

Announcer: Welcome to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast. A podcast all about leadership, change, and personal growth. The goal? To help you lead like never before in your church or in your business. And now your host, Carey Nieuwhof.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, hey everybody and welcome to episode 243 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof and I hope our time together today will help you lead like never before. Man, a lot of us are church leaders, a lot of us are involved in church, but maybe leading in the market place and I just love it when Rich Birch is on the podcast. He's been on a few times and I sit down and talk to Rich because he's unlike almost anybody else that I know. He's worked at three large mega churches that are multi site and helped launch a lot of campuses and he studies growth. And one of the things he shares with us today is what the 6% of growing churches do, particularly in respect of their weekend services, that 94% of churches don't. There's just common denominators among what growing organizations do. And he's actually talking about basically how to do what you're already doing better, like your messages drive so much of what happens on the weekend and honestly we don't talk about them enough. And Rich talks about how to talk about that in a really helpful way.

Carey Nieuwhof: So I think you're going to love this. Plus he's got some really great stuff for church leaders. You are going to want to check out. And I want to thank you for gifting me and us with your time today. I know how precious your time is. Some of you are listening at this to play this game like, can I listen at 1.5 or 1.75, I find 1.5 is my max for podcasts and that was only recently until like a few months ago. I was like, "No, I got to listen in real time." But now that seems real slow. Anyway, hey, I hope you're going to get a lot of value out of today. I think you will. That's why I had Rich on.

Carey Nieuwhof: And, hey, I'm so excited about how many leaders have been jumping onto what pro media fire is doing because here's the problem we opened 2019 with. For a lot of leaders it's like, "I know I got to get serious about digital. Don't have the budget for staff." Well what if you had a whole cloud based creative team that could do that for a fraction of the price of hiring a staff member? A lot of churches overwhelmed trying to keep up with the demands of social media, church media, series promotion, all that stuff. There's a brand new service called Pro Media Fire. Lots of our listeners are jumping on board. You're actually the first to hear about it and the only place they're talking about it is on this podcast. It is a cloud based church creative team. So what do you get if you sign up? And I mean seriously, this is a fraction of what you pay a staff member, but you get unlimited graphic design services, unlimited custom church videos for a monthly flat fee.

Carey Nieuwhof: The creative team has got over 30 years combined experience working for ministries. And because you listened to this podcast, you will get a special launch offer. 10% off all plans for life and 40% off the media bundle for life with unlimited graphic design and video services. So how do you find that? Go to promediafire.com/carey and you'll get the launch special. So that's

promediafire.com/carey, Carey, you'll save 10 to 40% now. And Rethink Leadership is getting close. It is one of my favorite things I do all year. It's happening May 1st and 2nd in Atlanta. And the question is, are you in? We have all kinds of top church and business leaders gathering and if you're tired of conferences, you need to come to Rethink Leadership. This one's personal. That's what our theme is this year. It's brand new content. So everything that we are presenting has never been presented before. That is the deal with all of our speakers.

Carey Nieuwhof: The talks are short and the affinity conversations or breakouts, for lack of a better term, are even shorter. We, as presenters, are only allowed to talk for 15 minutes and then we engage your questions. Lots of interviews, round table conversation, access to the people who usually retreat to the green room and like-minded leaders. It's happening May 1st and 2nd in Atlanta, Georgia. We've got Brad Lomenick, Dharius Daniels, Mike Foster, Kara Powell, Eliot Crowther, Danielle Strickland, Facebook's Nona Jones and so many more. I'll be there. I'll be speaking. So we'll Jon Acuff and yeah. Oh, I mentioned Jon, right, and Brad. Yeah. So all that.

Carey Nieuwhof: You get a special discount if you register before February 21st. So head on over to rethinkleadership.com plus you'll also get a \$50 credit toward any orange curriculum that your church purchases. So go to rethinkleadership.com. I will see you in Atlanta in May. I can't wait. And in the meantime, let's jump into my conversation with Rich Birch. Rich is an author. He is also a guy who blogs and podcasts over at unseminary.com, one of my favorite people, he's also a great personal friend. Here's my conversation in studio with Rich Birch. Rich Birch, welcome back to the podcast.

Rich Birch: Carey, thank you so much for having me. It is a cold, blustery day here in Canada, but I'm so glad to be here today.

Carey Nieuwhof: Last week you were in Antigua, Guatemala.

Rich Birch: Which is beautiful. Well, I walked around thinking this is where I need to retire. Not here in Canada, but-

Carey Nieuwhof: People do that.

Rich Birch: I know.

Carey Nieuwhof: They actually retire in Guatemala.

Rich Birch: It's beautiful there.

Carey Nieuwhof: I was in Nashville and it was like 74 degrees.

Rich Birch: Oh, that's nice. That sounds great

Rich Birch: Glad to be here today, Carey.

Rich Birch: I know. We are today. It's amazing.

Carey Nieuwhof: Carey Nieuwhof World Headquarters, also known as basement in my house.

Rich Birch: Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof: In my Studio.

Rich Birch: Exactly. Glad to be here.

Carey Nieuwhof: All right, well, Rich, it's a big day. We're pretty excited because you've got a brand new resource that you are rolling out for the first time on church growth.

Rich Birch: Yeah. I'm super excited to be here today, Carey, and excited to talk about church growth. And I have found over the last number of years, I just keep talking about church growth. Everywhere I go, I end up interacting with people. Last year I wrote a book, that was the last time I was on the podcast. And thanks again for having me back. And yeah, I just find myself really obsessing a little bit on this topic.

