

Man in the Mirror Bible Study

Speaker Series

Special Guest Speaker: Kris Den Besten

Rough Transcript

Patrick Morley/Kris Den Besten

Patrick Morley:

Today we have a very special guest speaker, Kris Den Besten, who is the chairman of Vermeer Southeast. Let me go ahead and give you the stats on that. Founded in 1967 by his father and his father's partner. They have 11 locations in Florida, in Georgia, in Alabama, the Caribbean, Central America and Puerto Rico. They have 180 team members.

It is employee owned at this point. They do about 150 million dollars a year in revenue. Vermeer is a manufacturer of various industrial equipment. One of the great innovations that they've come up with is horizontal boring equipment. And so, that whole industrial equipment sector has changed tremendously as technology has developed over the last few years.

And so, Vermeer has been at the forefront of that, and Vermeer Southeast has been the chief distribution and sales effort for that throughout the Southeast. Kris is married to Robin. They have three grown children. He is an author. I'll tell you a little bit more about that at the end, about how you can get a hold of his book, if you like what he has to say today.

And with that said, I wonder if you would join me in giving a very warm and arousing Man in the Mirror welcome to our guest speaker this morning, Kris Den Besten. Kris.

Kris Den Besten:

Thank you, Pat. Appreciate it. Well, good morning and it's a blessing to be here. I like the way Pat introduced me, because often when you speak people say you're an author, and though I have written a book I don't consider myself an author. And I am up here speaking in front of you, but I don't necessarily consider myself a speaker. As Pat said, I'm an equipment salesman.

And there's an important reason why I always tell people that, because if I mess this up I'm an equipment salesman, what do you expect? But if I happen to say something that makes an impact or means something to you, then you'll know that it had to come from the Lord, because how could it have possibly come from an equipment salesman?

Many years ago, actually I started my career in 1986. That's pretty interesting. When you told me that this started in 1986, that's when I started working at Vermeer Southeast. We've got common years in service to talk about as well. But a few years after that I closed the biggest deal in the history of our company. It was a huge deal and I was so excited about it, and before I went in to talk to my dad about the deal I sat for a minute and thought about it. I reflected on my career at the company, how my dad had started it in 67 and I had joined there in 86.

And when I first got there I wasn't much of an employee. My first job was the gofer job. You guys know what the gofer job is? Go for this, go for that. But I really liked that job, because I could drive around in a vehicle and listen to music, and go grab this and take 45 minutes when it really only took 20, and get paid. And it wasn't a bad job for a kid right out of college.

And the other thing I really liked at the time was, believe it or not I liked the filing job. Back then you had papers and you put invoices together, and you put them in files in alphabetical order in the big filing cabinets. And that doesn't sound like much of a job, but if you did it at 10 o'clock that was the key, because the file room was right next to the break room.

And in the break room all the equipment technicians would come in and tell their stories, and I don't know if you've ever listened to a group of equipment technicians tell stories, but I could stand in the other room and listen to them and be entertained, and get paid for this entertainment time. And it was a lot of fun.

But one day I wasn't too joyful about what they were saying, because they were talking about me. And the things they were saying is, "What a loser. That kid will never amount to anything. He wouldn't even have a job here if his dad didn't own the place." And I don't necessarily know how or why, but that was the first time that I ever got a vision for my career.

And I'm not going to tell you it was the right kind of vision, but it was the vision I needed at that time to move forward. And my vision was, those guys in that room will one day say, "He does his business even better than his dad, who founded the company."

A vision is to motivate you by what could be, instead of allowing yourself to be held back by what is. If you want to go from here to there you have to have a vision and know where you're going. That was my first vision. And I went all in. I did everything I could. Everything I possibly could. I learned everything, I worked hard, I poured my whole life into doing this job, so that I could one day be noticed as better than my dad.

This brings me to the biggest deal in the history of our company. I'm walking in to tell my dad that I got the deal. My day had come. And when I walked into his office I said, "Dad, I got the deal." He said, "How much of it?" I said, "100% man. We shut out the competition." And he reached forward to shake my hand and instead of just saying thank you, you know what I did? I held his hand, I looked him straight in the eye and I said, "What's the biggest deal you ever closed, dad?"

