

Engage360 Episode 152 | Meet Denver Seminary's Eighth President: Dr. Mark Husbands

[00:00:00] **Don Payne:** Hi friends, welcome again to Engage 360 from Denver Seminary. We are glad to have you with us for another episode. My name is Don Payne and I'm honored to be your host for this conversation. This episode is of unique significance because we get to introduce you to the next president of Denver Seminary, the eighth president in our 75 year history. five year history. Dr. Mark Husbands. Dr. Husbands, welcome. Welcome to Denver Seminary and to Engage360.

[00:00:46] **Mark Husbands:** Thank you so much. I've been looking forward to this conversation and, I've listened to it a number of times, so it's a joy to finally join you here on your podcast.

[00:00:54] **Don Payne:** Well, we are so glad to have you here and, I'm just eager to help you get acquainted, or help our listeners get acquainted with you. Dr. Husbands will be following Dr. Mark Young, who retired on December 31st. And Dr. Husbands assumed office January 1, and I'm deeply grateful to introduce you to him. He holds a Ph. D. in Theology from the University of Toronto, where he studied under the auspicious John Webster. So, you'll have to, excuse us if he and I, randomly divert into a theological nerd out. I, have to say to listeners that the search and interview process undertaken by the Seminary Board of Trustees was the most prayerful, careful, and thorough process of that sort that I have ever seen. It was a process in which we can all have immense confidence and gratitude for how God has led us to you, Dr. Husbands. So, tell us first, a little bit about what drew you to Denver Seminary. What inspired you to consider the role of president at Denver Seminary?

[00:01:58] **Mark Husbands:** Sure. I mean, I think you've touched on something really important, which was the search process was remarkably detailed and thorough, and that was, I think, a really good thing, because it gave my wife Becky and I time to, get to know Denver really well. We met, probably, you know, before I met the community formally, I met through this process about 40 different individuals tied to Denver Seminary, and, drew us to this place was both the people and its mission and core values and commitments. I can speak a little bit more about that, but, I want everyone to understand the people we met were the strongest witness of the efficacy of a Denver Seminary education. And that was a tremendous blessing.

[00:02:48] **Don Payne:** Well, that's, very, kind and affirming. Yeah, you do say more about that. What is it that intrigues you or excites you or stokes your passion about, the Denver Seminary community and the Denver Seminary mission?

[00:03:00] **Mark Husbands:** Sure. for me, work is never a job. It's a context in which I offer my gifts and talents and abilities and experience back to the Lord for his blessing. And when you do that, you, often find yourself in places where there's a really good, correspondence. between the organization you're a part of and your own values. And so what really did attract us was when we came to understand Denver's mission and its core values and unique commitments, I was really amazed at God's provision in Denver seminary. There's a lot of seminaries that focus on knowledge or scholarship or truth or defending scripture. Then there's some seminaries that really focus on addressing the needs of the world and practical preparation for ministry. At Denver, what we noticed was here's a place that cares deeply about scholarship, is explicitly committed to providing students with a really high quality theological and biblical education, but it's deeply focused on engaging the needs of the world with the gospel. And there's a sense of joy and commitment and a sense of self love. A clear sense of confidence about God's work in the world at Denver, and that was really, apparent, and it's so deeply attractive to Becky and I.

[00:04:28] **Don Payne:** I'm guessing that, that convergence of commitments, the way you've articulated them. Did not come from nowhere for you, but that has been in various ways. I'm guessing a formation part of your own formational journey in your relationship with Christ as well as your professional journey. I'd love to hear a little bit more about that. Maybe your own faith journey, the moments that have been definitive for you and your relationship with God, how that has grown over the years and then converged into the kind of mission passion that you described. so much.