Carey Nieuwhof: So on that note, church growth has a bad name.

Rich Birch: Oh absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof: Right. But you found, cause you've been writing for years online and unseminary.com, I've been writing on my blog, every time you talk about church growth, all these people who say, "They read." So what is that?

Rich Birch: Well, I think at the heart, church leaders got into church this thing that we do, which is really hard. We got into it because we want to see people take steps closer to Jesus and we want to impact our culture. And so an outcome of that is the fact that our churches grow. And that your church can't grow unless you're making an impact in the culture. Now you might be able to get a growth spurt. You might be able to get a couple of hundred people who from the disgruntled church across town, but then what people figure out is you don't want those people. That ultimately, if you want to see your church grow in a healthy way, you end up trying to reach and attract people who don't normally attend church. And so I think the reason why people are interested in this topic is because really when we get back to why we got into ministry, it's at the core of it.

Rich Birch: None of us got into ministry because we want it to lead dying churches. We got into ministry because we want to see people take steps closer to Christ and that ultimately trickles down into seeing more people come to our churches. But the reality of it is most churches in our country are in decline. That number we've

talked about before here on the podcast, 94% of all churches are losing ground against the growth of the communities they're in. So that means that even churches that are growing, there's ... over half of the churches that are growing, aren't growing as quickly as the communities they're in, which means that the message of Christ is losing its influence in our culture, which we know that. That's not a new number. It's not like, shock or surprise. And so for me, I think the reason why I'm interested in talking about church growth and why I think so many people are interested in kind of wrestling through it is because it's really at the heart of why we got into ministry.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. Do you think there's something inherent in the Kingdom of God that is expansive? Like it's advancing, its growing?

Rich Birch: Absolutely. Well, I do think healthy things grow. And I don't think that's just a great sticky statement. I think it's actually true. And so we're all trying to figure out how can we see our churches to be healthier so that we can ultimately impact people. And I do think, embedded into the message of Christ and embedded into what we're called to do as people who follow Jesus, is to multiply, to see the message go beyond. I think God's kind of last as Jesus was going up there and Acts chapter one, which I love that picture in Acts chapter one. They come to him and they say ... the apostles, they come to him and they're like, "Hey, so is now the time we get to kick out the Romans?"

Rich Birch: And he's like, "Listen, guys, don't worry about that. That's not your time." And then he says this amazing thing, right? "Go and be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." And then he disappears. He goes up into the clouds and I can just imagine the apostles standing there and being like, "What did he just say? What was that again?" And it's embedded in what we're called to do is to take the message beyond, is to go beyond ourselves, to go beyond our Jerusalem, to go beyond just our little town, our community, and I would say a lot of our churches. Our Jerusalem is just literally the four walls of our church. Getting beyond that and saying, "How are we reaching people who aren't here today?"

Carey Nieuwhof: Now, okay. I'm just going to play devil's advocate for a minute because when I think I've quoted you, healthy church grows. I'm not sure that originated with you, but healthy things grow. One of the things I've seen online is, "Well, cancer grows, that's not healthy."

Rich Birch: It's a good question. Okay. That's a good question. So yeah, there's a corollary where every growing church isn't necessarily healthy. That there can be a type of growth that ... Now my experience has been, when you see that kind of rapid overnight growth that's unchecked, it doesn't last in the long term. Churches that sustain over an extended period of time have a balance of both reaching and then helping the people who they're reaching grow up in their relationship with Christ.

Rich Birch: You have to be doing both. This kind of idea of evangelism and discipleship. It's funny. It goes back to literally the stuff we talked about in seminary. That evangelism, discipleship, or both sides of this are two sides of one coin. You can't do one without the other. And I think there is this weird modern fallacy that I think is happening in a lot of our churches where we seem to think you can only do one or the other. We seem to think, you have to be either all about evangelism or all about discipleship and I actually just don't think that's true. I think a fully devoted follower of Christ is a person that worries about what it means to reach people outside the walls. I don't think you can do one without the other.

Rich Birch: You can't just keep going deeper in. You can't just keep reading more and more scripture. Now, the flip side of that, I think if we're really honest about trying to make an impact in our culture, we've got to help the people who we're reaching grow up in their relationship with Christ. That we've got to see unchurched folks who get connected to see those people ultimately get plugged in. And I think that just works out, even just personally over with people I've worked with in the years. And you've talked about this, you've written some great stuff about this around the attractational church, is a part of that. And that's been my bread and butter, that's been ... I feel like every time we'd come on the show, we ended up talking about attractational church. But that's been where I've spent most of my life.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's where most of the growth has been over the last 20 years.

Rich Birch: Yes. Right. But if I'm honest with the people who've come into our church, nothing that we do on the weekend is interesting enough to keep people connected longterm. It's just not. Carey, you're a great communicator, you've a lot of good things to say, but no sticky statement will make people stick. You can't long term. You've got to move people beyond that. And ultimately that's about where are they at in their relationship and that's the groups and getting people connected, getting them serving. We've got to help people put their faith in action. It's got to connect to real life, all of those things. So anyways, how does that connect?