And you know, I remember it so well. He gave me that look that only a father can give a son. He didn't have to say a word, but in his eyes it was clearly saying, "You are such an idiot, son." I'm like, "Why is he giving me this look? I mean, this is the biggest deal ever. He hasn't had one like this."

And he thought for a minute, and he said, "You know what, son? I don't know that there's a deal that stands out in my mind, but I think what I'm proudest of is that this company has provided for so many families, for so many years. And I'm just thankful that God has allowed me to play a part in it."

My big deal didn't seem so big anymore. My big vision certainly didn't seem so big anymore, so I knew I needed another vision. One that would maybe be a little bit more important. And eventually the Lord granted me a vision. I call this a kingdom vision, instead of a Kris vision. Up to that point I always had Kris visions, "I want to be better than my dad. I want to grow this company to 100 million. I want to, I want to, I want to."

The visions were always mine, but what I needed was a vision from the Lord. And he gave it to me in a really, really cool way. One day I had been playing golf with some people that do what I do. The other dealers around the country. We were in Myrtle Beach South Carolina, and it was one of those nights, we're having dinner, we're talking about the golf course, we're talking about our businesses, we're bragging about whose business better than yours, "My business is doing this."

One of those times, and at the corner of my eye I saw this busboy cleaning the tables in the restaurant. And soon, it wasn't just out of the corner of my eye, I was watching this busboy every time he would clean a table, because he had such a great way of doing it. He had a plan, he had enthusiasm, he went

after his job. He did it so well, that by the end of the evening everyone in the restaurant would applaud the busboy every time he cleaned a table.

Have you ever seen anything like that? I mean, I have seen the worlds greatest busboy. That night I couldn't get that out of my mind. I mean, I'm trying to go to sleep and I just keep thinking, "Man, that guy did his job so well." And it just came to my mind, "That's what it is to shine." He was standing out in a way that others took notice and they applauded him for the work he did.

I was like, "That's what I want. That's what I want my company to do. That's what I want myself. I want to do my job so well, that others take notice and applaud me for the work I do." And it wasn't an audible voice, it was just a feeling in the heart. You know how sometimes the Lord gets our attention. He just put a thought in my mind, "There's a bible verse." And I'm like, "Okay. This is great. I can't get to sleep because I can't get the worlds greatest busboy out of my mind, and now I'm thinking there's a bible verse."

I knew what I needed to do. I needed to get up and find this bible verse that had to do with the word shine. And thankfully they had been there. The Gideon's had left a bible in a Myrtle Beach hotel room. Just for me. And I found it, and I fumbled through a little bit. Matthew five, 16, "Let your light so shine before men that they'll see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Well, I had heard that verse before. I've gone to church almost my whole life, but that night I heard the verse for the first time. We were indeed called in our lives to stand out. To stand out in a way that others would take notice. But not then that they would applaud us for the work we do, but that they would applaud our Father in heaven for the work that he does in and through us.

And I was so excited. I felt like I had this vision from God, so I went back to my work, I went back, I pulled our management team at the time together and I said, "Hey, on my golf trip I got a message from God." And they were like, "What did you do on your golf trip, man? Seriously? A message from God." I'm like, "Yeah. No. I did. He gave me this vision. It's going to be the new vision for our company. We're going to shine. We're going to be an organization that stands out and others see us, and glorify our Father in heaven, because of what they see in us."

And they're like, "Oh, okay. Well, how do you do that?" And I was like, "I have no idea. Read your bible. It's Matthew five, 16. It's right here." In fact, I felt so big about it, that I put it on our walls. This is our vision and I hung Matthew five, 16 on the walls and I'm like, "isn't this cool? I have a bible verse hanging on the walls of my stores. I'm trying to pursue what the Lord wants for me, so much that I put a bible verse on the wall."

And you know what? Maybe it did something that I didn't know about, but I really didn't do anything. I mean, that's often what visions are, is something we hang on our walls or values, we put them on our walls. But do they really ever get into our hearts? Because it's not about what we put on our walls, it's about what people see. And that is exactly what shine is supposed to be all about, because you don't hear a light, you see it.