[00:05:03] **Mark Husbands:** Sure. grew up in Wales. My grandfather on my mother's side was a pastor, and, uh, my dad, converted to Christ as a teenager and was really disciplined by, the gentleman who became his father in law. So I grew up in a devout Christian family in Wales. about the age of six, I became aware of my need for forgiveness. And at a Sunday evening service, there was a missionary service and it was calling people to faith. And at the age of six, I remember experiencing God's call in my life, and God speaking to me, indicating that, you know, God loves me, and I have fallen short of the glory of God, though I didn't have the words at six to explain that, but I had a deep sense that I needed forgiveness and needed God in my life. But I was too afraid to walk forward. So later in the car on the way home, I remember a conversation with my parents. They may have forgotten it by now, but I remember something like, does it work if you don't go forward? they said, what do you mean? And we talked about that. I had prayed a sinner's prayer and that I now am belonging to Christ. And now I'm a new creature and that I have forgiveness and that God will be with me forever. And that was the beginning of a life journey with Christ. when we came to Canada. We attended a local Baptist church. It was a great experience. I love Boys Brigade. I love being part of the church. And eventually I was surrounded by people who noticed. Um, gifts. First gifts in music, so I participate in worship, and then gifts in sort of discipleship. And, they found ways for me to participate in and help lead others grow in faith. That was A really compelling thing to have people in your church pour into you and discern your own gifts. That led me, I think, to an entire journey of life focused on Christian learning and education and theology and preparation for ministry. So that was very important. And then, as you noted, I went to university. I studied music and then switched to religious studies. I had the gift at a secular university of many professors who would comment at the end of my papers. They would say roughly, we disagree with everything you've said here, but you've made a compelling argument, and you've handled the source material carefully, and you deserve an A. And I thought, wow, I'm so blessed to be with people of integrity that, that they might not agree with me, but they were models of what it meant to take learning seriously. Bye. And then I studied at the University of Toronto at my master's degree and PhD, and I met John Webster. And he became, as you know, one of the world's leading evangelical Anglican theologians, focused on Karl Barth principally, and he left an astonishing mark on my life. He wasn't the only one, at Toronto I was shaped by a Jesuit named George Schnur, a Presbyterian named David Dempson, and a Catholic theologian named Margaret O'Gara, in addition to John. And together That four group of faculty nurtured and challenged me to think deeply, to love Christ, to honor the truth of Scripture, and more importantly, at the end, to see how the faith calls you to offer the world a compelling and faithful witness. And join with God in his work of reconciliation.

[00:08:53] **Don Payne:** That is so well said. and what a gift to have a, a cadre of scholars who will contribute to one's formation like that, that group of individuals did for you. What a great gift. And, among the gifts, I mean, I'm glad that your parents gave you the gift of, letting you off the hook from the walking the aisle. that yeah. That, no. Magic to that.

[00:09:21] **Mark Husbands:** yeah, my life has taken on a more public role than that, so I'm no longer embarrassed about walking the aisle, but as a small young boy, I, wanted to know if, God would hear my prayer and would be meaningfully engaged with my life and how remarkable that a, at a young

age. You can experience the Lord, and you can experience God's presence and guidance throughout your whole life.

[00:09:46] **Don Payne:** Yeah, that is. Tell us a little bit more about your time with John Webster. I know not every listener is going to be acquainted with John and his work, but those with some theological background, their ears will certainly perk up and would be interested in, what that relationship with, Professor Webster was like and how, that formed your thinking.

[00:10:06] **Mark Husbands:** Certainly. I mean, I want to make it somewhat relevant to people who, didn't know John. the, short version is that there's not a day that goes by where I'm not grateful for the blessing of having had an opportunity to study under John. Um, over time, John and I became friends. when my wife and I had children, John was engaged in, our own sort of discipleship of children. He became my son's godfather. And at a certain point, we had come to the view that infant baptism is, a sacrament. And so we invited John to come back from Oxford to preach in that service and he baptized all three children on the same morning. Um, but what did John teach me and why was he such a compelling example? So here was an evangelical theologian that. was teaching Barth, among other things, and the irony is, when I first met John and was listening to Barth, I, didn't really like Barth at all, and I've since become someone who loves the work and scholarship of Barth, but at the time, I had to learn that Barth was not interested in my questions, and that Barth was interested in a much more important project, The Project, can be summed up, and John clearly helped me navigate this, was finding your place within the strange new world of the Bible. And what

[00:11:36] **Don Payne:** I remember that phrase from him. Yeah.

[00:11:38] **Mark Husbands:** yes, what that meant for me was, instead of beginning with myself and my own questions and dilemmas, I had to risk trusting God had revealed himself so clearly within Scripture, that I would find my identity, my purpose, my calling, the use of my gifts, with joining into that story, by being part of God's work in the world. And John was a wonderful example of how the study of theology, It leads to a moral witness. And that gave me a platform or a foundation upon which I could learn more about Barth. The last bit is, I did work on Barth's account of the Lord's Prayer. And one of the things that has remained with me is that when we pray the Lord's Prayer and ask God to bring His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. We're also, at the same time, asking God to equip, bless, strengthen, and prompt us to enact a life together that reflects the values and commitments of the kingdom of God. So prayer is also about moral action and witness, and Bart and John taught me the importance of that, and I'm forever in their debt because of it.

