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# Mark & Friends

While in the Through Season

Hosted by Donna Leland with playwright Sean Reese and director Donna Jefferson •  
Thursday, July 16, 2026

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**Today's focus:** Difficult seasons are not permanent addresses. God faithfully carries His people through uncertainty, disappointment, and struggle, using faith, fellowship, and perseverance to lead us toward hope and victory.

Welcome to today's edition of *Mark & Friends*. Listen to the broadcast, read the proofread transcript, download a printable copy, and explore today's Program Resources.

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## Listen to Today's Broadcast

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## Program Summary

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Donna Leland welcomes local author and playwright Sean Reese and experienced playwright and director Donna Jefferson to discuss the Springfield-area production *While in the Through Season*, presented by Fresh Visions Community Church. Sean explains how the play grew from a sermon that she could vividly imagine coming alive through characters and action.

Donna describes the range of emotion, humor, worship, and authentic church life woven into the production, along with the remarkable local cast bringing the story to the stage. The conversation centers on one encouraging word: *through*. Hard seasons may include doubt, delay, pain, and detours, but believers do not have to make their home in the valley. God is faithful to carry His people through, and there can be victory on the other side.

## Key Takeaways

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- God can use a sermon, a story, an artistic gift, or a moment of inspiration to communicate biblical truth in a fresh way.
- Theater can help audiences see faith lived out through real people, real emotions, and recognizable struggles.
- A difficult season is something we walk through, not somewhere we are meant to remain forever.
- God's faithfulness does not mean the journey will always be easy or smooth, but His promises give us strength to keep going.
- Christian fellowship and creative outreach can welcome people who are unchurched, wounded, or hesitant to return to church.
- Every person and every role matters when a community joins together to share hope.

## Scripture References

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- Psalm 23:4 - God accompanies us as we walk through the darkest valley.
- Galatians 6:9 - Do not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up.
- Isaiah 43:2 - When we pass through waters and fire, God promises to be with us.
- Romans 8:28 - God works in all things for the good of those who love Him.
- Hebrews 10:24-25 - Fellowship encourages believers to persevere in faith and good works.
- Psalm 46:1 - God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

## Quote of the Day

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*“Don't give up in the through point. God is faithful to carry you through those seasons and those valleys.”*

*- From today's conversation*

## Broadcast Notes

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- Donna Leland hosts this local-focus edition of *Mark & Friends*.
- Sean Reese wrote *While in the Through Season* after being inspired by a sermon and imagining its message lived out on stage.
- Donna Jefferson directs the production and discusses how strong theater moves an audience through laughter, sadness, reflection, and hope.
- The play portrays a pastor and first lady in different seasons of life and ministry, supported by a full local cast.
- The production includes dramatic scenes, spoken word, mime ministry, praise dance, and music in an immersive church setting.
- The broadcast announced the presentation for Saturday, July 18, at 6:00 p.m. at Fresh Visions Community Church.

## Practical Applications

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- Name the difficult season you are presently walking through, and remind yourself that it is a passage, not your permanent identity.
- Write down one promise from Scripture that you can stand on when discouragement rises.
- Encourage someone who may be tempted to quit in the middle of a hard season.
- Use your own creative gifts - writing, music, drama, hospitality, art, or service - to point others toward God's faithfulness.
- Help make your church a welcoming place for people who have experienced church hurt or feel uncertain about returning.
- Thank a local artist, volunteer, or ministry worker whose faithfulness helps bring hope to the community.

## Today's Challenge

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Choose one hard season in your life and replace the sentence “I am stuck here” with “By God's grace, I am walking through this.” Read Psalm 23 and Galatians 6:9, then take one faithful next step without giving up.

## Closing Prayer

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Lord Jesus, thank You that no valley, delay, disappointment, or season of uncertainty is beyond Your reach. When we are tired and tempted to give up, remind us that You are walking with us and carrying us through. Strengthen local churches, artists, writers, directors, actors, and volunteers who use their gifts to share truth and hope. Help those who feel wounded or far from fellowship find a welcoming place and a fresh reminder of Your faithfulness. Give us courage for the next step and confidence that victory belongs to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Program Resource Library

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Continue learning through the growing *Mark & Friends* Program Resource Library at [GreatNewsRadio.org](http://GreatNewsRadio.org) or [WLUJ.org](http://WLUJ.org). Revisit today's conversation, share it with family and friends, and return for more biblical encouragement.