Rich Birch: I think, yes, cancer grows. Where I think that analogy starts to break down, is when we look at what God ... and when we read the New Testament, what we see is this balance. I have been struck. I've been rereading it's ... early in the year. I've been rereading through the New Testament this year and struck by this super balance of evangelism and discipleship. See both of those happening both throughout the gospels and then also in Acts, you see this idea of reaching out, but then seeing people who have made a connection getting connected and growing deep as well at the same time.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, I think the other thing you can say, Rich, quite honestly, is that stagnant things are not healthy. Like if you look at and stagnant water and you've got a glass of water.. I think it's been stagnant for about three years. And there's a

little bit of fungus on the bottom. Yeah. And declined, like I understand plateaus for season. I understand, okay. This is a different season or were in decline because we're retooling re ... whatever ... imagining. But overall, I think the trajectory of the kingdom and the trajectory of any organization should be toward the outsider and should be toward growth. Now a question for you, cause we have a lot of business leaders listening too. Is any of what we're talking about today applicable generally across the board?

Rich Birch: Oh absolutely. When we get into some nuts and bolts here, a little bit later in the conversation, I do think at its core, it's not rocket science, "Why do churches grow?" A part of why ... what I've been doing over these last number of years is interviewing prevailing church leaders and interviewing particularly church leaders who are leading in some of the fastest growing churches in the country. And if you're a business leader listening in today, the reality of it is, what we do in the church world is a lot harder than what a lot of businesses do. And I'm not trying to set up a competition, but it's people making faith decisions. That's a significantly ... that's a real core decision in people's lives.

Rich Birch: It's difficult for people to make that kind of decision. And we're seeing from these growing churches that are bucking a significant trend. So if you think about it, just from a business point of view, 96% of the organizations in this industry are shrinking ... sorry, 94% of the churches in this industry are shrinking. We're looking at the 6% that had been growing. Think about that in your own industry. Think about those areas or those kind businesses in your industry that are growing. I would suspect that the same thing we're seeing a similar dynamic. The churches that are growing, really all they're doing is encouraging their people to invite their friends. They're encouraging their people to reach out. It's not really anymore more rocket science than that.

Rich Birch: Even just before we got on the call here today, I was talking to a church leader who was kind of a little bit agitated with some of the stuff I've been talking about church growth and I said, "Listen, you can fight me on statistics. You can try to discredit all this stuff, but at its core, churches that grow, grow because people who are in that church are excited about what's happening there and are inviting their friends." And the same is true for a business leader. The reason why your businesses grow is because people that you serve are so excited about what you're doing. They're going to share it with other people.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, and a great example, Rich, like I listen to Donald Miller's podcast, the story brand podcast. So I don't know that you heard the episode about the Savannah Bananas, but this guy...

Rich Birch: Oh, yes. Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: ... named Jesse at 34 years old. So one of my team members, her family is from Savannah, and I mentioned this at our retreat recently. And she's like, "Yeah, all my friends and my parents, they're going to the Savannah Bananas." And that

was dead. And we'll link to that in the show notes for people who want to see it. And I think about these principles too, because you worked at our church for season, you've been at Liquid Church, one of the fastest growing churches on the east coast, for what? Seven years?

Rich Birch: Seven years.

Carey Nieuwhof: Seven years. You were at The Meeting House, which at the time was the fastest growing and became one of the largest churches in Canada, our native country. So, I mean, you've seen this, but I've also seen this for those of you who listened to Rich and on unSeminary, on the unSeminary Podcast, on your unSeminary blog, you apply these principles, things grow. And more recently in the last two years, you took over a camp, like a summer camp for kids that was not having its best days. And all of a sudden within six months, 18 months or not even 18 months, but six months, you're moving to all time record years over a 70 year window. So it's not like, "At three years old, we got all time records." No, over seven decades. This is the strongest and the best it's been. So if you're listening through whatever lens, this is why I keep having Rich back. This is why we're implementing some of the things that Rich talks about at Connexus church where I serve. And really you and I talk about marketing a lot and I learned a ton from you.

Rich Birch: I appreciate that.

Carey Nieuwhof: So this is really good. I just wanted to say, even though we're drilling down on the nuts and bolts of church growth, whatever you happen to lead, whether that's a not for profit, for profit, a storefront-

Rich Birch: principles are the same.

Carey Nieuwhof: Principles work across the road. And even back to the Savannah Bananas, a lot of that is a different business model and raving fans, word of mouth, in a team that is so far down from major league baseball, nobody stands a chance of ever making it to the show. They're sold out for years in advance. Rich, so you've worked for three growing churches. You talk a little bit about that because these are some similarities. These are the things that although there were three different churches, they became larger, fast growing a multi site, et cetera during your leadership. Well, and what's interesting about you is ... you and I have talked about this, and I know you wouldn't raise it unless I raised it, but you may have the most experience of almost anyone in church world in leading multi site launches in large churches.

Rich Birch: Yeah. It's a funny ... I keep saying this in other contexts, so I was involved in 13 launches where I was in the driver's seat for launches and campuses and I keep looking for someone else who's done more. I'm assuming there is someone out there, but I haven't run into them yet.

Carey Nieuwhof: In three different churches. So three different churches. We launched 13 out of this one thing.

Rich Birch: No. Right. Yeah. Absolutely. And so one of the things I realized and I would say this is ... even over the last I would say a year or two, I become ... you have your own story and as you get older you start to get a bit more reflective on your own story. You're like, "Hey, what is that God's been doing in your life." And a lot of your life, I feel like I've spent ... and you're a more self reflective leader than I am Carey. But I do feel like I've just done what I've done and I'm like, "Okay, you live your life." But then I do realize that yeah, it's a bit unique that I have this unique experience that I've led in three churches that all have grown. Multiples of them have gone from a thousand people to three, four, five thousand people, which is super unique. That's just-

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. Here in the top half percent.

