

A New Kind of Normal

Carol Kent on Divine Surprises, Unexpected Heartache, Vulnerability, and Choosing Hope

Carol Kent

Tuesday, August 25, 2026

Program Summary

In this Classic Conversation, Carol Kent describes how God can turn unwanted interruptions into 'divine surprises' and how her family learned to live a new kind of normal after her son Jason's arrest and life sentence. Through grief, questions, humor, vulnerability, and compassion, Carol reminds listeners that following Jesus does not guarantee easy circumstances, but God remains present and purposeful even among the ruins.

Key Takeaways

- Look for divine surprises inside unwanted interruptions.
- Following Jesus does not guarantee smooth circumstances in a fallen world.
- God is not helpless among the ruins of a life that changed unexpectedly.
- Sometimes faithfulness means breathing, praying, and doing the next thing.
- Choosing hope does not mean denying pain.
- Healthy humor can be a balm in seasons of deep heartache.
- Vulnerability can break false shame and help others tell their stories.
- Compassion often comes before explanation; sometimes weeping with someone is the ministry.
- God knows the sighing of my heart.
- Isaiah 43 reminds me that God can make a way in the wasteland and streams in the desert.

Scripture References

Isaiah 43:18-19, Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Psalm 38:9, Habakkuk 1:5, Romans 12:15, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Psalm 34:18, Lamentations 3:22-23

Quote of the Day

"God is at work in ways we cannot even imagine, even when times are tough, if we say, 'I choose hope.'"

Broadcast Notes

Carol tells how a broken-down car became a divine appointment with a discouraged Christian tow truck driver, then traces her own faith to childhood and the Christian radio program Unshackled. The conversation turns to the devastating arrest of her son Jason and the family's new kind of normal. Carol speaks about choosing hope, receiving humor as a gift, becoming vulnerable instead of hiding behind false shame, and learning that compassionate presence can sometimes communicate Jesus more powerfully than immediate advice.

Practical Applications

- Ask God each morning to help me notice a divine surprise.
- Pause before reacting to an interruption and ask whom God may want me to encourage.
- When life changes suddenly, focus on the next faithful step.
- Give myself permission to grieve honestly while still choosing hope.
- Share one hidden burden with a trustworthy person instead of living behind false shame.

- Listen and show compassion before trying to fix another person's pain.
- Receive appropriate moments of humor and joy without guilt.
- Keep Isaiah 43:19 visible this week.
- Ask how a painful experience God carried me through could help someone else.
- Thank God for people and ministries He has used to point me toward Jesus.

Today's Challenge

For seven days, keep a brief 'Divine Surprises' journal. Record one interruption or unexpected conversation each day and ask where God may have been present, whom you could encourage, and what He may be teaching you.

Closing Prayer

Father, when life does not turn out the way I expected, help me trust that You are not helpless among the ruins. Open my eyes to the divine surprises You place in ordinary interruptions. When I am frightened, disappointed, ashamed, or grieving, help me breathe, pray, and take the next faithful step. Teach me to choose hope without pretending pain is easy. Give me courage to be vulnerable and free me from false shame. Make me compassionate enough to sit with another person's pain before trying to fix it. Remind me that You know every longing and every sigh. When life feels like a wasteland, help me perceive the new thing You are doing. Use even my broken places to bring hope to someone else. In Jesus' name, Amen.

About Today's Speaker

Carol Kent

International Speaker, Author, Coach, and Bible Teacher

Carol Kent is an international speaker, author, and coach who has spent decades helping women navigate life's challenges with faith and resilience. With humor, empathy, and biblical insight, she encourages women toward deeper faith, lasting joy, and renewed purpose. Her own family's profound crisis has given her a deeply personal understanding of disappointment, grief, vulnerability, and trusting God when life takes an unexpected turn.

About Today's Host

Mark Burns

Host of Mark & Friends

Mark Burns is General Manager of the WLUJ Family of Stations and Great News Radio Network and host of Mark & Friends. For decades, Mark has served in Christian radio and ministry with a heart for helping listeners know Jesus and grow deeper in God's Word. Through Mark & Friends, he gathers pastors, teachers, ministry leaders, authors, missionaries, and everyday believers for biblical teaching, testimony, conversation, and encouragement.

Proofread Broadcast Transcript

Mark & Friends Welcome Song

We're glad you're here, we're glad you're here,
 Fellowship is sweeter, knowing you're near.
 It's so good to see you, we hope that it's clear,
 Everyone loves you, we're glad you're here.