## Complete Proofread Transcript

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Welcome to Mark and Friends. I'm your host, Donna Leland, and we love all things local. And so today we're going to be sharing a wonderful opportunity to see a local play in the Springfield area.

It's called *While in the Through Season*. It's presented by Fresh Visions Community Church. It's happening this Saturday, the 18th, at 6 p.m. So today we're talking with local author Sean Reese, as well as local playwright Donna Jefferson.

And we're just excited that we're able to showcase the local talent and the local giftedness here in the Springfield area. Thank you so much, ladies, for joining us on Mark and Friends. Thank you for having us.

Oh, yes, thank you so much. Let's start out with you, Sean. So you wrote this play.

Have you written other plays? And what motivated you to write on the subject? And without giving us the whole play, maybe you could just give us a tease as to what it's about. Sure. So yes, I've written other plays, and usually they're done at the church.

I've never written a play for the stage. That's a goal. But this play came about one Sunday.

One of our associate pastors was preaching. I could visualize what he was talking about. And I thought, well, wouldn't it be nice if there was a church service where things were happening and there was actually action to it? And so it brought to life what was being preached during service.

I know we're not supposed to have our cell phones out. Right. But during service, he's preaching.

I'm listening, and I'm using his preaching to develop the script. And then I came home and was like, don't bother me. And I sat at the computer and typed it out, just inspired by his sermon and how he tied and weaved together some of the scripture and thought it would be a good way to demonstrate that in action through a play.

That is so neat. You know, I've never heard that motivation, you know, coming straight off of a sermon and wanting to see that lived out. Yeah.

So people could actually put flesh on it. That is so neat. Now, how do you whip it up? How does this process happen? I'm just very curious as to how someone would write a play.

Donna probably can speak to it more than me. She has some stage play experience. For me, it really is just thinking about one, the message I want to convey.

And then two, who are the characters? I like I'm a people watcher by nature. I tend to see people and think about what their life is behind what I see. And so I tend to use familiar characters that I know or I see in my neighborhood or at home or in church and develop characters from that.

And for me, I see things in pictures anyway. And so it's easy for me to take what I see and then type it out. And I see conversation.

I see the whole thing playing out as a picture. I don't know, Donna, if your way of doing it is a little different. I would agree with that.

It starts from a burst of inspiration. And once I have the inspiration, then I can sit with it for a bit before the vision becomes clear. And once I have that inspiration and vision, I become, like

you said, a very good observer of people, things, situations, events, so that I can capture all of those things and bring it to life for everybody.

It's a fascinating process. And to start with it as a seed and to watch it come to fruition is simply magical. And it's kind of neat because it's like radio.

Once it's out there, you can't take it back unless, of course, you're recording it. So you're in the moment. And I love live radio.

Things happen. And that's the same thing with on the stage. It's just happening out in there.

Their lines are memorized, but there's still that something. There's a life to it. Very living.

Donna, what is your experience? Tell us a little bit about your backstory. My first play that I wrote was A Letter to Heaven. And that grew out of a graduate level playwriting class that I took.

You probably know Dr. Marcellus Leonard. He's passed now, but he was a playwriting professor at UIS. And I took a class with him.

As a final writing assignment, we had to write a play and direct it. And so I did. I wrote this play, A Letter to Heaven, based on a song that my mother used to sing to me when I was a child.

The night of the final, I brought in my friends to perform the play. And everybody was just blown away. They said, you got to put that on stage.

So I did. I took it to the Hoogland and Dr. Marcellus Leonard was my assistant director. So I got to learn from him about directing as well.

I've been on stage myself as an actor. In 1992, when Muni did Dreamgirls, I was Lorelle, one of the dreams. And that's probably one of my fondest experiences.

I think you have to be on the stage and understand what the characters are going through in order to really be a good director. Yeah. Now, Sean, what's your background? So I have no theater experience.

