

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. This is where we explore what it looks like to engage the needs of the world with the redemptive power of the gospel and the life changing truth of Scripture. And we are excited to have another esteemed guest and August guests with us this morning. And it's not often that, that you get to interview someone who is a professional interviewer and a journalist. So not that that makes me in any way nervous or self-conscious about this at all.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: But I can turn a question around. So how does that make you feel Don?

Dr. Don Payne: I knew this would happen well, and there we go. So, our guests this week, I'm really heavy about this is our colleague and friend Marshall Shelley. Marshall joined our faculty about three years of years ago, I believe. And prior to that served on the board of trustees at Denver Seminary for how long Marshall?

Dr. Marshall Shelley: I joined in the year 2002.

Dr. Don Payne: Marshall holds a bachelor's degree from Bethel University or may probably Bethel college.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Bethel college when I was there. It's a university now.

Dr. Don Payne: Bethel College Bethel University, and a master of divinity from Denver Seminary. And has, as many of you will probably know, has had an illustrious journalistic career with Christianity Today and Leadership Journal. I'll let Marshall fill in some of the blanks and tell a little bit more about the details of that. Well, three years ago, when Marshall left Christianity Today and moved back to Denver, where he had grown up to join the faculty of Denver Seminary to become director of our doctor of ministry program. And it has been a delight to have him here, not only because he's Marshall Shelley, but also because I now teach a little bit in the doctor of ministry program and get to interface with Marshall through that, which is just a great delight. So, Marshall officially, welcome to the podcast.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Well, thank you very much. It feels like, in some ways coming full circle, people ask me, how long have you been at Denver Seminary? And I say, there's two answers to that question. One is I joined the faculty three years ago, but the other answer is I arrived at Denver Seminary in 1957 when I was three years old when my dad joined the faculty. Okay. So, you know, I've been a Denver Seminary faculty kid. I've been a Denver Seminary student. I've been a Denver Seminary adjunct professor. I've been a Denver Seminary board member and now a Denver Seminary faculty member.

Dr. Don Payne: So, I'm thinking this probably sets a record or maybe a number of records for longevity and for the most different ways of relating to the Denver Seminary community.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: It's been a delight I've seen Denver Seminary; you know, grow and develop. And I have to say Denver Seminary better and healthier now than I've ever known it.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So, let's start out and just tell us a little bit more of your own story. You alluded to some of that, you've got a long history here because your dad taught here. Your dad was one of my professors here, and I suppose, however awkward that might've been probably one of your professors too.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Yeah. I was the rabbi's son twice and certainly pressure was on. And I certainly did my best in those you know, in those settings. So he didn't have to find any conflict of interest in how he was going to deal with it.

Dr. Don Payne: That was noble of you as a son. I'm not sure all of us as sons would have done exactly the same thing. So you get an award for that as well. Give us a bit of a Chronicle of both your, your life as it relates to Denver seminary and then your ministry career with Christianity today and other things you've done

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Well, I was raised in Denver. My earliest my earliest memories were here and graduated from high school, went to Kennedy high school, Southwest Denver, and as a high school senior, my only vision, my only dream at that point, my only passion was to be a college football quarterback. You know, I'd been a high school football player and that was a noble dream. The problem was I was 155 pounds. And so that meant the options were going to be limited. This was not going to be a division one, but I wound up applying to a number of Christian colleges that I knew had football programs was accepted at all of them, but to choose Bethel because it offered me \$500 in financial aid. And I said, football scholarship. Although it was actually just financial aid, but that got me to Bethel. Low and behold, my football career lasted two years in 10 minutes. The 10 minutes was after being an underclassman, waiting for the upperclassmen ahead of me to graduate, the quarterback.