Rich Birch: Yeah. It's a strange kind of environment. And it all of those was not the lead pastor, but was in significant leadership roles in-

Carey Nieuwhof: Basically the operations.

Rich Birch: Yeah, exactly. Executive pastor operations, that kind of thing. And those churches. And so that has given me a unique vantage point. And then obviously in the same experience you just mentioned it, this camp that I've been working for or I'm running has been experiencing similar kind of growth. You start thinking like, "Oh, maybe there's something I'm learning here that I need to be a bit more self reflective on it and say, 'Hey ...'" Because I do have ... I would say, and this goes back even to when I was in ministry school, I remember earnestly asking professors and didn't really get good answers.

Rich Birch: I remember asking at the time I would phrase the question around revival. I would say, "Professor, help me understand revival because that's what I want to have happen in our country." And I would pose the question like this, "Is it that God loved the people in that area more in that time more, and then his spirit moved in a way and a whole bunch of people came to know Him or was it that, the people who are leading that kind of new something that had some sort of special knowledge that they were applying that then caused the gospel to spread?" And the reality of it is kind of those both ends of that spectrum are kind of unsatisfactory. I don't think it was that God loves people in that part of the world at that time more. I think He loves everybody.

Rich Birch: And then I don't think it's by human design, but I do think that the leaders in that day understood something that we need to understand in our world there are human dynamics that we're living with, there are kind of just the realities of how we get people to interact with each other. So early on ... I've been asking this question for all these years and I realize, "Oh, maybe there's something about my leadership and there's about kind of how I've positioned my life to

think about how can we help things grow." And I would say I've wanted to over the years share the things that we've been learning with other church leaders to help them be more effective. For years, I've talked about execution and how do you practically do things. But it all has come back to this same question, which is, I want to make sure that churches are reaching more people and all the times. And I would say I had it this year at our Christmas Eve service at Connexus. I thought Christmas Eve at Connexus was amazing.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. Me too.

Rich Birch: It was a fantastic service-

Carey Nieuwhof: All time high.

Rich Birch: Yeah, it was great.

Carey Nieuwhof: Most people have-

Rich Birch: And this is probably ... and I probably need to spend more time with my therapist on this, but there's a part of me at the end of that though, I was like, "Man, I wish there was twice as many people here." I was like, "I thought you killed it for-

Carey Nieuwhof: But you're a leader.

Rich Birch: Yeah, but I thought you killed it from a message point of view. I thought, man, it was such a clear presentation. I thought the band did such a great job. I thought it was inspirational. I thought, "Man, there were people who were here tonight, they took a step closer to Christ and, man, it was fantastic." And even though it was record attendance, I was like, "Yeah, it would've been great if we had twice as many people." And the default of my leadership has been that over the years, saying, "Hey, what can we do to try to reach more people next year and how do we pass it along?"

Carey Nieuwhof: I think there's a lot of leaders who feel that absolutely.

Rich Birch: Yeah, absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof: Where you hit a milestone, whether it's all time attendance at your church or, "Wow, 7 million downloads on the podcast. Why isn't it 14?"

Rich Birch: Yes, exactly. Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof: So you get to that place, but this is the stuff they don't teach you in seminary, they don't teach you in business school, they don't teach you ... like growth and what is... Cause here's the thing you get to, even as a writer, as an author, it's like Jon Acuff says, "I've never known an author who didn't want his or her book

to get read." Nobody publishes a book and it's like, "I hope nobody reads this." You're just a weird duck if you do that. And yet you get into that place where, is this self promotion or how does that happen?

Carey Nieuwhof: And there are principles, there are books that take off, there are books that sell multiple thousands of copies. You're an author as well as a blogger, and a podcaster, and leader, and then there are books that don't. There are businesses that take off like, you come to my house, there's a Nest thermostat. Why has Nest done so well? There were lots of people who are doing technology with that, but why have they done so well? Why did Amazon take over the Internet? Why is Walmart still prevailing when so many Kmart's, Sears are wobbling and Walmart is expanding? Fascinating questions and it all goes back to growth that they don't teach you in business school or seminary. So reflect on your own seminary experience.

Rich Birch: Yeah. So I remember when I was in ministry school, I think there was only ... and I was trying to rack my brain because I've been saying this publicly recently because I don't want to misrepresent this, but I really can only remember like a half of one lecture that was on church growth. So three hour lecture like an hour and a half. There might've been more, but I don't recall any of it. And I don't know why that is. I think it was a miss in my training. And it could be a miss in a lot of our training. There was this idea that just preach the word and people will show up.

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm not sure we got that far. I think we got to just preach the word period.

Rich Birch: Yeah, that's true. Yeah, that's probably true. That is probably true. Yeah, that is actually probably true.

Carey Nieuwhof: We didn't even talk about people showing up.

Rich Birch: Right. It's true. And there's this whole thing around ... and I've said this in other context, there's this whole thing around, I did not realize that I was running a small business until I was probably 10 years into ministry. It didn't even dawn on me that like, "Oh, we have to plan ..." I obviously knew we had to pay bills and all that stuff, but there are normal business dynamics that I think in some circles, and there may be leaders even as we're listening to talking today, that could become a comfortable for us even talking like that. But it's just true. There are these kind of normal dynamics and marketing or seeing people get exposed to what you do is a normal dynamic of any organization and it's a definitely normal dynamic in our local church.