We're glad you're here. We're glad you're here. Fellowship sweeter.

Knowing you're here. It's so good to see you. We hope that it's clear.

Everyone loves you. We're glad you're here. Reading from Isaiah 43, verse 19a.

See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up. Do you not perceive it? That was Isaiah 43, verse 19a.

O magnify the Lord with me, let us exalt His name together. It's Tuesday, August 25th, 2026, and welcome to Mark & Friends. Today we're reaching back about thirteen years to share a conversation I had with author and speaker Carol Kent as she was preparing to come to our area and minister to women at the New Life Church in Rantoul.

Our conversation centered around learning to live a new kind of normal when life takes a turn we never expected. And there's another reason I'm excited to share this conversation again. Today you can do much more than simply hear the broadcast.

Under the Mark & Friends tab at greatnewsradio.org and wluj.org, you'll find the program to listen to anytime, along with the transcript, scripture, key takeaways, practical applications, and additional resources to help you continue learning and growing in your walk with Jesus. Here's how the interview started up. On the line with me is Carol Kent, bestselling author, popular speaker, former radio co-host, has traveled the world, featured on Focus on the Family, Billy Graham Primetime, Dateline, CNN, MSNBC, Aspiring Women, Significant Living, In Touch with Charles Stanley, Family Life Today, Primetime America, Midday Connection, keynote speaker, author of many books, mother, wife, communications trainer, educator, evangelist, Bible conference speaker.

So Carol, with your extremely slow, boring, and seemingly unproductive schedule, what's the Lord been teaching you lately and how has he carried you to this point in your life? Well, I am so excited about what God continues to do because I believe that he has purpose for our lives, no matter what happens for us. And what he's been teaching me right now is that if we're looking for them, we are going to find divine surprises everywhere we turn, even if life isn't turning out the way we once anticipated it would look like. And it just gives me great hope for the future because I know that today I'll have an opportunity for a divine appointment that will totally surprise me and give me an opportunity to use what he's done in my life to touch someone else with hope.

Hey, define that divine surprises because I like using that divine appointments, you know, when you read God's word each and every day and you pray, Lord, lead me, direct me, guide me. But I've not heard of divine surprises. I know it's the same thing, but you know, we have a cross section of listeners, people that are scanning the dial where one of our frequencies is between two rock and roll stations.

So they might be unfamiliar with the divine, that there's a God who loves them and cares for them. So maybe elaborate a little and then share some of your own faith story on how almighty God drew you to himself. Oh, I would love to do that.

Well, to me, a divine surprise usually comes in the form of an unwanted interruption. And I chuckle sometimes because when I was young in my time of beginning to speak and share my faith with others, I remember my car quit at a red light and I was so upset. I thought, here I am out doing God's work in this world and my car won't run.

And I remember sitting there with angry people behind me honking their horns, wanting me to get out of that intersection so they could be on their way. Finally, they were making their way around me and I could see them mouthing things at me through the windows. And I could tell they were not quoting Bible verses.

And I thought, well, this would be a good time to pray. I said, Lord, what are you going to do with your car? You and I have to be in Ohio tomorrow. How will we get there? And that might have been a little presumptuous of me.

But this time the engine finally turned over. I wound up in a subdivision area where my car quit completely. No amount of begging, pleading or praying would get it going.

I walked up to a house and asked to use the phone and got a dealership to send a tow truck to where my car was. And it turned out to be a female tow truck driver. Well, I jumped into the cab of her truck after she very skillfully got my car hoisted up.

And as we were going down the highway, I said, I hope you don't mind me asking, but how did you get into this line of work? She said, well, to tell you the truth, I have a Bachelor of Arts degree in Russian literature. And right now I'm working on a Master's degree in theology. And at this time last year, I was working in underground evangelism.

And I looked at her, I said, wow, you mean you're a Christian? She said, yeah, you too. I said, yeah, me too. And Mark, we sat in the cab of that truck celebrating what it means to be in the family of God.

And she told me it had been the most discouraging year of her life. And she said, you wouldn't believe how people laugh at me for doing this. But it's the fastest way I know how to pay off my debts so I can be on the mission field where God wants me.