I did fulfill my dream of being a football college football quarterback for 10 minutes, got hurt at 10 minutes in. Ligament damage in my ankle. I was on crutches for six weeks. When I came back, the a sophomore behind me had beaten me out. And I thought, what was that all about? And a professor that I happened to have that semester Alvera Michaelson, her husband, Berkeley Michelson was an esteemed New Testament prof. Yeah. And Alvera said, Marshall, if she was teaching a writing class, I was in, she said, Marshall, if you put the effort into your writing that you put into football, I think you might be able to do something with that. Tell you what, if you write an article and sell it to a publication before the end of the semester, you get an a in this class. And I was not getting an a in the class at that at that time. So I took her up on it, wound up selling an article to campus life magazine. And that introduced me to you know, the world of journalism.

And when one dream was taken away, the whole football thing, another one was opened up this idea of using writing abilities and opportunities to make a contribution to the, to the kingdom and earn a living. And it you know, developed into a eventual career upon graduating. Upon graduating from college I worked at David C. Cook publishing company, which at that time was in the Chicago land area. Worked there for four years, came back to Denver Seminary, got my master of divinity. At that point Christianity Today had started a new journal called Leadership Journal for Pastors. They said, Marshall, we're looking for somebody who has journalistic skills, but a pastor's heart. Do you know anybody like that? And I said, yeah, I think that's me. And they hired me and I've spent 34 years there working on Leadership Journal. And some of the other publications that Christianity Today had started and loved the journalism career.

Loved the opportunities to interview and to put together publications. And but then when Leadership Journal and January of 2016 published its last print issue, it was one of the casualties of the electronic revolution here. And we had an online version, but you know, the financial picture was just not as rosy as we would've liked. It became clear that it was time for me to be open to other things. And at that time, just providentially Denver Seminary came calling and said, we're looking for a director of a doctor of ministry program. We're looking for somebody who loves Pastors has developed a Pastoral network and has a heart for continuing education and know anybody like that? And I said, yeah, I think that would be me.

- Dr. Don Payne: You always get asked the same question don't you. And the answer is always the same.
- Dr. Marshall Shelley: And it was just, a wonderful thing came and interviewed and you know, worked through the process. And it's been a delightful experience here being able to work with doctor of ministry students who are ministry leaders, people who are leading various churches, church plants, para-church ministries, spiritual formation situations. And being able to invest in their lives has been a delight.
- Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Some of the most interesting people I can say this, honestly, some of the most interesting people I think I've met in years. Each crop of doctor of ministry, students who come in, I just, I can't believe that diversity of their backgrounds, their traditions within the Christian faith, their ministry experiences all over the world. It staggers me every year.
- Dr. Marshall Shelley: One example of that just this year, a new student started who had experienced in the Marines. And then after we finished the Marines, joined the peace Corps, he was involved in security of the Peace Corps around the world. And in the process of that job winds up planting two churches in Africa and one in Augusta, Georgia. And but he recognizes that you know, his calling has exceeded his preparation. And so he wants to come and get a doctorate of ministry. And somebody like that is just a delight to be able to work with because there's so, so much experience giftedness. And yet you want to be able to come here to

Denver Seminary to refine skills, theological reflection has perspective is just a delight to be here. to walk alongside somebody like this.