[00:13:08] **Don Payne:** Those remarks about your study of Karl Barth and your the influence that John had on you in those years is a wonderful reminder, it's a wonderful pointer, I think, to the role that good theology has in engaging the needs of the world. That's where so much comes together in the ethos and the mission of Denver Seminary. that, that missional engagement of the world and, adroit academic study are not in competition with each other. Good theology feeds mission. And I, always hope that our listeners are hearing that underscored in all of our conversations and all that we do. Now you've had, Dr. Husbands, a pretty, Interesting professional journey. You've done a lot of things, served in a number of places, in a number of different roles. Love to hear a little more about that. Different career experiences, highs, challenges, lessons you've learned from the various roles that you held.

[00:14:14] **Mark Husbands:** Absolutely. God's blessed me with an opportunity to take on different roles. There's, I've had the privilege of being a professor of Christian theology. And I've had the

blessing and call to be an institutional leader of Christian institutions. Sometimes people imagine that academic study and administrative work are very different. but you and I both know what you want at a Christian seminary or a Christian university are academic, leaders who understand not merely the witness of scripture, but also the values that enable you to help cultures flourish and help people flourish. And that commitment to a moral witness must be carried on in your professional journey, wherever God takes you. So that's helped me through all of these different roles to put into place a kind of Commitment. A commitment to do whatever I can to create a culture in which everyone around me is able to better use their gifts and to bless others. So, you asked about challenges and circumstances. So, for me, there's this, Passage in Philippians, Paul is, writing these words, Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice, the Lord is at hand. And Paul's able to write that, from prison, knowing that, his ministry and life might indeed come to an end. And in that same context, he's led me, to think about obedience in the midst of the challenge of leadership. And we have this counsel, don't we, in Philippians 2, 3, Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, Count others more significant than yourselves. So, we, know how important that is, but knowledge is not doing, and, being a theologian, you know a lot of things, but being a Christian, you're called to live this out, day in and day out, and we sometimes disappoint each other, we sometimes disappoint each other. Don't honor all that God calls us to do. And so I've found having to be, a person that so deeply wants to continue to in humility and love for others grow. And I find great joy in, in seeing the gifts of others and encouraging those gifts and enabling them to flourish. As a professor, you do this with your students. As an administrator, you do this with everyone around you that you have the opportunity to, work alongside. And that's a source of tremendous joy. And I find a call, a sense of calling in doing all of that.

[00:17:13] **Don Payne:** I'm so glad to hear that because it reiterates a conviction of mine that leadership is a theological act.

[00:17:21] **Mark Husbands:** It is.

[00:17:22] **Don Payne:** Yeah, that, that leadership, administrative work, and the more recognizably scholarly work of teaching and writing, those are not nearly as different as people might think they are. They iterate, differently, but they're all theological acts.

[00:17:38] **Mark Husbands:** So let me give you a quick example of why I think that's the case. so when I was president of Trinity Western, we, needed a vision. We didn't really have one. We had a long mission that was, reduced to a few words. And in order to kind of create a sense of purpose and direction for the institution, we had to come up with a new vision, statement. And what we did was come up with a phrase that was roughly, every graduate is equipped to think truthfully, act justly and live faithfully for the good of the world and the glory of God. Now, that's, a wonderfully inviting statement that creates space for others to say, Oh, I can contribute to that. But what that meant in part, every graduate is equipped. That helped us understand part of what we do is to get people to graduate. To help them accomplish the, journey and calling that God is preparing them to take on. Which means you have to do a lot of things to make the educational experience, less fraught with friction and ambiguity. We even had to change the career center, which, was initially transactional. And then we realized, no, a Christian institution, Should care about how people go on a journey where they learn first of all, who are they? What's their identity? And then you invite them to discover their gifts, their abilities. What are they good at? What do they value? What do they truly love? And only then do you invite them to think more deeply about what good can they do in the world, given who they are, And what they believe in value. And so we added a kind of theological pattern of development to preparing for one's calling, which then integrated career and professional

life and development. so that's an example, I think of how a theologian, should use his or her gifts to help administer an institution to create tremendous value for students.

[00:19:59] **Don Payne:** That is so exciting because there's an entire theology course embedded in that description you just gave.

[00:20:06] **Mark Husbands:** I agree.

[00:20:07] **Don Payne:** Yeah. Dr. Husbands, tell us a little bit about life beyond work for you. Your family, interests, activities that, are life giving to you and keep you grounded.

