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## MARK & FRIENDS

Tuesday, June 30, 2026

Testimony Tuesday with Retired Judge Chris Donnelly

Guest: Retired Judge Chris Donnelly | Philippians 3:10-11

Welcome to the Mark & Friends Program Resources page. Here you'll find today's broadcast, a printable transcript, Scripture references, key takeaways, memorable quotes, and additional resources to help you grow in your walk with Jesus.

### Scripture Callout

Philippians 3:10-11 - "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

### Program Summary

On this Testimony Tuesday edition of Mark & Friends, Mark Burns visits with retired Judge Chris Donnelly about his faith journey, his marriage to Donna, and the way God graciously changed the direction of his life. Chris shares how outward success did not fix the deeper issues in his heart, home, or relationships - but coming to the end of himself opened the door for him to surrender to Jesus.

The conversation centers on the difference between knowing about God and truly knowing Christ. Chris reflects on the prodigal son, the hope of the resurrection, the role of suffering in drawing him near to the Lord, and why the Christian faith is rooted not in wishful thinking but in the testimony of Scripture and the evidence of Christ's resurrection.

The broadcast closes with encouragement for listeners to draw near to God, ask Him to reveal Himself through His Word, and consider the life of meaning, purpose, and eternal hope found in Jesus.

### Key Takeaways

- Good things can become disordered when God is not first.
- Christianity is not merely religion; it is a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
- Suffering can become the place where we recognize our need for the Lord.
- The hope of resurrection is central to the Christian faith.
- Jesus prayed for oneness among believers, and that unity still matters today.

### Scripture References

- Philippians 3:10-11 - knowing Christ, the power of His resurrection, and fellowship in His sufferings.
- Luke 15:11-32 - the prodigal son and the loving heart of the Father.
- Romans 5:8 - Christ died for us while we were still sinners.
- John 14:6 - Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life.
- John 17 - Jesus' prayer that believers would be one.

- James 4:8 - draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.
- 1 Corinthians 15 - the resurrection as essential to Christian faith.

## Quote of the Day

"I could have missed salvation by 18 inches."

Chris Donnelly, reflecting on the difference between knowing about Jesus in his head and surrendering to Him from the heart.

## Broadcast Notes

- Chris and his wife Donna recently celebrated 48 years of marriage.
- Chris served as a judge in Cook County for 20 years before retiring and moving to Champaign.
- A key theme was the shift from personal achievement and self-reliance to identity in Christ.
- The discussion connected courtroom evidence and eyewitness testimony to the credibility of the resurrection.
- Chris is exploring the biblical theme of oneness, especially from Jesus' prayer in John 17.

## Today's Challenge

Ask God to move your faith from your head to your heart. Take time today to read Philippians 3:10-11 and James 4:8, and ask Jesus to help you know Him more personally.

## Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for pursuing us with grace and truth. Help us not only to know about You, but to truly know You. Use our joys, struggles, questions, and testimonies to draw us closer to You, and help us point others to the hope of Your resurrection. Amen.

## Complete Transcript

We're glad you're here. We're glad you're here. Fellowship sweeter, knowing you're near.

It's so good to see you. We hope that it's fair. Everyone loves you.

We're glad you're here. I'm reading from the book of Philippians, chapter 3, verses 10 and 11. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3, verses 10 and 11. Oh, magnify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together.

It is Tuesday, testimony Tuesday. You know, that's one of my favorite days of the week as I get to have somebody share some of their faith journey, life story, some of their testimony, sometimes some of their love story or the unique work God has called them to do. Well, that's the case for today on the Tuesday edition of Mark and Friends as my special guest is Chris Donnelly.

In fact, you might have heard his voice last Friday during Mark and Friends as he was in the studio with the room of friends. As we walk through the book of James, we're continuing to do that on Fridays. I think we're going to be in it for about a year.

It seems like we'll finish chapter one this Friday. We covered a couple of verses last week, but on Fridays we get to go through the book of James. And Chris joined us last week.

It was the first time he was at the WLUJ studios, and he got to see some of the behind the scenes ways that we work and broadcast and serve so many of you. So I hope you're going to be encouraged by his testimony. In fact, I'll just give a

short overview.

We have a mutual friend in Bill Gingold, Dr. Bill Gingold. He and Phyllis attend our ministry leader luncheon for the last year or so. And Bill emails me and says, hey, I have this neat guy.

He's a friend. He lives in our building. I think you would like him.