- Dr. Don Payne: Well, I've got so much, I'd like for us to talk about before we get to more contemporary questions and issues, let's roll back a little bit and talk about Leadership Journal. There were so many great moments from Leadership Journal from when I started reading that in the, probably in the late seventies or early eighties. When did it start?
- Dr. Marshall Shelley: The first issue was January of 1980.
- Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Okay. So yeah, I was in on just reading that in some of the early days.
- Dr. Marshall Shelley: I was a charter. I was a charter subscriber too. I, you know, I like to say I enjoyed, I enjoyed reading it before they paid me to enjoy reading.
- Dr. Don Payne: That's a great gift. Yeah. This is going to show how shallow and superficial I am, but my greatest memories of Leadership Journal were the cartoons.
- Dr. Marshall Shelley: Oh yeah, yeah. People say they read it for the articles, but I know we all know.
- Dr. Don Payne: We're all lying. When we say that the articles were very impactful in many cases, but I can hardly remember a single article, but man, the cartoons were the best. Tell us about that. How did that evolve and who was in charge of that?
- Dr. Marshall Shelley: That was that's not anything I had much to do with other than I inherited a great concept that the founding editors put in, in place. But yeah. It's interesting that Leadership Journal was known for great cartoons, just sort of inside your skin cartoons. It was in-house humor for people who've been in church leadership.
- Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Only church kids and only people who breathed the exhaustive, the church would get it
- Dr. Marshall Shelley: Breath the exhaustive church is a great way to put it. Don, that's a great description, but it is, it was fascinating that almost all of our cartoonists were either Pastors, Pastors wives, or Pastors kids. And you know, they knew what the you know, the underbelly of, of ministry was like, I think of one cartoon, Pastor sitting in the corner of a boxing ring up in front of the congregation. And the caption is sometimes he sets aside as regular sermon and wrestles his personal demons. Oh, I've watched some wrestling with personal demons as I've listened to certain sermons and realize, okay, there's a lot going on, but eat the surface on this one. And so I just appreciate the insight of the cartoons.
- Dr. Don Payne: What were a couple of other favorites of yours, if you can, if you have them ready at hand.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Let me see. There's one Pastor sitting behind sitting behind a desk and two new staff members are in front of him and he says consider this place a theocracy. And I'm Theo.

Dr. Don Payne: I remember That one. Yeah.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Oh yeah. Yeah. That's great. Yeah.

Dr. Don Payne: Anyway, How did you develop such a heart for pastoral ministry through a career, as a journalist. Now, obviously you grew up in a Christian home and your dad was that was actively involved in ministry, but you've been kind of on the front lines of pastoral ministry, and probably other forms of ministry as well. But on the front lines, in a way that many people don't get access to those front lines, unless they in fact are a Pastor.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Well, I'd have to say, it does begin with being raised in the home of a seminary professor who taught church history. And conversations in our house growing up tended to be about either church history or about sports. And so, you know, given my age that meant.

Dr. Don Payne: Sports always went out.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Well, Martin Luther was usually followed by Mickey mantle and Roger Maris is what it was. But I reckon dad did a great job. Dad was you know, church history prof, but who was clearly committed to the health and vitality of the church, but he recognized that church growth development vitality was never a straight line, that it was always dependent upon flawed human beings, sinful people who God, for whatever reason had chosen to put in positions of influence in the church. And I just found that fascinating, you know, as someone who had sort of journalistic instincts and journalistic roots, I recognized that man, the church is just a great place full of stories that have, you know, pathos, ethos, and logos. There is emotion there. Yes, there's emotion, there's passion. There is content.

There's just drama, in the best sense of that word. And God uses stories of bringing re redemption to hopeless and broken situations throughout history. And also stories of, you know, tragedy and destruction. I mean, it was a full-bodied story of the church throughout the centuries that I just sort of became fascinated with it. You know, I enjoyed historical fiction and church history was as good a historical not fiction, but reality is any of that historical fiction. I was reading about you know, the leather stock, you know, James Fennimore Cooper, and Natty Bumppo and the Deer Slayer and all of that. I love that kind of fiction, but reading the church history, you think my goodness, this is the same story.

Dr. Don Payne: Right, right. We've I hadn't intended to talk about this, but you've mentioned your dad a few times. I've alluded him. And just for listeners who don't know your dad that was Dr. Bruce Shelley who authored a couple of books that

listeners may have heard of Church History in Plain Language, probably the most, well-known

Dr. Marshall Shelley: It's still selling pretty well. I might you know, I might add as a text in everything from homeschoolers to Christian colleges to seminaries.