Rich Birch: So yeah, it makes me sad. I think there was only half of one lecture and it seemed to be a whole area. And then the other part of it is when I was in ministry school there and that I used to say, it was not that long ago, but, "Mid 90s is getting farther and farther in the past." Church growth at the time ... but I

think back to what it was, it was a lot of guys with binders and overheads, and there was a lot of fill in the blank forms. And I think-

Carey Nieuwhof: Some good diagrams.

Rich Birch: It's lots of diagrams and I think some of that kind of rubbed off where those were the church growth experts, were those guys. It was almost like their mode of communication kind of communicated something like, "Hey, you should not be paying attention to these people." Cause even at that point we realized, "Oh, this is probably isn't the future of how communication is going." And so I think the term ... you mentioned this earlier, the term itself has fallen out of ... it's not a cool term by any means. But I think we're still interested in what's behind it and we have to be. We have to keep thinking about it for sure.

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay. So let's get practical, nuts and bolts. Repetitive processes. You write about not quick fixes because I think we all want to be the overnight success, which is never overnight. Ever. Look at Rachel Hollis, who's blowing up, she hit a million Instagram followers this year already in 2019. And I think this was her sixth book and she's been hustling for a decade. And then finally she has her moment where something goes viral. Is that similar?

Rich Birch: Totally. I see this all the time with church leaders and particularly when we're thinking about church growth. We're looking for the latest hack. And so we're looking for like, "Can you just tell me the magic algorithm with Facebook ads?" Or, "Can you send me a radio ad to do?" "Can you send me something that just will cause my church to grow?"

Carey Nieuwhof: And I'm going to press this button and next quarter our business is exploding.

Rich Birch: And that just doesn't happen. If you look at growing churches, even fast growing churches, all the time, and you've interviewed a lot of these pastors as well, but a lot of times at our podcasts, we'll go through and contact those leaders when they ... all the guys that come up are church leaders that come up, they're new on the list. We contact them, try to get them on the show and the conversation ends up something like this, "Hey, wow, this is amazing. You had huge growth this last year." And for them it does have this like, "Yeah, it's been a long time coming." It's up the middle football. It's like we've been running down, we've been taken one yard at a time game. It's not like with this some hail Mary, we figured some magic formula out. It's been repetitive processes. So it's the kind of thing, and this is at the core of what we talk about a church growth flywheel, that rather than thinking about kind of this microwave approach, it's really a slow cooker. This idea of what are we repeating over and over and over and over.

Rich Birch: One of the things I realized that Liquid was ... we promoted our series in the same way. We use this kind of same process, 36 months in a row, 30 series in a row. We did the exact same thing. Now every series was obviously different, but

we followed the same process. And I actually I am convinced that's a part of why they continue to grow to this day because they've stuck on that. They've kept with it. And so for us, I think when we're thinking about growth in our church or in our business, the question is not what is the one thing we can do today? But what are successful businesses that are growing over or churches that are growing over an extended period time? What are they doing repeatedly? What are they keeping on top of? What is their knitting? And you can see this ... folks that are listening in I'm assuming, have listened to Carey and you're a part of that, you do this with your emails. You're like a dog on those man. I get them all the time.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's terrifying.

Rich Birch: No, no. It's amazing. It's great because, yeah, am I going to read all of them? No, I don't read all of them, but man, there's a lot that come through that I open up and it keeps you top of mind. It keeps you ... I'm thinking like, "Oh wow, there's some good insights today. I wonder what Carey's talking about. I wonder what his latest blog post is, what his latest guest is." That keeps you top of mind. It would be easy to just be like, "Well, I've got this killer guests coming on and I'm just going to email about that." But no, you keep on top of it. The same as in our church. What are those things? And so for us, I think the question we should be asking you-

Carey Nieuwhof: Can you drill down on the church growth flywheel? I know we talked about that before, but I want you to zero in on some of the key points and get specific because we've been using it at Connexus now for two or three years. And at first you think this is way too much like way, way, way too much, Rich. People are going to hate me. It was like when I went to almost daily emails, I thought this is it, everyone unsubscribes. And just the opposite happens. People are more grateful, people are more engaged. But can you walk us through some of the just broad strokes, some of the things that people need to be doing?

Rich Birch: Yeah, absolutely. So mindset part first. What is a flywheel? So this idea of a flywheel, when I was a kid at the park, around the corner from my house, there was a merry-go-round. I don't know if you had those in your area. But yeah, it's like a big metal disk with those four posts on it and you'd put your foot up on the disk and then you put your foot on the ground and you would push. And I don't know if you remember, you push the first time around, it was so much work to push around that first time and then the second time it was still a lot of work. It was a little bit less. And then the third time was a little bit less, a little bit less and eventually what happened is you kept pushing to the point where you're pushing hard until the point you're hardly pushing.

Rich Birch: And so the same is true with church growth. There are things that we just have to get on and we've got to do time and time again. Series promotion, that's one of the things I mentioned earlier, the question is what are the five, six, seven, eight at Connexus or at Liquid we did eight things every time we went through,

like we're going to make it stuff like ... we're going to do a video for every series of trailer for every series. We're going to have invite cards, we're going to hand out the week before. We're going to do a series of emails that are going to land in people's inboxes and a bunch of other stuff that we did every single series.

Rich Birch: And the reason why we did every series is because, hey, we were going through ... we just finished up a series at Connexus on the end of the world, which is amazing. There are some people who are like super engaged on that content, so we're going to talk about that. We're going to promote that. There's other people that aren't as engaged on that, which is fine, but for us, if we don't promote every series as if it's the kind of series that people want to invite their friends to, there will be series where people who in the back of their head they're thinking, "Oh, maybe I should invite my friends. But they haven't said that I should invite my friends to this so I won't." Now I know that sounds crazy, but it's true. If you don't tell your people, "Hey, this next coming series is a series you should invite your friends to." There will be people who will opt out of that. And so what we want to do is keep on top of that. Now that's just one particular area.