He likes to do Bible studies with people, and he's kind of like you. He loves God's word and the Bible and talks about Jesus. And so I contacted Chris and said, hey, I hear you're involved in the community.

And would you like to come and join us for the ministry leader luncheon? And so you've done the last two or three, I think. Sure. I mean, if you have food and hey, I'll come.

So you feed me on there. And besides being a judge in the Chicagoland area or Cook County, so in the city and retiring and now I think three or four years living. About three years I've lived in Champaign.

What else should our listeners know a little bit about you before you share some of your faith journey? Yeah, well, Donna and I just celebrated our anniversary, our 48th anniversary. It sounds like a pretty big number, but my parents made it to 70. So I still have 22 years to catch them.

You know, so it could be a little while yet. But Donna's the love of my life. She is a remarkable, remarkable woman.

She's the rock and I call her our lioness to our family. Don't ever come between the family and her or there's going to be trouble. And she always puts us first.

She's a servant and she's got a servant's heart and she's a wonderful, wonderful person. And I've got three great kids. They're all married and I have four granddaughters.

And so that's how we ended up in Champaign three years ago. We came because of don't tell anybody else, but our granddaughters. We came for them.

So, yes. And knowing a little bit about those 48 years, they weren't always easy because you were a successful judge working, living the good life. But Christ wasn't really a part of it.

And it was at a point where there is some friction and difficulty in your life. And so what at the age of around 30 began to change you? Yeah, sure. We got married when we were roughly 21.

But as we had kids and careers and things like that drifted apart, and I became more consumed with not only my career, but also the kids. And so, you know, you can have good things in your life. But if you get out of order of God, spouse, kids, if you get out of that order, you're going to pay for it.

And that's what we ended up doing. God really wasn't important. He was on the list somewhere, but he certainly wasn't number one.

And then my wife was not number two. And kind of the kids were in front because they're at a young active age. And so we're deeply involved with them.

And so we drifted further and further apart and things got worse and worse. It's a slow descent, but it's a death spiral. And when I started to recognize it, I worked really hard in my own mind to correct it.

Well, I was the problem, so I probably wasn't going to be able to correct it. But I didn't know that. I didn't think that.

And so it got worse and worse. And it seemed to me the harder I tried, the worse it got. And finally, thank God, he got finally through to me, through this hard-hearted, this proud man who had failed to— even I knew all about Jesus.

I even have a theology degree from college, but I only have it because I found theology to be interesting. Not that I'd given my life to the Lord. I just found it fascinating.

But God finally got a hold of me one day, and everything changed from that day. And I became a Christ follower. And what a surprise, not long after that, when I changed, what a surprise, my relationship with my wife changed.

And at that time, I was also having a great deal of difficulty with my oldest son, who was 15 at the time. And we had a terrible relationship. And our relationship started to change.

And so God changed everything because I met my need of Jesus Christ. Now, because of the 21 frequencies and some of our stations between rock and roll stations, we have a lot of different people from all sorts of lifestyles and backgrounds listening and tuning in. But when you say something like you gave your life to the Lord or you recognized Jesus as Savior, what does that mean? Yeah, for me, it was pretty simple.

Lord, I know my way isn't working. I've tried everything. I worked really hard.

I thought I was a good person, and yet nothing was working. It was getting worse, and it was driving me crazy until I finally got to the point of, Lord, your way is different. I need to do it your way.

I see that now. And sure enough, that's exactly when you read God's word and you understand His way, you won't get it all the first time of understanding perfectly. In fact, I've been at this for a little while now.

I've read the Bible through many, many times now. Do I understand it all and have a complete grasp of it? No. But He's given me more and more wisdom as I grow older and stay faithful and obedient.

And so, therefore, God reveals Himself more and more and more to us. And that's been the journey. I wrote down the word, your identity.

So your identity shifts from this successful judge or this father or this community-minded person to being, if you will, a son of the Creator of the universe. Yeah, right. How did you view God's character? Because I think for a lot of people, they look at God and they hear God the Father or pray the Lord's Prayer, Our Father, but they had dysfunctional dads or bad role models, or maybe their dads were good but let them down, or maybe at times their dads made promises and they didn't deliver, and so they can sometimes get a jaded understanding of who God is.

But how did you realize who God the Father really was in Jesus? Sure, the way I came to that was when I had come to the end of myself, which is where what I described earlier, the point of like, I can't do this anymore. So I need a new dynamic. I need a new identity.