Eventually the Lord did give me, I decided, I did some bible study, some reflection, a lot of prayer, and it was actually my wife's idea, "This vision should be spelled out to be a acronym, the word shine and then maybe people would understand what it might look like." What we did, was we really started praying about what would it look like if Jesus came to work at our company? And that's how we came up with the acronym to shine, which became the guiding principles for our company for many years.

First of all, the S in shine is to serve others. No matter what business you do, no matter what job you do, if you want to be like Jesus, the most important principle that you can follow is to serve others, because we all know the son of man came to serve, not to be served, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

What does service like that look like? Service like that looks like service directly from the heart. In business, it's often, we serve so that we can sell more stuff, if we do good service we're going to get more business. But Jesus calls us to serve in a way that just really takes care of the need of someone else's, because we're serving from the heart and not for anything necessarily that we would hope to get in return.

Next, Jesus came to honor the one who sent him. He said, "I came to honor my Father in heaven who sent me." All the work we do often is for our own benefit, and there's nothing wrong with it. We work because we want to earn more money, we work because we want to take care of our families. That's a great benefit of work, but a much greater purpose than a paycheck and work is to have a purpose beyond just making a paycheck, but to actually have a purpose that could bring honor and glory to our Father in heaven.

That's what Jesus would do if he came to our workplace. That's what we should do in our workplace as well. Next is, improve continually. Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, with favor and with God and man. He spent 30 years preparing for his three years of earthly ministry. Everything Jesus did, he continually was a work in improvement and he's taught us that our lives are to be given over to him, so that every day we grow to become more like him.

We should constantly be trying to use the gifts and the talents that he gives us, to grow for his kingdom's glory. Navigate by values. Like I said before, if you put it on the walls, but you don't do anything, nothing happens. A lot of people say they have values, but do you see them lived out in the way they live their life and the way they do their work?

And in fact, if you have Godly values, then you'll begin to see eternal fruit from the work of our labor. Finally, excel in relationships. This is really what it's all about. Again, whatever business you're in, whatever you sell, whatever you work, whatever, the key to work is that we excel in relationships with those around us, and most importantly with the one who created us.

The other important thing about this is, the more relationships we build, the more we can introduce people to the greatest relationship of all and that's the relationship we have with Jesus Christ. That's the relationship that makes the biggest impact. This is the vision for our company. It's been the vision for my life.

The serve others and honor God, is what we do. We're called to do those two things, wherever you are you're called to two things. Serve others and honor God. The way we want to do it, is by improving continually and navigating by Godly values that produce eternal fruit. And the why, the reason we do it, is so that we can excel in relationships with others. And most importantly, with Him.

Now, I was about to learn something really important right after this happened. Right after we began to use this as our company's vision and value system. What I had to learn was, our light is needed most when we walk through the darkness. It's one thing to stand on top of a hill and hold your light up and say, "Yes Lord. I praise the Lord." That's a great thing. But our light makes the most impact when we're going through the darkest times, because it's in the darkest times that we need the light the most.

In 2009, this is from my Christmas cards that year, my daughter was nine years old. Around Christmas time she wasn't feeling well, by Christmas eve she was so sick she couldn't get out of bed. We took her to the hospital, actually to the pediatrician. At the pediatrician they sent her to the hospital, Arnold Palmer Hospital downtown and that's where we learned that a virus had attacked her heart.

It's a condition called Viral Myocarditis. And people that get this, one third of them, if it's not too bad can survive it. One third of them need a heart transplant, and one third of them die. This was our Christmas eve news. It took us from straight out of the blue. We never expected it from a healthy child. We thought she just had a bad cold or something.

And we began to pray that she would be in the good one third. The good one third being someone who heals from it. By about eight o'clock that evening it was very clear that she was not going to be in the good one third. They said she needed to be put on a breathing tube, because she wasn't able to breathe and she wasn't getting enough oxygen, and she was becoming delirious. And she was just screaming out crazy things, and it was really hard to watch.