Rich Birch: There's a bunch of areas here at church. We're kind of keeping on top or promoting on a regular basis. And really how do we just keep doing this, which I think for some leaders we get the Shiny Object Syndrome. We're like, "What's the latest thing?" Because again, it's easier. It's easier to think like, "If I just spent \$25 on a Facebook ad, we'll get a hundred new people this week." Well, that's just not going to happen. That's not how it happens. It's over an extended period of times.

Carey Nieuwhof: What's interesting about that to me is, number one, it assumes decent content. So again, whether you're talking about 100 people, 50 people, 1,000 people, 10,000 people, it assumes that what you're producing on a Sunday morning has some level of quality to it and share-ability to it. But it gets back to how you described Christmas Eve, which is, it's great we have thousands of people in attendance, but wouldn't it be great to see 7,000 right. And there's the idea that if it worked for a hundred, if a hundred people are going, "Man, that was a great message, Rich. Thank you so much." In the noise that we're in in the world, there could be 200 in the room, but people just forgot about it, or they forgot to invite their friends, or they didn't know they could. And I know this sounds so elemental, but people honestly don't think they can bring their friends.

Rich Birch: No, absolutely. No, that's very true. And they won't think about who they're supposed to invite. And you have to walk them through that and talk them through that time and time and time again. We know that only 2% of people every year in a typical church will invite their friends, which is a crime. That's terrible.

Carey Nieuwhof: Say that again. How many?

Rich Birch: Only 2%. We did this study probably five, six years ago where they found that 2% of people in kind of the Evangelical Church world invite a friend in a year or had invited a friend in the last 12 months. And that's a problem. We know that the reason why churches grow is because people invite their friends. And so if your people aren't inviting their friends, obviously, your church is not going to grow. And so we've got to work hard at that particular issue, which is how are we increasing the invite-ability? And a part of it is doing exactly what you said, it's the call to action. This would be a great series. The joke around Liquid became, letting you know a little bit, an internal joke. Every series, the next series was always going to be the best series ever. It always was going to be that.

Rich Birch: In fact I heard on ... I compared it to ... apparently on Saturday night live, they have this tradition where in the first meeting of the week they say like, "Oh, this week we've got Carey Nieuwhof on Saturday Night Live. And people are like, "Oh, that's great." And then there'll be like, "Next week we've got Craig Rochelle." And then everyone's like, "Woo-hoo." They'll always cheer for the guy who's coming up next. Not The guy who's on air. That's apparently a tradition there. And it was almost like series had that feel internally at Liquid where it was we would get a series out the door and then we would already start talking about the next series. Like, "Wow, this is going to be a very special series." And so the internal joke was like, "Well, the next series, man, that next series ..."

Carey Nieuwhof: That next series. Best ever.

Rich Birch: Best series ever. And although some of that's kind of tongue in cheek, but it is true. We've got to have a constant forward orientation, hey, what is coming up next and how do we get people excited about inviting their friends? I like to call it the Netflix effect. I don't know if you've ever had this on Netflix where you're trying to find to watch ... I still have not watched Bird Box ... you're trying to find something to watch, but you're worried that you're going to miss something else. And so you find yourself just scrolling through that never ending list of videos and why that is is because your brain is trying to figure out what's coming up next.

Rich Birch: And the same is true with our churches. We need to be not just what's on now, but then what's coming up next. And we do that through repetitive process. We say, "Okay, what are we going to ... let's stop debating. Are we going to promote the next series?" We're going to promote the next series. The question is what are we going to use and how do we just keep on top of that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. And you've got details like exactly how to do that or what that looks like, et cetera. That scale, whether you're a small church with no budget or a very large church with like staff.

Rich Birch: Right. Absolutely. Well, and that's the thing, the good thing about the era we live in is ... a good friend of mine pastors a church in Sarasota, Florida. He's a church planner. He's a couple of hundred people, 200 and just around 200 to 250 people. And they're doing this kind of the same level of promotion that churches literally 10 times their size are doing because they can, because the resources are available online. It's actually fairly easy to find this stuff. It's more about sticking with it. And in some ways actually I think smaller churches have an advantage. Larger churches, we have staff which is amazing, but those people can find themselves being intrigued with the latest shiny object thing then they get interested in it.

Rich Birch: And I see this happen all the time where if you've spent any time on Facebook, people start talking about, again, some strategy, some online things, some billboard campaigns, whatever this one church did. But at the end of the day, most churches grow because people in that church talk to their friends. I am convinced that every church that's listening in today, you're not doing enough. Getting your people to invite their friends. If you would just spend this year and double down on that, I'm convinced you'd see church growth. I'm convinced you'd see more people a year from now plugged in.

Carey Nieuwhof: I think what resonates with me is what you're driving at is that we are still all looking for the silver bullet. We are looking for the one series idea for the billboard that's going to change the world, for the Facebook ad, or the social posts that's going to go viral and that will tip everything over in the direction we want it to. But what I hear you saying is, "No, it's all the small things that you do." Excellence as a repeated habit. Culture change is a repeated habit. And if you get into the habit of every series, frankly, whether you think it's your best series or not, just inviting your friends and getting your congregation ready to do that, you will see results.