And when we got to our destination, that dealership that had a garage that would fix my car, I sat in the cab of that truck and I prayed for my tow truck driver, that God would encourage her and send people around her who would not only pray for her, but help to meet her financial needs as she prepared for the mission field. And then I hugged my tow truck driver. And as I left that dealership that day, I realized that in the form of an unwanted interruption, God had given me a divine surprise that enabled me to use my faith to encourage someone else who was having a tough day.

So I want to encourage all of our great news radio family to look for a divine surprise every single day and realize it might be a telemarketer, it might be somebody who taps at your front door when you're not expecting it, it might be in the supermarket or in the workplace. Look for the opportunity you have to encourage someone through what you say or do and make that your divine surprise. And I bet afterwards you just sat and thanked God, thank you for that divine appointment where I got blessed to see where you're using this woman, and she probably really blessed your life too.

She really did. And, you know, as I was driving the next day in a car that was working perfectly, I remember thinking, you know, I sat at that intersection thinking, here I am out serving Jesus and all I have is trouble. You'd think the least God could do is keep my car running, but I got trouble.

How many times have we thrown a pity party? I bet you haven't, but I do. And all the while, God knew that he had checked my carefully planned itinerary, and he thought, you know what, Carol has a little time this afternoon and I have a lonely, discouraged tow truck driver headed for the mission field who needs a word of encouragement. And God gave me that opportunity, only at the time all of that was happening, I wasn't really looking for a divine surprise.

I was looking for smooth sailing that day, but God had a greater purpose in mind. Yeah, and carrying on his perspective, because he usually will layer things. In his economy, he's got a lot of different things going on, and we just have to be attentive or available and open to him using us, working in and through us.

So true. Oh, it happens in many, many ways. And I remember my friend Nan Walker called one day.

She said, Carol, I just got off the phone with a telemarketer. And I rather piously said, well, I have a gift for getting rid of those people quickly. She said, you don't understand.

I told her I'd answer her questions if she would answer mine. And she said, I answered every question of my telemarketer. And then I said, if life as you know it ended next week due to an accident, do you know for sure you'd make it into heaven? And this woman said, no, I don't.

And I've been very fearful about that. And that day Nan shared her faith with her telemarketer, and right over the phone this woman invited Jesus Christ into her life as her personal Savior. Now, talk about divine appointments in

unexpected ways.

That surely was one. Sure, yeah. Here you're thinking, hey, here's one of the strategies.

Just leave the phone down and walk out of the room or do a blowhorn into the phone or something. No, I think oftentimes God uses us in those simple tasks during those kind of divine appointments, you know, in the grocery line or on the phone or something. Yeah.

Well, was it always that way? Did you grow up in a Christian family just, hey, let's share our faith from the age of six on? Or were there some hurdles in learning? I did grow up in a Christian home, and I'm very grateful for that. One of my earliest memories in life deals with Christian radio. I was listening to the old program called Unshackled, the voice of the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago, Illinois.

We air it seven nights a week on WGNJ. Oh, I can't believe it. 10 p.m., seven nights a week.

Great radio rock. Yep, yep. Well, as you know, they share the stories of people who have had very dramatic life changes, faith stories that just blow you away.

And I don't know what the story was about the day I was listening, but I know it was God's time to get through to my child heart. And even at the age of five, I felt this sense inside me that I needed what that program was talking about. And I said, Mama, after that program was over, Mama, I'm such a sinner.

And believe you me, I was one of those little strong-willed kids who would look at my parents through the bars of the crib as if to say, how soon can I get out of here and take control of this household? I was one of those. And that was the day my mother got the Bible down, and she sat with me, this little girl, and she shared with me that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And then she reminded me that the wages of sin are truly death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

She read both of those scriptures from Romans to me. And I remember sitting there saying, Mama, I want Jesus in my heart. And my mother got on her knees with me and helped me pray a simple prayer, confessing my sin and inviting Jesus Christ into my life.

So I am very fortunate that at an early age I became a very tiny child of faith. And I remember even as a teenager wanting to do something with my life that would outlast my physical existence but would matter for eternity and make a difference in people's lives. So I did grow up as a preacher's kid in a ministry home, and there were some challenges along the way.

It was not a perfect home, and I never want to give the impression that, oh, everything was so wonderful because we knew Jesus. We had the normal challenges that most people have. But I certainly wasn't prepared for the shocking experience I encountered as a mother of a son who had just graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and everything about my former life took a turn that stunned me.