[00:20:19] **Mark Husbands:** Sure.

[00:20:21] **Don Payne:** Beyond reading theology, of course.

[00:20:22] **Mark Husbands:** No, I get it. I'm I've been tremendously blessed to be married to a fantastic person named Becky. Becky is a pastor's daughter. Her father's still living. He was a pastor for 65 years.

[00:20:43] **Don Payne:** Wow.

[00:20:44] **Mark Husbands:** And so, um, I saw in Becky someone who is a wonderful person. Joy to be with, who loves the Lord, who cares deeply about ministry in the church, and who's invested in, the well being of others. And so it was a, really remarkable, to, get to know her and fall in love and, begin a family together. And we have three wonderful adult children. Olivia, Elliot, and Ethan, they're all grown and they're all living and serving Christ in the fields of education, politics, and clinical counseling. So that's quite varied, and it gives our family time. They've always been highly verbal, so family dinners was always, really quite tricky and we had to tell them how to make segues. So you had to, connect whatever someone else had said to what you want to talk about. And I think that was also really helpful for them. But apart from that, we've been active in church life and ministry throughout our marriage, leading Bible studies, adult ministry, youth ministry. My wife was a children's minister. And essentially, we've been trying to build relationships that reflect the love of Christ. And that's what we've done through our church ministry, and you asked about what do I do when it's really just sort of time off. I really try to work hard to find activities that nourish my spirit and build relationships. So yes, I love reading and writing, but I also love great food with friends and family.

[00:22:19] **Don Payne:** Amen.

[00:22:20] **Mark Husbands:** That's a source of tremendous joy. my wife is a fantastic cook. I'm a passable cook.

[00:22:26] **Don Payne:** But I hope you're a fantastic eater then.

[00:22:29] **Mark Husbands:** I am a fantastic eater, which means I then also have to exercise, which means I like cycling and, being outside on my bike, listening to podcasts as I go along is actually just a great way to sort of find, a sense of joy in, in exercising, but also realize that God gives us the gift of

nature. It's always changing around us and it's great to be outside and to witness the beauty of God's creation.

[00:22:57] **Don Payne:** And you have been blessed to live in some rather remarkable places.

[00:23:01] **Mark Husbands:** I have, I've been spoiled. That's for sure.

[00:23:04] **Don Payne:** Well, Dr. Reisman, tell us a bit about your vision for Denver Seminary. Your hopes, goals, what do you hope the seminary's future will be under your leadership?

[00:23:13] **Mark Husbands:** The short version is this, that my hope and prayer is that under my leadership, God continues to bless Denver Seminary and that it continues to deepen its commitment to its remarkable mission and core values. And that by God's providence, it continues to be one of the most important leading evangelical seminaries in North America. Not for its own sake, however, but for the sake of the work of ministry, either in a sort of professional ordained setting or in a non-ordained setting that will happen through the thousands of graduates that are already serving the Lord and will continue to do so. so. at the end of the day. My hope is that I can continue to serve Denver and help it to move along the path that it's already chosen but continue to deepen its commitment to Christ and scripture and deepen its commitment to providing extraordinary value for students as they fulfill God's call upon their life. That's the general thing. How do you do that? It sort of requires a deep commitment to relationships and it will, I'm looking forward very much as, the new year follows underway to, to deepen my understanding and build relationships and come to know what is truly excellent about Denver. What are the sort of hidden gems of people and strategy and gifts and tradition that have shaped you and given you such a, lovely positive vision of God's work in the world. And so, I'll be first a student. And a sort of a partner in learning about Denver, and I'm inviting the Denver community to help me do that. That's key, and at the end of the day, my hope is to help Denver Seminary become a place that people recognize as a key lab for leadership development. and also, a place where you learn how to more deeply serve the calling to participate in God's reconciliation of the world. So there's a passage of scripture that is meant Uh, the world to me in my professional life, I don't see it falling off the map of the most important passages I come to, which is 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. And the key passage in there is in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. This is where things like justification and justice fit together. And that's been so important in my coming to know about Denver and fall, quite frankly, in love with what Denver is doing, is to see that it cares deeply about salvation and the gospel, and it understands the gospel in a more holistic sense, where God wants to reconcile people and their cultures and their goals and aspirations to himself in Christ. And that's a tremendous, I think, north star in how I execute my leadership and what shapes my imagination and prayer life and how I seek to help others.