Dr. Don Payne: And then also he wrote a smaller one called Christian Theology in Plain Language. Maybe not quite as well known, but still just a really, he had a great, great angle on those things, how to boil what are often esoteric and overly technical academic concepts to make them accessible.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: And he told history as a story, as a narrative, you know, each, each chapter of church history in plain language begins with the screenwriter's trilogy here. You've got you know, people, place, and action. So one chapter opens with, you know, Martin Luther walking through a forest when the storm comes up and lightning strikes nearby, he falls to the ground and says, save me St. Ann, I'll become a monk, you know, and you you're, you're caught up in the story and what's going to happen to this guy next, he makes this, this promise in a panic and he lives up to it, but what's going to be the trajectory of that man's life. You know, it's a fascinating story that leads to the Protestant reformation. And so yeah, dad, Bruce Shelley was associated with Denver seminary for 50 years. After he stepped down as a professor, he continued to be a mentor and continued to you know, work with students on an individual basis. So for, you know, a little more than 50 years before his death in 2010, you know, he was a part of the Denver Seminary World.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. And I enjoyed interacting with him, I think more in those days the days after he retired partly because I wasn't his student and I wasn't, I was always intimidated by him, I think, but maybe not quite as much. He was one of when I was a student, he was probably one of the most excitable people I knew. I do remember a moment in class one day when he was talking about and a writer from another era, Henry Scougal the title of a book by Scougal, The Life of God and the Soul of Man and that the title of that book got your dad so excited. He was literally jumping up and down in class.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: I believe it, yeah, he brought energy to the classroom in a way that at least at that point was pretty unusual. More teachers now are bringing some energy into the classroom and I'm grateful for that. But you know, at that time, I think dad realized that history had a bad reputation of history of being boring. It was just all about, you know, dates, and movements. And he realized he had a job to do if he was going to actually impact people with the power of understanding history. So yeah. He brought his whole self to the classroom.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah, he did. Now you wrote a book. I mean, you've, I think you've authored several two or three. Yeah. I don't know if it was your first Well-Intentioned Dragons. Was that your first?

Dr. Marshall Shelley: No, it was my first, but it was certainly the best known of anything that I've done. Yeah, it was actually written back in. The first edition was 1985, but a fascinating story. I was sitting with my two bosses at Christianity Today. We're having lunch one day, just talking about the need at that time for Leadership Journal to have more than just a publication. He said, we need a book line. And so we started talking about what could we publish that hasn't already been published 15 times? And one of the one of my bosses had been had been a pastor and he said you know, one of the things that has always fascinated me is that conflict in churches is usually driven by people who don't think they're being problematic, although they are, they think they are being faithful. They think they are serving the Lord, but they just wreak havoc in their wake. And my other boss, who's a little more literary minded. He said, yeah, they're just Well-Intentioned Dragons. And we just paused, there was just silence. And we said, that's it, that's exactly it. Who could write that? Who could write that? And they both turned to me again?

Dr. Don Payne: And you said I can. The same answer.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: I think that, I think that would be me. And that became a fascinating nine month journey of interviewing church leaders from all different denominational backgrounds from, you know, from Anabaptist to high church, to church plants to, you know, all sorts of. But every one of them, it, you know, when I described the concept, it didn't take anybody more than about a minute and a half to say, yep, somebody immediately comes to mind. Anybody who's been in ministry more than an hour and a half has had a, an experience with church conflict, serious church conflict, and almost always the people involved on both sides see themselves as being faithful to their understanding of Scripture, faithful to the calling of God on their life. And it just leads to you know, conflict with often severe consequences. And I just thought, my goodness here again, is the drama of church history being written today. So I was, I sort of considered you know, Well-Intentioned Dragons you know, the rough draft of church history.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, yeah, that just occurred to me this, this was almost like writing history as it happened.