Rich Birch: Absolutely. Even just the bare minimum. This is a takeaway everybody could do. Like if every weekend ... and you do this in your teaching, Carey. If you're looking for an example of this, you should listen to Carey. He does this on a regular basis. You should have a part of every message that tells people why they should come back next week and invite a friend. If you're not just bare minimum doing that, if you're not somewhere in your message saying like, "Hey, it's been so great to talk about this part of this thing next week, but next week we're going to be talking about that." That alone, just that habit of saying, "Hey, on a regular basis, we're going to articulate why people should come back next week." That will drive growth in your church.

Carey Nieuwhof: A great way to do that, just to bake it in without sounding salesy, is to say, "You're probably wondering, well what does that say about evil? Well, actually we're going to look at that in part three of the series. So if you got questions, that's when we're going to go there." And then people are like, "Well, that was what I was asking." But it creates that sense. And the reason I'm so passionate about having people in the room and inviting their friends is I really believe that

frequency helps when it comes to discipleship. There's a big difference between the person who reads the scripture and prays daily and the person who does it once a quarter. I really just believe it. I'm not saying one is saved and the other is not.

Carey Nieuwhof: There's a difference between the person who watches what they eat every day and goes to the gym four times a week. And the person who like, January 1st through seventh is in the gym and then forgets about it for the rest of the year. A little bit guilty. But anyway, "Oh, sorry about that everybody." And that idea that when you have people engaged in their faith and engaged in what is happening personally and organizationally, you see progress. So let's talk about invite-ability, Rich. What are some key ingredients in invite-ability for churches to think about and church leaders to think about?

Rich Birch: Totally. So here's the takeaway. If your church leader or business leader listening in today, you know there's those kind of super fans. In the church world we say, there are these people who are always inviting a friend. They always have somebody on their arm. They're always talking about this. What if you grabbed a coffee with that person this week and asked them this question and said, "Okay, what do you say to people when you invite them to our church?" Try to re-craft that conversation and what you're trying to get at is this nuanced difference here. And I'll try to pull this apart. You're a better communicator than I am, Carey, but I'll try to pull apart the difference here.

Rich Birch: It's not why do your people attend church? It's not actually what's important. What's important is why your people, what they say to their friends about why they should attend church and actually because whatever's there, whatever is in that piece that your friends, people who attend your church, tell their friends to come to your church for. Whatever that is, that gives you a hint at what is the kind of the most invitable part of your church. So take for instance, when I was at Liquid Church in New Jersey, I would ask this question. I would say to people, I'd say, "Hey, what do you say to your friends when you invite them?" And we invested a lot of different things. We had incredible kid's ministry, amazing music, we did all this international stuff, we had a really warm welcome environment, we really great groups, we had a lot of different things, counseling, ministry.

Rich Birch: But people would come back to really two things, a lot. They would say, "You know what I say to my friends, I say, 'Man, you should come and hear this guy, Tim. He's an incredible communicator. Tim talks about the Bible in a way that makes a difference to my everyday life.'" And so what I knew is, hey, that is a core part of what in kind of inviting in our culture was. People wanted to kind of share the things that Tim was saying. And the other thing they would say is, "You should bring your kids this weekend. It's amazing. My kids have so much fun." We're in Northern Jersey, a highly kind of ex Catholic area, lower lapse Catholic area. And people would say stuff like, "Man, I never had this much fun at Church when I was a kid. It's so fun. It's so great."

Rich Birch: And so for us, we've got to build tools around those things. How do we encourage our people to talk about what we're talking about on the weekend? And then how do we encourage our people to tell their friends about the great things happening in our kids ministry? So the challenge for leaders today would be, again, find one person, maybe flipping to the business side, maybe that client of yours that keeps bringing people to you that like, "Hey, you should come here and do business with this organization." Ask that person like, "I would love to know, can I buy you dinner?" What do you say to people before you bring them to me? What does that conversation look like? And then listen really carefully because I suspect that there probably is a gap between what you think and what your people are actually saying. And what we want to do is double down on what your people are actually saying. They're kind of most invitable people.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's such a good principle because regardless, maybe you're thinking, "Man, my kid's ministry isn't that great and that's a growth area for us." But those people in your church who are inviting are saying something. What is that script? And they might say it's the teaching, or it's the music, or it's the people, or whatever it is. And these are the people who have success. It's not theory. It's like, no, these are the people who are showing up with ... And even if that's one or two people in your church, there's one or two in any, it doesn't matter how large your ... you think about who are your best inviters at Connexus. I can name on one hand, the best inviters. At the end of the day, there's probably a couple hundred people who invite, but there are some who are just the serial inviters and figure out what they are doing because those are the clues to what you can help your other congregation learn because it's actually happening. It's not theory.

Rich Birch: Totally. There's a study done by Gallup a couple of years ago that found that two thirds of the reason why people attend to churches is because of the teaching. And the interesting thing that Gallup found was two things. One, people are looking for teaching that is based on ... and this wasn't a particularly Christian study, it was just looking at why do people attend religious experiences. But they were saying, they're looking for teaching that is based in scripture.

Rich Birch: And then the other thing was that it connects to daily life. The interesting thing about this. And a lot of church leaders who are listening in are humble leaders and I've really had the advantage of, I've been in that kind of second chair with great communicators and I've been able to raise the flag of saying, "Hey, we need more people to rally around and listen to what Carey has to say, or listen to what Tim has to say. The lead guys I've had a chance to work with, which is an advantage. I realize if you're the core communicator today and you go out and you ask people, "Hey, why do ... what do you say ..." And a lot of times you hear, "Well because of your teaching." It's going to be hard for you to get up in a meeting and say-

Carey Nieuwhof: Hey, because of my teaching.