I love the written word. So I like being able to use my own imagination. And so when I write plays, that is me being able to use my imagination to put out and to write.

I self-published my first book last year and am working on my second book. For me, the written word is a way for like to almost like escapism. As people are telling stories, you can see how things are like in my own mind.

And so while I've never been in a play, I am really an introvert. So I don't really care to be in the front, but I like to see it. I love the in-the-now moment that theater brings.

And so I love to write about it, like write plays. And I like to go to plays. This is my first foray in actually working with Donna on learning how to direct.

And so that's something new for me. The whole process and how it develops and thinking about the lighting and the sound and the positions of where people go, it's just, it is just fascinating to me. And so I'm just delighted that she agreed to direct it and to bring me alongside her.

Hey, Donna, let's talk about these characters. Thank you. That Sean has developed.

So walk us through all of our cast and give us a little bit of the backstory behind their character. Well, first, I want to say that Sean is an excellent playwright. When she approached me, you know, with the possibility of directing the play, I said, well, let me take a look at it.

I knew that I had a lot of things planned for the summer. So I said, let me just read it. And and I sat down and I read it and I was right away.

I was just blown away. I just loved it from the beginning. It is poignant.

It is moving. It just gets you on a real visceral level. It is there's humor.

You will go through the range of emotions. I love that. And I remember.

Yes, I remember that my playwriting professor taught me that if you if you don't bring your audience through those emotions to laugh and to be sad and to wonder and to, you know, all of those things, then you fail them. And her play had all of those elements. And so I was very excited to come on board.

She has very lively characters. You will meet Mother Brown, who is she's feisty. She is self-assured.

She's certain. At first, you don't know whether to love her or, you know, or to dislike her. And then you you just find that you just love her.

She's real. She's authentic. You know her.

She's your aunt. She's your grandmother. And then the way that it's written, the pastor, we see the pastor in three seasons as a young pastor, full of energy and excitement and eager to get to work in his new church.

And we see him in his middle age, in the through season, when he is unsure and filled with doubt and indecision. And then we see him on the other side. And I don't want to give away the play because I want you to come and see it.

But the way she's able to capture all of those phases of life for the pastor and also for the First Lady is remarkable. Let's give a shout out to all of the actors that you have corralled to be in that. Can you talk about that, ladies? Oh, absolutely.

Excuse me. I think we have brought together some wonderful local talents. So we have Michael Newman.

Yeah, Michael Newman, who plays Pastor Jenkins, who's in at the point of the midlife. We have John Berry. Excuse me.

We have John Berry, who is playing the younger version of Pastor Jenkins. And we have Terrence Davis, who's going to play the older version of Pastor Jenkins. And then we have Derek Stapleton, who is, he's been in a lot of plays and very community focused, community engaged, who's going to play Elder James.

And one of the things about Elder James, Elder James is the stabilizer. And there is usually always one person in a church that holds it, helps hold it together. Like, you know, no matter what's going on, you can see this one person.

And that person is the foundation, like helps hold the foundation together. And so in the play, Derek Stapleton plays Elder James, and he serves as the litmus test, if you will, for Pastor Jenkins. Melissa Newman is going to play First Lady Jenkins.

Alicia K. Robinson is going to play also First Lady Jenkins. We pull together some really good, strong lead characters. And each of them are starting, they're feeding off of each other and getting to really invoke the personality.

And for three different people to play one character and for them to be consistent about how they're portraying him is just, it's amazing. It's amazing. It's remarkable.

And even those who are, and I guess you could say minor roles, although I say all of the roles are important, they are outstanding. We have Mark Franklin, who does a spoken word performance that is just riveting. And by the way, the play is, it's going to be fully fleshed out in that you will get to experience the mime ministry and praise dance.

There's a vocalist singing. There's a lot. You will get a lot.

A very full, full performance is being planned. I like to call it an immersive. You're immersed in, you're in church, but you're also at a play.

So you're getting worship, but you're also getting an opportunity to see what worship would look like lived out loud. That's what I refer to it as an immersive. You get immersed into it.

So the takeaway, when people walk out of the theater, what is that single thought that you really would like for them to carry home? Oh, it's the word through. Yeah. The word through.