As they were getting her ready to put this tube down her throat the last words I heard her say that night were, "I'm going to die." She screamed out, "I'm going to die." And what does a dad do in that situation? I mean, a dad wants to save her daughter, a dad wants to protect her daughter, a dad wants to jump in and do something, but there was not a single thing I could do.

And my wife, Robin. A mom wants to hug her child and tell her it's going to be okay, and she couldn't do that. All we could do at that moment was place our daughter in the hands of the one who had created her, and to pray that she would be okay.

Next morning. Christmas day, is the day that Robin and I received the greatest gift we've ever received. We call it the greatest Christmas gift ever. As she was on full life support the doctors said, "There's nothing we can do for her. Her body is going to have to heal itself." And at that moment of greatest angst that a parent would never want to have, that's when the gift came. And the gift was peace.

I don't know how, I don't understand it, it's the peace that passes all understanding. I just felt peace. And Robin felt the same thing. And we talked about it. I said, "When the doctor said there's nothing we can do, what I heard was God can only do this." And she said, "You know what I heard, was she's not in the doctor's hands anymore, she's in my hands."

And what we did, was we committed it to the Lord. We committed that situation to Jesus. We said, "If you want to keep her in heaven, we know she's where she needs to be, but we pray that you would give her back to us. We pray that you would return her to us." She wasn't getting any better. Couple days later they said, "There's a experimental medical procedure. They've been doing it at the University of Florida. It's not approved by the FDA, but there's this machine called a Berlin Heart. It's probably your daughters only chance for survival, but you'd have to agree to be in a medical experiment and all that comes with that."

And since there was such peace, we prayed about it and we knew that would be the thing to do. We allowed our daughter to become a medical experiment. When they put the machine on she actually did begin to come to. They told us that while she had been in this situation a blood clot had broke free and gone to her brain, that she may never speak again, that she may never move her left side.

And the worst part about that is, if the brain damage was too bad that they would not ever be able to do a heart transplant. In essence, we received a second potential death sentence, I guess we would say, for her. And again, this moment I will never forget. My wife touched the doctor on the shoulder and said, "You have to give people like us terrible news like that, and we so appreciate your heart and your compassion. But we want you to know that our daughter's in God's hands and she's going to be okay."

I couldn't believe it, that my wife at that moment could say that to a doctor. And the doctor literally started crying. Over time, we began to pray for very specific things, "Lord, let her move her left side." And she began to move her left side. And then we started praying, "Lord, let her speak." And when they took the breathing tube out I felt like she was trying to speak, and they told me, "You're a hopeful dad. She couldn't speak right now, even if she wanted to. Her lungs are full of fluid."

And remember the last words I heard my daughter say was, "I'm going to die." When she finally spoke in this really weak voice, she looked up at me and she said, "Daddy, I love you." I'll never forget it. From, "I'm going to die." To, "Daddy I love you." What a miracle. For one moment I think I had a feeling of how God must feel if we're in the middle of a crisis, in the middle of something terrible, something we hate

going on and we look up and go, "God, this sucks but I love you." Imagine how he must feel when we do that.

Picture's worth a thousand words. That's the machine they put her on. That's literally her blood coming out of her body and being pumped back into her body. That was her artificial heart that sat outside her body. We had to spend five months at the University of Florida Shands Hospital with her on this machine as we awaited a heart transplant. Every day was an emotional, spiritual, physical battle.

It wasn't a good time at all. And I had once thought that the Lord gave me the message of shine, so that I could use it in my business. And what I learned was the Lord had given me this message so that I could walk through the darkest time of my life. I called my wife the kitchen evangelist. Everyone knew it was her daughter on this machine clinging to life, yet she would walk through the hospital singing praise songs.

We had to put everything in God's hands and trust him. And that's really what it is when we shine, is we want to turn our life over to him so that he can be seen in us. It wasn't our peace that pulled us through, it was his peace alive in us that took us through this time.

April 15, 2009 they called and they said, "We think we have a heart for your daughter." And that's a unbelievable day. You're full of so much anxiety, hope. Every emotion you can imagine is pouring through you and this is just before it's time to go in and get this heart transplant, to get this new heart. And I prayed the dad prayer. The dad prayer is, "Dear God, I want everything to go like this. I want everything to be perfect. Be with the doctors, be with them and make this heart everything we hope it to be."