It really put me into a panic and this place of fear when my son, who had been an ideal student, he'd been president of the National Honor Society in high school, had gone on missions trips with his youth group, had gone on to nuclear engineering school after graduating from Annapolis, had met and married a young woman who had been previously married who had two little girls, and we got news that our son had been arrested for the first-degree murder of his wife's first husband, believing this man, who had multiple allegations of abuse against him, was about to get unsupervised visitation of two vulnerable little girls, my son's stepdaughters. And we began a journey that I talk about in the book, When I Lay My Isaac Down. And we had this time when we felt like our faith was tested beyond anything I ever could have imagined.

I'm one of those mamas who just was on the floor with my face to the ground, pounding into the floor saying, God, why? Why? How could you have allowed this to happen when my son has a heart for you and a love for his family?

How did his thinking get so twisted? So if there are any hurting people out there, I get what you're going through. And I know hurt comes in many forms, and my heart really feels what you're going through today. You're talking about a new kind of normal and just life experiences.

You're going to fortify people from all walks in their faith journey, wherever they're at. And that begs the question, sometimes people are under the illusion, I think, that when you accept Christ, when you come into that saving relationship with God and secure all eternity with Him, where there's no more pain or suffering in eternity, it doesn't mean that everything here on earth just works out, where your checking account starts balancing and everything goes well. It doesn't mean that, does it? It certainly doesn't, Mark.

And, you know, it's one of those things where you say, I thought life was going to be easier. And sometimes when we commit our lives to the Lord, we think, well, you know, it's going to be perfect now. And we still live in a fallen world where very difficult things happen.

I love what Eric Liddell, the Olympian, once said, circumstances may appear to wreck our lives and God's plans, but God is not helpless among the ruins. And in those first few hours after we got the word of our son's arrest, I remember saying things like, breathe, do the next thing. We started a list and my husband and I intermittently sobbed as we made this list and we held each other and prayed.

And I had nausea sweep over me and I tried to get out of bed and my legs would not hold my weight because the call came at 1235 AM, which is not when you want to get a call. It's usually not good news when the phone rings at that time in the day, or I should say the night. And I finally crawled my way into my office and from the floor, I grabbed the phone and got a number for the Orlando Florida Jail.

Someone finally answered, and when I asked about my boy, a rude voice on the other end of the line said, Lady, we ain't got nobody by that name Jason Kent in here. Lady, your son ain't here. And for a moment my hopes returned, but as hour followed hour, the facts of the case were confirmed.

Our son had been arrested in a public parking lot and a man had died. And we began our journey into what we call a new kind of normal. Can you tell us a little about what you hope to accomplish or what you hope to pour into these women that will be attending? Oh, I am so excited about meeting the women in your area because I know in the Great News Radio family that there are probably some of you who have lost a child due to death or perhaps something physical that has gone on that you just were not expecting.

And maybe the man who promised to love you forever has betrayed you or left you for somebody else. Or maybe you're struggling financially. Or it just could be that you've gone through the holidays and you've had one relative who just having them breathe next to you gets on your nerves.

I think everybody can identify with some kind of a new kind of normal. And I'm going to be talking about all of the hope-filled choices we can make when the life we expected turns out differently from what we anticipated. And we'll talk about choosing life instead of a kind of emotional death and finding, even in the middle of tough experiences, a bit of humor.

I had friends who started sending me cards after our son was arrested. And most of them were very serious cards with very sweet sentiments. But one friend said, Carol, I know your heart needs some humor in the middle of such a tense time.

And she sent me shoebox greeting cards, and some of them went like this, brain cells come and brain cells go, but fat cells live forever. Or I'm a perfect 10, I just keep it covered with fat so it won't get scratched. And do you know, Mark, that touch of humor was a balm to my soul because at that time I didn't know if I would ever know how to laugh again.

And God reminded me that I would learn how to laugh again. We'll talk about choosing vulnerability. And I don't know about you, but every time something bad happens, especially in my family, I kind of close down and I don't want anybody to be guessing what's going on.

And I put on the plastic smile and pretend everything's okay. And in the middle of our journey, I learned how to choose vulnerability. I remember speaking in Oregon soon after our son's conviction and sentencing to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

And a woman came up to the book table after I spoke, and she had her head down. She could barely speak above a whisper. She said, My husband's been incarcerated for the last 18 years, and nobody knows, and he's getting out next month.