Dr. Marshall Shelley: As it happens. Exactly. And so you know, the publisher did ask me to do a second edition of Well-Intentioned Dragons a few years ago after the electronic revolution. And you know, what does, what does electronic warfare do to Well-Intentioned Dragons when they have access to show social media and they can post their charges on Facebook and just amplify the amplify the conflict? And so we added chapters on electronic warfare. We added chapters on the effect of medications and mental illness on some of these things. And so the book is still in print, still being used in in college and seminary classrooms. But yeah, when people say people often come up to me and say, I read well intentioned dragons, and it you know, and it's still it's still relevant today. And I never know whether to say, I'm sorry, or thank you.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, this is as good a time as any use to put in another plug for that book. Well-Intentioned Dragons the most recent issue. Most recent edition of that. Marshall, you have been, I know this about you, that you have been sort of a student not sort of, you have been a diligent student of the church particularly in the US maybe abroad as well. I don't know, but I know you have really done a lot to try to keep your finger on the pulse of the church and church leadership and for a long time now you've done that. So talk to us a little bit about what you have seen change and development trends in church leadership. What's different now than 20, 30 years ago? What encourages you? What are some of the things that the church needs to lean into and face courageously?

Dr. Marshall Shelley: Well, yeah, there are, my mind is operating on several different levels and there's probably 15 different ways I could answer that question, but let me just speak to one that I've appreciated watching and participating in church leadership, being here at Denver seminary for these last three years as a faculty member. I continued to write for Christianity today's Pastors section, and a little over a year ago. They asked me to write something on what can American Christians learn from people who came to Christ and first had got involved in the church in another culture, in another part of the world. And so being here at Denver Seminary, I was fortunate to have a lot of people right here who came to Christ in other countries, and then came to America. And I remember sitting with Wilmer Ramirez who was raised in Guatemala, Pastored in Guatemala, was part of a Seminary down there, then came and is now overseeing our, a Hispanic initiative here in at Denver Seminary.

But I just asked him, I said, Wilmer, when you first came to the United States, what was the experience you had that first made you realized I'm not in Guatemala anymore? And he said, Oh it was the first Sunday I was here. I was in an English speaking church and the pastor was making announcements. And he said you know, we're going to be having this event this next weekend. Y'all come, it's going to be a blast. And he said, I'd never heard that phrase used in church before. And in Guatemala, in the midst of a Civil War, when you say it's going to be a blast, that's run for cover. And he said, but here in the United States, he said, I found that almost every announcement was appealing to the fact, maybe they wouldn't use the word, you have a blast, but it's going to be fun. You will enjoy this. Your kids will love it. You know, it was all, the appeal was all on the enjoyment or the attractiveness of the event.

And he said, I'd never thought of that before, you know, in Guatemala. If you invite somebody to come to something, if you're going, you're doing it because this will be good for you. This is going to be, it's going to help you in your walk with God. This will help you represent the kingdom of God in some way. It was just a different way of thinking in America. The fun factor was the, you, you led with the fun factor in the American church. And I realized, wow, Wilmer, I'm guilty as charged. I mean, I've breathed the air of the American church so much, that didn't strike me as odd at all. And that's just how we do things here. When we're living in a you know, consumer Christian culture, you have to try to appeal to people who think like a consumer with how, you know, how fun or how

enjoyable, or how beneficial or how profitable it's going to be for you to be a part of this this event. So, you know, that was one thing that I think sort of opened a window for me recognizing that this is the situation where this is the air we're breathing.

And sometimes the air we're breathing can inadvertently cause us to move in directions that may not be what the original kingdom of God, what the original Ecclesia that Jesus said he was going to establish was all about. Not that we condemn people, who've breathed this air so long. This is the only way they know, but it, it really helps to be able to see what we're doing with the eyes of people who are from another part of the world. Another student here who came to Christ in Mongolia. He was one of the first some of the first missionaries after the iron curtain fell, came to Christ in Mongolia, his name is Mogenic. I asked Mogenic a similar question. He said you know, when I came to the United States, everybody seems so casual. He said, I went to a Bible college in another state and he said, the president invited us to call him by his first name. He said, that was unheard of in Mongolia. But at the same time, I sort of assumed that if I can call him by his first name, I can just drop by his house anytime I want.