[00:26:46] **Don Payne:** Well, that, that for what it's worth, that, just to hear you say all of that kindles and rekindles a lot of, my own vision and affections and I almost feel like I've been in church.

[00:26:57] **Mark Husbands:** Well, that's fantastic. love it. it.

[00:27:00] **Don Payne:** I think I want to follow on that with one even more specific question. Let me give you a little bit of background to it. As many people will know, historically seminaries were places almost exclusively for training pastors for ministry. church ministry. And over the last few decades, that has broadened considerably. Seminaries now, ourselves included, have multiple degree programs training people for gospel centered, gospel shaped ministry in many different

sectors of the world and many different types of ministry roles. but, still, the church needs pastors. And without in any way diluting the importance or the need of trained, effectively trained people to serve in all kinds of roles in all kinds of places. What's your vision for the seminary and the church? We're not going to go back to 1950. Seminaries of necessity and thankfully are able to prepare people in lots of different ways these days. But what's your understanding these days of the seminary's role and relationship and responsibility to the church?

[00:28:17] **Mark Husbands:** It's such a broad and deep question, isn't it? It's sort of so significant that you're like stumbling upon a vista. Now you see an ocean in front of you. Um, it's so big. Is it important for seminaries to care deeply about pastoral ministry? Absolutely. We desperately need to equip church leaders to flourish in a setting in which is it's, we're often encountering something that looks a lot like post Christianity, where it requires a very sophisticated understanding of how to live and communicate the importance of the gospel in a culture that sometimes is ill disposed to receive it warmly or enthusiastically. And pastors play such an important role. In proclaiming God's word, but also coming alongside and nurturing future leaders. and helping people in the practical areas of their life live out their faith. I've been really, really moved by Denver Seminary's commitment to ministry broadly understood. So yes, pastoral ministry is absolutely crucial, but preparing for professional life outside of explicit church ministry is also the witness of the church. And so, My life as a theologian is one in which I'm able to see that all things matter to God and all activity can be given over to glorify God and to be a blessing to our neighbors. And so, what Denver Seminary is doing in equipping people for professional life, outside of pastoral ministry as well, is a tremendous value and gift to the church. It also helps pastors, quite frankly, understand that their audience, their congregation, their parish, has to live out the faith day to day in a secular context. And how do you equip people to see that work can be an avenue of flourishing? And how are Christians a blessing to not merely their coworkers, but the institutions that they're a part of? How can they also see their work as something which glorifies God and advances God's kingdom? That's key, and that's, I think, why Denver's various programs offer people a greater opportunity to discern God's calling for their life, beyond just simply being a pastor.

[00:31:01] **Don Payne:** But it all does come together around the church as you've so beautifully.

[00:31:05] **Mark Husbands:** Absolutely. There is no, all of this is the witness of the church. And that's hard, I think, when you have Christians discerning God's claim upon their life, it's, also a joy to help them understand that they're never called to do this alone. They're always called to do this as part of a, body of Christ, that their gifts contribute to the larger witness of the church and that God's spirit binds us together as we understand our gifts and are able to encourage each other to bear witness to Christ as the body of Christ in the world.

[00:31:43] **Don Payne:** Amen here So well said. Well, Dr. Husbands, thank you for taking this time to introduce yourself to our listeners, our constituency. And the great news is that I think we'll have other opportunities to have you back on the podcast and talk about other matters as we go along. And I really look forward to that, just eager to get to know you better and to serve you. So, thanks for spending some time with us today.

[00:32:13] **Mark Husbands:** Thank you. What a joy to be with you. I've been blessed by this, podcast in many ways. And now it's a joy to be part of it, but also to share with you in the task of helping Denver Seminary flourish and to meet the needs of students who also want to honor God with their gifts and abilities in their life. So, it's a joy to be called to this opportunity and I'm looking forward to many more conversations.

[00:32:40] **Don Payne:** same here. Well, friends, we're grateful for you as well. Grateful you've spent some time with us today. And as always, we'd ask that if you have a few moments, please give us a rating, a review, wherever it is that you happen to access your podcast and Please feel free to send us any questions or comments you have at our email address, which is podcast at [denverseminary.edu](mailto:podcast@denverseminary.edu). Remember as well that on our, website, denverseminary.edu, there's information about all kinds of resources, as well as our degree programs, events and other episodes of this podcast, Engage 360, including full transcripts. Friends, we're grateful for your interest, for your prayers, for your support. And until next time, may the Lord bless you and keep you. Take care.