The person who's experiencing this, I'm sorry, I can't figure this out. But I knew at least some of the Bible. I grew up in a family of faith, which I was in church every Sunday.

But it affected my head, it didn't reach my heart. I could have missed salvation by 18 inches. And so therefore I let God into my heart.

And when I did that, I recognized He's a loving God. He's provided for me, He's taken care of me, even though I had turned my back on Him. What was particularly influencing to me was the story of the prodigal son.

I was the prodigal son. I had done everything to spit in the face of my father. I had insulted him, I disobeyed him.

In fact, the prodigal son in the story, he wishes that his father was dead so that he could have the inheritance right now. And so the prodigal son gets the money from his dad and leaves. I mean, incredibly insulting.

And yet when he recognizes that he needed his father, that the father was all he had, that's what changed for me. The father is all I have, that's my only hope. My hope can't be found anywhere else.

And so that's when it's like, I need you. I need you to change me. I tried to change, I can't.

I need something bigger than me and more powerful than me. Well, where else could I turn? That's gotta be Him. He's the only answer.

And sure enough, thank you, Lord, I'm here to testify, He's the answer. And I think that's so key for all of us to realize and understand that Christianity is not a religion, though it's maybe measured against other religions, but it's about a relationship. Clearly, completely.

And when we understand God's character of loving and goodness and sovereign and mercy, yes, He's just. And there will be consequences of sin and ramifications. As a judge, you see this all the time.

I sure did. All the time, right. But when we understand His true intent was to fellowship and have a relationship with us, and He demonstrated His love.

I probably shared this verse many times, but while we were still sinners. So it wasn't when we cleaned up or were doing everything right or being kind and such, it was while we were still sinners that He sent the Lord Jesus Christ to die for our sins, to pay the penalty, so we could have a relationship with Him. So I think it's just so important to realize that Christianity is about a personal relationship with God.

Yeah, God's taken the first step, second step, third step, whatever number you want to put on it. He's completely proven His love for us and for each of us individually. And so therefore, we don't have to look at, well, God, if you show me first, He's already done that.

Right, right. Well, of all the verses, and you've read the Bible, as you mentioned, many times, and you love God's word. I do.

But why choose Philippians 3, 10, and 11? Well, people always want the good stuff. And I think that's why this is real. This is truth.

This is God. Life is about good things, and it's about bad things. But God is in the midst of all of it.

And so therefore, in many ways, how I drew close to God was in my suffering. I think about it this way. Would I ever want those days, those bad days to return that I experienced with my wife and I? Absolutely not.

Am I grateful that they happened? Yes, I'm very grateful. Why? Otherwise, I would never have turned to Jesus. Nothing would have turned me.

But in my desperation, in my suffering, I cried out to him, and he answered me. I love the beginning of verse 10 of this Philippians 3. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. And the first thought comes to me, I would think that any listener that would pray that would say, God, I want to know Christ.

I'm not familiar. I haven't read the Bible before. I don't even know why I'm tuned into this station, this frequency at this time.

But these two guys are talking about a relationship, and I would love to enter into a relationship with you if you really do exist. And so it seems like if they followed with this, I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, I would hope, I would pray that God would reveal that. And then it goes on, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.

Well, they might say, I don't know if I want that part of it. But like you said, suffering can oftentimes lead to the realization that we can't do it by ourselves. And notice the word fellowship in there.

God will share with us in our sufferings. Is Jesus acquainted with suffering? Oh, you bet he is, completely and thoroughly. And so therefore, he understands all of our suffering.

And therefore, he can identify with us and understands exactly what we're going through. And how about this part, to attain the resurrection from the dead? So somebody's tuning in. I'm sure with thousands of listeners, people are tuning in.

Resurrection, I don't believe you can be resurrected from the dead. But the Bible is very clear. If Jesus didn't resurrect from the dead, I think Paul teaches or writes about it, then our faith is foolishness.

Correct, right, right. Because it gives us the only possible hope. Because the last I checked, I think the death rate is hovering at right around 100%.

I'm fairly certain of that. Okay, and as I'm now approaching 70 in September, it's like, yeah, I've outlived a grandparent already. And so therefore, the idea of, I'm going to die one day.

Well, do I have any hope? And I have what I call the hope, the noun of, I'm betting my entire life on this. Why? Because I know this to be true because Jesus said so. And he's a truth teller.