Like, you know, like you do with people who invite you to call you by their first name in Mongolia. But I learned very quickly that in the United States relationships are very casual, but they are not near as accessible as you know, they were in Mongolia. And I thought, wow, I never would have seen that. But being able to see church life, being able to see our cultural idiosyncrasies through the eyes of people who met Christ and were raised in different forms of church and other parts of the world has been very helpful.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. So what do you think are some of the biggest, or maybe the, if you can isolate one, the biggest challenge facing the church today in the US and challenge that those preparing to lead the church need to face

Dr. Marshall Shelley: In a word individualism. Okay. in the, in the US you know, we've just been so steeped in individualistic thinking that each person is the you know, captain of their own fate, each person can choose what is best for them, that brings real challenges for what it means to try to live as the body of Christ. And oftentimes in a consumer culture, which, you know, I've referenced before you know, what's the old saying the customer is always right. And you know, when you bring that kind of attitude to church, you know, it really is a challenge for us to be able to talk about the authority of Scripture or talk about the primacy of being the body of Christ, not just the individual fingernail of Christ. And so, in the United States, it's a challenge for us to be able to subsume personal preferences, to be able to subsume our individual wants desires and our wish list in in the service of something much larger than our own individual preferences. So I would say that's an ongoing challenge as we seek to walk under the Lordship of Christ. It's not just me under the Lordship of Christ. It's, how can we, be under the Lordship of Christ? And that's probably our cultural challenge at the you know, in this age.

- Dr. Don Payne: Put in a plug for the doctor of ministry program, how does that express Denver Seminary's mission to prepare people, to engage the needs of the world, redemptively?
- Dr. Marshall Shelley: For people who already have a master's degree, but recognize that there's more to learn, more theological depth to, to plumb a need for an understanding of your contextual theology. What are the theological foundations of your particular ministry in this particular place? The doctorate of ministry is a great opportunity to deepen your theological foundation and to broaden your, a ministry perspective. Being able to sit in class with people like some of the individuals I mentioned earlier, who come from other parts of the world who are in very different ministry contexts, but who can enrich you in your ministry greatly. And so I'm loving it. I'm getting an education myself, even as I'm overseeing an academic program.
- Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. I can relate to that. Yeah. It's delightful. What's the most interesting you've read in the last year. Interesting thing you have read. Did I say that right in the last year?
- Dr. Marshall Shelley: Well, one of the texts that we just used in our class you know, two weeks ago is called Leadership Dichotomies. It's written by two Navy seals, and they talk about the fact that just about every leadership principle can be either under applied or over applied. And so there's a dichotomy there. Any good leadership principle can be taken too far. And leadership is a matter of balance. And boy, I appreciated that. They talked about such things as being disciplined, but not rigid planning, but not over-planning. And I thought, and as, as we worked through this with a class, everybody was identifying areas in church life, in the leadership of their Christian organizations where these things applied. So I'm loving the opportunities to find new books that just been written in the last year, like Leadership Dichotomies that have great application for ministry.
- Dr. Don Payne: Good. Okay. So what I often like to ask people is if you were doing anything else, what would you be doing?
- Dr. Marshall Shelley: Oh, easy, easy. I would be a docent at a national park. Yeah. I would love to, I love to tell the stories of history in, in places where they occurred. So boy, if I could be in the in national parks telling some of the history of Colorado, or if I could be at you know, a Little Big Horn telling the telling the foibles of General Custer I think that would just be delightful to help make history come alive in the places where it happened.
- Dr. Don Payne: That's great. I love it. We have been visiting with Dr. Marshall Shelley director of our doctor of ministry program, a long time editor of Leadership Journal. What a delight Marshall, thanks for carving out time to be with us today.
- Dr. Marshall Shelley: Thanks. It's fun to be here.

Dr. Don Payne:

Yeah. This is Engage360 from Denver seminary. If you would like more information about the doctor of ministry program, you can find that on our website, along with information about all of our programs at Denverseminary.edu. We hope you'll keep listening and encourage your friends. If you've benefited from this podcast, we encourage your friends to listen and find us on all of your favorite podcast platforms. I'm Don Payne, talk to you soon.