Absolutely nothing wrong with that. To ask the Lord for what we want. I mean, it's in scripture, "Make your requests known before the Lord." That's what I was doing. And then when it was her turn to pray, again, something I will never ever forget. Her prayer was so simple. It was, "Dear God, thank you that you've sent this heart and I pray Lord, that it would heal me. But I want you to know if it doesn't work out the way I want it to, I'm still going to trust you God."

Who prays like that?, "If it doesn't work out the way I want it to, if it doesn't go the way I want it to go I'm still going to trust you." That's the faith of a child. That's true faith that shines. That's the kind of faith God uses that heals hearts. That's the kind of faith God uses to move mountains. That's the kind of faith God uses to do incredible miracles.

And he still does it all the time, if you're facing anything difficult pray that way. Pray that way, "Even if it doesn't work out the way I want it to I'm still going to trust you." Not many people get to do that. That's my nine year old daughter holding her original heart in her hands.

I remember the day very well. They came in and they go, "Hey Gracen, would you like to see your heart?" And she's like, "Yeah. I think I would." I was like, "Oh, this is going to be really, a interesting sight. Hey Gracen, would you like to hold your heart? Yeah. I think I would."

I never touched the thing, but she held it in her hands. And then the next question is, "Hey Gracen, what's it like to hold your heart in your hand?" And then we really leaned in, because this was going to be really profound. She looked at it and she said, "It looks like chicken to me." And handed it back to the doctor. That's exactly what she said. There's no way I could make that up.

This is November of this past year. One of the things Robin and I prayed so hard for, when we didn't know if she'd live another day, we prayed for a lot of things but one of the things we prayed for is that she would have a wedding day. That she would find a Christian spouse. And there's an update even to this picture. This weekend she was married here in Orlando. She's on her honeymoon.

And I got to officiate the service. Incredible how God works miracles when we turn it over to him. Pat mentioned Vermeer Southeast is now an ESOP. If you remember the dates, 2008 and 2009 was when

this happened. If you think about business during 2008 and 2009, when I got out of the hospital and came back to my job it was the worst of worst times.

Everything was shutting down. 2008, 2009 it was the worst years, and in equipment business it was really, really bad. We had to shut stores, we had to let people go, we had to do all these things. And me as the CEO, I had to be the one that led this charge and had to do this one. And one day I was just sitting at the kitchen table with my head in my hands just, with all the weight of the world on me and my wife walked in and she goes, "It can't be that bad."

And I'm like, "Oh, it is. You don't even understand. You don't even know. I don't even know what to do." And she said, "Well, I'll give you some advice. You could first of all stop looking like such a depressed doofus." I was like, "Thanks honey. That's what I needed. That does it right there. Now I'm ready to go."

What she said next was what was so critical. She said, "Remember a few months ago when the doctor said there was nothing they could do for Gracen? Remember what we had to do? We had to place our daughter in the hands of the Lord. We had to place her in the outcome in his hands. Don't you think he'd like you to do the same thing with the business?"

I guess I was a depressed doofus. You'd have thought somebody that just went through that, and just saw such a miracle would know what to do. We place our burdens in his hands and we trust the outcome to him, and then we just take each step by faith. And that's what we did and we made it through this tough time. It wasn't pretty, it wasn't fun, it was a terrible time.

I often say it was harder to do that than it was to deal with my daughter's situation, because in my daughters situation nobody expected me to do anything. I'll I could do was pray. But in the business situation everybody expected me to do it, because I'm running the company and I'm supposed to make all these decisions. It was actually harder to place that in the Lord's hands than my daughter.

But it's the answer to whatever it is we face, we have to place it in the Lord's hands. And since then the company's thrived, it's done better, it's grown. And then on December 31, 2018 we were able to sell it to the employees, which also is a great blessing. And I get to stick around and still be a part of the company, but now all the employees of the organization get to benefit in the profitability of it. It was a great move for our company.