I said, Is he coming home to live with you? She said, Yes, we're going to try to make a go of it. And then she stood to her full posture, and with confidence she said, Today, you've given me the courage to start telling my story. I'm going to quit hiding in false shame and false guilt, and I'm going to tell people what's happened.

I want to give them hope the way you've given me hope. Thank you. And, you know, Mark, every Christmas, my husband Gene and I are at the prison visiting our son.

That's where we spend our Christmas day, eating Christmas dinner out of the vending machines, and that's our new normal. And on one Christmas afternoon, I was in the ladies' room in a stall in the visitation area, and I heard a woman come in. She was hyperventilating.

She was sobbing. She was cussing. I heard her say, I hate this place.

I hate these people. I think I'm having a nervous breakdown. Now, the old professional me would have come out.

I would have quoted my five best verses on suffering. I would have prayed over her and said, You'll be fine. But the new broken me was weeping before I left that stall.

That day I put my arms around a total stranger. We didn't even know each other's first names. And I just began to weep with her.

And I didn't quote my Bible verses. I didn't say my prayer. But after a few moments, I just said, I know this pain.

My boy's here, too. I'm so sorry about what's happened in your family. You know, sometimes I'm kind of from the buttonhole and for Jesus generation.

If somebody has a problem, I like to grab them and say, Look, friend, you have a problem. I have the solution. Pray this prayer and get with the program.

Be well. And you know, that's not how God works in most people's lives. Often He works because we care about somebody first.

We show them love and compassion. And you know, that would later earn me the right to share my faith with that woman just because I wept with her before I gave my little sermonette. And God's teaching me a whole lot about being vulnerable.

I just love that Scripture from Psalm 38 and 9. All my longings lie open before You, O Lord. My sighing is not hidden from You. And sometimes we forget that God knows the sighing of our heart and He cares and He understands.

Well, there's so much to still share and say and talk about. Carol, I want to keep you for a second day of broadcasts because I want to talk a little about how your son's arrest impacted your marriage and with your forever husband, Gene, how you two met, a little of that love story, his support of you throughout this time, and just how God has worked in your marital situation and relationship and just a lot of other things I want to talk about on tomorrow's edition of Mark & Friends. But how about closing out with a favorite verse that I opened up with, Isaiah 43, 19,

about the new things that God likes to do in all of our lives.

Well, I love that Scripture, Mark. It goes like this, See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up.

Do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wasteland and streams in the desert. And I truly believe that God is at work in ways we cannot even imagine, even when times are tough, if we say, I choose hope. You know, it reminds me of one of my favorite verses that was true of this radio ministry.

I shared it in the early years. I think it's Habakkuk 1-5. It's been some time since I've shared it.

I think it begins with, Look at the nations and watch and be utterly amazed, for I am going to do something new that you would not believe even if you were told. I mean, isn't that a great concept? It's a great one. I think it's Habakkuk 1-5.

I was trying to find it. It's like, where is Habakkuk? I couldn't even, you know, I'm searching through my Bible here. That's what you have to hunt for.

Yeah, it's a short little book, but just that concept that God desires to do a new thing in all of our lives, each and every day as mercies are new. And Carol, I so appreciate that you're going to carve out some more time. Please stay on the lines, and I know there's some more other themes and topics you'll want to address and some other God-citing stories, or as I like you sharing, divine surprises that God has laid out even for us today.

So may we be attentive to his leading and be conscientious that he does want to orchestrate some unique things where he can use us and work in and through us. So thanks for being a part of today's edition of Mark & Friends, Carol. It's been a privilege.

Thanks for having me on the air. As mentioned at the beginning of today's broadcast, this conversation with Carol Kent originally took place about 13 years ago when she was coming to our area to minister to women at New Life Church in Rantoul. And there's more to come.

Part two continues tomorrow during Mark & Friends. One reason I'm especially glad to share this conversation again is our growing Mark & Friends program resource library. Visit greatnewsradio.org or wluj.org and click on the Mark & Friends tab.

There you can listen to today's broadcast again, share it with a friend or family member, read the transcript, explore the scriptures, review key takeaways and practical applications, consider today's challenge, and find additional resources designed to help you continue growing in your walk with Jesus. Thanks for listening. Thanks for being a part of our radio listening family.

This is Mark Burns with the Ministry of Great News Media. God bless you and have a great day and night. And I hope you can tune in at the same time tomorrow for the Wednesday edition of Mark & Friends.