He's the way, the truth, and the life. And so therefore, God wants us to be restored to what he intended in the first place, in paradise, in the first two chapters of Scripture, where God made paradise and it was perfect, but we sinned. And so

therefore, death became a part of things because God said, don't do this or you'll die.

And so therefore, God sent Jesus to die for us to pay the price that we cannot pay ourselves. And so therefore, I don't hope as in a wishful thought. I have the hope, meaning the thing I'm betting on, it's my life, and this is exactly what I long for in terms of the ultimate of realities, that heaven will be obtainable, will be mine, and I'll be with Jesus.

And Mark and I, we just prayed this a few moments ago, we'll be in front of his throne forever, worshiping and praising him. I wrote down, and you might get a kick out of this, and I don't know if I formally introduced the fact that you're a judge. I think I mentioned that, and I don't know how many years you served, and it was in Cook County.

20 years in Cook County. As a judge. So as a judge, talk about maybe the evidence.

You've seen evidence almost daily in the court, and you have to weigh the evidence, and then you come to conclusions or determinations. But as a judge or somebody trained to judge and evaluate information, what was maybe key in some of that story to say, you know, I believe there is a God, I believe that he sent Jesus Christ, I believe he died on the cross for my sins. When we talk about faith, is faith just happenstance and you just hope for the best, or can you be really rooted in evidence? No, here, think about this.

I would sentence people to long, long periods of time in prison, okay, and not hoping that they were guilty or not guilty. It was based on evidence, but I wasn't at the scene of any of these things that ever took place. And so therefore, I'd have to be convinced beyond a reasonable doubt.

What would that be? Well, of course, evidence. If three people come before me, and they testify pretty much exactly on point of this is what happened, and this is what I saw, and everything else backs that up, well, guess what? I believed it, unless somehow they have some interest or bias or somehow that gets proven, like for some reason, they shouldn't be believed. But if I'm having different people, particularly if they don't know each other, one observed, one happened to come upon the scene, another it had happened to them, well, I would believe them.

The same is true for me of reading the Bible, an account from many, many centuries of testimony, eyewitness testimony, and particularly when you start talking about the New Testament, you have multiple eyewitness accounts of Jesus did all these things, including, by the way, he was nailed to a cross where he was dead, he was in a grave, and then we saw him again, and we touched him again, and this wasn't a mass delusion. And guess what? These people who wrote these things, they eventually died a death, where if this was a lie, I suspect they would give up that lie, like, hey, don't kill me, I was lying, but now I'll tell you the truth, yeah, it was all a lie. No, no, no, they went to their graves, and Peter was executed like Jesus, crucified, a horrific death, but went to his death rejoicing in Jesus.

The apostles, right after Jesus was crucified and rose back from the dead and then ascended to heaven, shortly thereafter, the Jewish religious leaders pulled them aside, said, hey, don't teach in this name again, but had them flogged, which some people would die after this type of whipping. The Bible tells us that they left this flogging rejoicing, that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ. Now, either they're completely insane collectively, they're lunatics, or this is the truth, and I choose completely, I'm completely convinced, 100%, this is the truth.

And one thing that's never been discovered, show me the bones, I mean, do you know if he died? They could have, think about it, this is only a couple months after Jesus had died. You'd think that, hey, we've got the bones right here, here they are, you're lying. No, they couldn't produce them.

Yeah, so it's not a faith in fairy tales, and these are historical events. There was the person, the Lord Jesus Christ, he made claims, and you and I talked off air, liar, lunatic, or Lord. You can't say Jesus was a great teacher, or a wonderful person, because then he was lying, or he was claiming to be something.

He said, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father, which is a claim that's basically saying, you're looking at God. Now, there is some mystery for us that follow Jesus Christ on how God worked it, and how God is three in one, but hey, there's a lot of mysteries in life. How does that 100,000 pound aircraft fly through the sky? How do you put a piece of paper into a machine, and it faxes across the country? I mean, there's a zillion things that, you know, I think they're saying now there's two billion solar systems, or two billion.

Oh no, there's many more than that. I mean, trillions of stars in the universe, trillion. It's incredible, but we believe it doesn't take a whole leap of faith.

In fact, I can't believe the faith that atheists or agnostics have to believe that it all just happened out of nothing, and there's no ultimate meaning or purpose in life. Like, how can you live with that when the simplest way to think about it is there's a divine creator behind it all. He created meaning and purpose, and yes, there's some mystery, but that's the faith that we have, because there's enough evidence to say, look at the design of the creation.