I'd love for my story to end right here. I'd love to step aside on this high and make you feel like, "Wow, what a neat story. It ended so well." Well, you would miss the most important part of the story if I did that. You see, one of the things that I learned while my daughter was in the hospital, was a very simple thing that happened one day.

We were doing this thing where, toward the end of it, a few months in, where most of the time Robin would be there all during the weekend and I would go back to work, so I'd spend more of the weekends with her and Robin would be home, and then I'd come home so I could work and she'd spend most of the weekdays there.

And one day when it was time for me to check out and go back to home and go back to work, I lingered by the door of the hospital room and I heard Robin say to Gracen, "How was today?" And she said, "It was great, mom. Dad's phone rang 12 times and he didn't answer it once." Here's my daughter laying in a hospital, fighting for her life and the thing that really made her day great was that dad's phone rang and he didn't answer it.

What had happened my whole life with my kids, was I might be there for them but the minute my phone rang they didn't matter. I had spent so much time building this business and pouring into it, and even doing good things, even writing a book about letting your light shine before Christ. Yet, that was happening.

A few years later I was doing a devotional and it said, "Name the three things that you would die for." And I go, "That's easy. I would die for my faith, I would die for my wife, I would die for my kids." And the Lord was like, "Be real, Kris. Seriously, be real." And I thought hard there for a minute. I was like, "Yeah, I would die for my faith. I really believe I would. I would die for my kids. I really believe I would. But my life would show that I wouldn't die for my wife, but that I would die for my work, because that's what I had prioritized."

For years my wife felt like I loved my work more than I loved her. I had to make that right too. And that's so easy for us as men. I mean, these jobs we hold or these things we want to accomplish, we make them so important that sometimes we can miss what's most important and I am the key example of that. Standing before you now, asking you not to do it.

I also have the answer. There's really only one way to do it. We spend a lot of time living on these levels here. The survival level is when we're doing what we need to do to get by. A lot of us spend a lot of time there. We need to survive, so we do what it takes to get by. Some of us picture success, we picture something we want, we say we're going to go after it with all our heart.

But success is something that we do for ourselves, because we want to make our situation better, we want to rise above survival, we want to chase success. Fewer of us actually go to the point of going, "You know what? I really want my life to impact others, because that's what significance is." When we live a life of significance, it's impacting those around us.

Survival's what we do to get by, success is what we do for ourself, significance is what we do for others. But here's the key. Do we ever think about living to shine? Do we ever think about giving it over to the Lord, and saying, "You take my life. I want to be transparent enough that others will see you in me?"

For anyone that hasn't accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior, this is my plea to you. Do it. If you'll give your life over to the Lord, and let him be seen in what you do, he'll get you through whatever it is you're facing. He's the one that can provide survival, he's the one that can help you find true success, he's the one that will make your life significant so that you can impact others around you.

And it's not just about work or life, it's about marriage, and kids, and whatever it is we're facing. Sometimes my marriage was just strictly on this survival level, because I wasn't paying enough attention to my wife. And the only way that I could bring that around was to give it over to the Lord, ask him to break the chains that bound me, break the chains on my wife as well, so that we could together experience what it is to live a life together that shines the light of Christ.

And I don't do it right every day. I don't do it right every day. Some days I'm right back to the bottom. But again, you know how to get right back? Put Christ first. Find it there. And then step out in faith. Matthew five, 16 is what shine is based on. If you were going to read it in the bible in chronological order though, you have to read five, 14 and 15 to get to five, 16. All right?

Five, 14 and 15 is when Jesus had his disciples around him and he said to them, he said, "You guys are the light of the world. You're like a city that's set on a hill that can't be hidden. And you don't take a light like that and put it in under a basket. No. You put it on a lamp stand and it brings light to all who are in the house. All who are where? In the house."

I missed this for so many years. I was out there trying to make my light shine in the workplace. I was out there trying to make my light shine in the community. It tells us first to be a light in the house. He wants all of us to be a light in our house. And if we're a light in a house, he'll make us a light to the world, "In the same way let your light so shine before men that they'll see your good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven." Thank you.