Because you don't stay. God carries you through it. It may not be easy.

It may not be smooth. There may be detours, but you keep, you go through it. And then on the other side, there's victory.

So don't give up in the through point. Absolutely. That God is faithful to carry you through those seasons, those valleys.

When it's hard, it's easy when we're on the mountaintop and everything is going right. But when there's a challenge and when we're unsure which way to go, to know that God is faithful and that we have his word and his promises to stand on, that's the reminder, that's the takeaway that I hope everyone gets. I just think of Psalm 23, walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

Absolutely. We don't live in the valley of the shadow of death. Absolutely.

We're walking through it. And then another one that brings to mind is do not become weary in doing good. Yes, for in due season.

We will reap if we don't fail. We can't fail. We can give up.

It's reality and we have given up in different hard seasons. But it's just such a great reminder that we're walking through and don't give up. It's so hard.

It's so hard. Yeah, it really is. It's funny you say that because as we've been rehearsing, there have been times when a cast member has pulled me to the side or one even said, I speak for all of us.

I think we need to postpone. And I'm like, no, we're not postponing. We're going.

You're not speaking for everybody. We're keep going. This is happening.

Yes. And it's going to be great. It really is.

It's going to be great. I'm just so appreciative that Reverend Roy Newman thought well enough of what we're trying to do to allow us to do it. Right.

Because so often we don't think about people who may be unchurched and we don't think about people who are, they were church and they had church hurt. How do you get them back in? Opening the doors for other opportunities like plays and other performances. And he has a mind to think about opening the doors as often as possible to allow people to experience the beauty of being in fellowship.

And so when he agreed, I was about floored like, yes, okay, we can do this. We can do this. That's wonderful.

How long have you been practicing? When did you start rehearsals? April? We started in April. Yes. It was about April.

Okay. Because everybody has lives. Everybody has families and jobs and things that they're doing.

So to pull them together. And we have one young lady. It is a lot of work.

It absolutely is. And we have one of our, the lady that's playing Mother Brown, her name is April Hunter. She actually drove from Decatur to come audition.

And then she has been driving from Decatur for every rehearsal. And she said, I have to be a part of this. And so that whole commitment and her being willing to drive every time we have rehearsal and to show up with her, with her line in character, and then her solo, forget about it.

That's all I can say. Yes. It's amazing.

So, you know, it just shows that we are bringing in community and we're reaching out to anyone who's willing to walk alongside us. And her driving from Decatur every time we have rehearsal has just been an amazing thing. So I'm so appreciative.

Now, who wrote the songs? She is singing a song that is well-loved, that people know, that she has sung before and performed before. But it's a song that we think will be very moving and familiar to a lot of the audience. Perfect.

Yes. Don't give too much away. I caught you doing that.

That's good, Donna. Good on you. We want to save some of the highlights here.

We're just giving people a teeny little taste as to what they can enjoy. Well, we are having a wonderful conversation here with Shawn Reese, the local author of the play, as well, directed by Donna Jefferson, featuring local talent. It's a moving production.

It offers a thoughtful look at God's faithfulness in the midst of life's uncertainties. It's called While in the Through Season, and you'll be able to see this at the Fresh Visions Community Church. This is this Saturday, the 18th at 6 p.m. Well, ladies, anything else you want to throw in there that maybe we missed or you want to highlight something? I'll just say thank you for the opportunity to talk to you about what the play means and the effort we put into bringing this to the community.

We hope everyone walks away with a piece of understanding that being in the through season means that you will come out on the other side. Yes. I would just add to that that there's going to be something for everyone.

Everyone will enjoy this play, and they will find themselves in it in different places. Every character, every line is important. Even the narrator is a very colorful character.

There are no throwaway lines, so everything is important. Everything is meaningful. I think that's going to have a big impact.

I really do. Yeah, I do too. Well, ladies, thank you so much for being here on Mark and Friends.

I just really wanted to shine a little light on the efforts that are being put in right here, right local. Trusting the Lord is going to bless your efforts. Thank you so much.

Yes. Thank you so much. Thank you very much for helping us get the word out.

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Have a great day.

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