Look at the variety of animals and people, and it's so incredible. How can you think that just happened? But anyways, I digress a little. Well, God has put a couple things in your heart.

Like, one is maybe writing a book. You haven't decided whether it's for yourself or your family, but what are you thinking about? Well, it struck me as God is seeking oneness with us. To me, see, that's a remarkable statement in and of itself.

The God of the universe wants to be one with me, and there are multiple passages across Scripture that say that. I was most moved by the fact, part of what started this adventure for me was reading John 17. Now, John 17 is a description of the Last Supper, and Jesus, this is his last teaching, and he concludes with a prayer.

And part of this in chapter 17 is he prays for all believers, including future believers. He describes that, believers who are to come. And his prayer essentially is, Father, might we be one as they are one, and that all of us would be one.

He repeats it again and again about this oneness. And if Jesus, knowing that he's going to die within roughly 12 hours or so of this, and this is the last prayer that he prays, well, gosh, that must be pretty darn important. And so I'm just exploring that idea, and I've got about 30 or so pages into it, and I've just kind of scratched the surface.

And I also am tying it in with my experience as a judge of how my experience in a courtroom, as Mark has brought up, has some interesting dynamics to it. Let's put it that way. My experience is tying it in with oneness and human beings revolting from being one.

This idea of, I don't want to be one. I want to do this all myself. And so where that brings it.

Yeah, last Wednesday I sent out an email to the pastors and ministry leaders, and I used some of that verses that Jesus prayed. I mean, if Jesus is praying this, Lord, I want them to be one as you and I are one. It's like, that's significant.

And so I'm hoping that's going to be a catalyst for many churches. Like, I think there's five different churches that they all meet, the staff and the personnel of each of the churches all together, and they pray for all the churches. And I'm thinking, if more and more churches can meet up with other churches and just meet as staff and get to know each other and pray for each other, I think God will work out some powerful things because Jesus prayed it.

Yeah, I'm a part of one of those churches. Yes, it's very powerful. It's a great thing.

I think that's awesome. Well, Chris Donnelly joining me today for the Tuesday edition of Mark and Friends, sharing some of his testimony and faith journey. And God wants to live out a testimony and faith journey in all of you.

He loves you, He designed you, He cares for you. You have unique, special gifts and calling, and He wants you to be His ambassador, to be that faithful follower of Jesus wherever you go, as you go, sharing that good news message that through the Lord Jesus Christ, you can have eternal life and a life with great meaning and purpose here on earth. God loves you, and He cares for you, and He created you.

You're not here by circumstance or by chance. You're here because God wants you to spend eternity with Him, and so draw near to Jesus. And if you want to talk to somebody about how to start that faith journey, or maybe because of some of the things Chris has said, you're going to sit down and start looking at the Scripture and asking God to reveal Himself.

As it says in James 4, 8, draw near to God, and He'll draw near to you. He will do that, listening friend. He loves you, and He cares for you.

If you missed a portion of today's broadcast, want to hear it again, or maybe you're thinking of a friend that could really benefit by some of the things that have been talked about or shared, stop by [greatnewsradio.org](http://greatnewsradio.org) or [wluj.org](http://wluj.org), and you can listen anytime under the Mark & Friends tab. Well, thank you, Chris, for joining us. It's been great to get to know you through the Ministry Leader Luncheons and through our Friday edition of Mark & Friends, and then today's Testimony Tuesday.

Maybe when you write that book, we'll have you back, or we'll get Donna in the studio and hear a little about her faith journey and how you've been married these 48 years, and we'll just see how God keeps bringing us together. Yeah, it's been just a wonderful, wonderful time. Thank you, Mark.

I really appreciate this. All right, listening friends. As you go, wherever you go, proclaim that good news message of Jesus.

Thanks for listening. Thanks for being a part of our radio listening family. This is Mark Burns and Chris Donnelly with the Ministry of Great News Media.

God bless you and have a great day and night.

## **About Mark & Friends**

Mark & Friends is a weekday radio program featuring biblical teaching, interviews, testimonies, and encouraging conversations designed to help listeners grow in their walk with Jesus.

## **About Great News Radio & WLUJ Family of Stations**

Great News Radio & WLUJ Family of Stations is a ministry of Great News Media, dedicated to educating, edifying, and evangelizing through Christ-centered broadcasting, biblical teaching, and encouraging conversations.