Rich Birch: Right. And so the thing I would say to ... if there's executive pastors or associate pastors are kind of the secondary people, that you have a real opportunity here to help encourage that in your culture. And say like, "Can we just have an honest conversation here?" People come to this church because they're interested in this communication and what's happening here. We need to be very good stewards of that. And I often think in a real way, last century, obviously Billy Graham had a huge impact. At some point, Billy Graham came to terms ... he's a humble man, came to terms with the fact, "People like to hear me talk about Jesus." And said, "I'm going to try to get in front of as many people as possible."

Carey Nieuwhof: During my lifetime.

Rich Birch: During my lifetime. I'm going to try to leverage that gift as much as I possibly can. I've had a similar opportunity where it's not been me, it's been someone else. I've been able to say, "Hey, your communication is amazing. Why don't we try to get as many people in front of it as possible? Let's do that."

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, and I think you're probably the single best leader I've ever seen at that. I remember you doing that when I was a lead pastor and you were operations, service, programming. You were the biggest champion of my teaching and you've done that consistently. And I don't see that enough in churches because you've zeroed in on a conundrum. I don't like to get up and say, "You should listen to me teach." You become a very weird human being, number one, if you think that, let alone if you say that, but the reality is, again, whether you're in a mega church, a small church, a midsize church, Gallup says 66%. I think there's a pew research study that says 70% of people choose a church based on the teaching. So whether that's 50 people, 500 people or 5,000 people, they are there. If you're teaching was worse than it is, you wouldn't have as many people.

Carey Nieuwhof: So that is probably what's keeping them back in. It's this weird culture in church world. I've seen, Rich, where people seem very afraid to talk about the teaching and there are places where it gets very unhealthy. Lead pastor can do no wrong, infallible. No, that's not the truth at all. We don't all hit home runs every week. We make mistakes, we struggle through things, et cetera. But at the end of the day, it's quality of the teaching that probably is the greatest determiner of a church's attractability. And even retention in the members that attend. And think back in a very small church context, you had this one pastor who was just terrible in the pulpit and the church shrank, and then you've got somebody who could actually communicate clearly and well, and the church grew. It's one of those things, and so leverage that.

Carey Nieuwhof: And just because you're going to not reach everybody doesn't mean you won't reach anybody. And so maybe that's 20 new people this year or 200 new people

this year or a thousand new people this year. I don't know. But I think in accentuating that teaching and the other key points in your church ... and again, you tell people how to do this in the church growth flywheel. That's good. Can we get into a couple more nuts and bolts? So you said a video trailer is really good. What are some other things that really help punctuate the invite-ability and the growth of a church?

Rich Birch: Well, I'll be a bit of a contrarian with this one. So I am such a fan of invite cards. It's so funny. It's one of the things that people roll their eyes at me all the time and they're like, "Invite cards? You mean physical like you're printing something and handing it out?" And I'm like, "Yes, absolutely." In an incredibly digital age, in an overly saturated screen age, there's this weird thing happening with the physical invite cards. A couple of years ago I was talking to Bob Frank who was a great church leader in Florida. His Church was one of these churches that popped up into the fastest growing churches. I think one of the fastest growing churches in the country.

Rich Birch: And I asked him, I said, "Hey, what was it that happened in this last year?" And he said, "It's a little bit embarrassing." And I said, "No, no, I want to know, Bob." And he said, "Well, what we did this year was every week ..." And again, so every week there's the flywheel side of it. "Every week of the year we put invite cards on every seat in our auditorium for the entire year. And so shocker, what we found was ..." And he said, "Listen ..." And so we talked a little bit. And he said, "No, no, really that's what it was. We got aggressive with getting invite cards out in front of people." So invite cards are this interesting thing because what percentage of invite cards actually end up in the hands of guests? Probably not a lot, but what they do, I know in my world, I bring them home and we have this little kind of cabinet thing in our back door and there's are our next door neighbors, we've been inviting.

Rich Birch: And I actually do think that they are probably going to show up this year, which is great. I'll put those invite cards on that kind of counter thing. And for a couple of days all I hear is you and I hear Jeff, our lead pastor, I hear them saying, "Hey, you should invite some friends to come. It's like this resonance that's in there. And I have actually taken cards and given them to people, but I don't take them all and give them to people. Some of them, they're just there. And then this time of year, we're out shoveling or blowing out the driveway and I'll pop over and say, "Hey man, I'd love for you to come this weekend. We've got this new thing happening." Invite cards are one of those things, I think, we typically have in a lot of churches, if they do them, they'll reserve them for a few times a year.

Rich Birch: They might do them at Easter, maybe they do them at Christmas, maybe they do them at Mother's Day, or a couple big days during the year. But I would encourage you, every series to be thinking, "Hey, we should be handing out an invite card. Email is another one, which we kind of touched on. And the big principle is however many emails your church is sending today, you should be sending more and probably a lot more.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's counterintuitive.

Rich Birch: Super counterintuitive. Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: So talk about that.

Rich Birch: Okay, so email, it still works. I know everybody, again-

Carey Nieuwhof: Men read their emails, people.

Rich Birch: Yes, people read email. And so on the invite card thing ... well, email, even if your open rates are, say 20, 30%, which is probably where your church is at, so you're sending 100 emails, 20 or 30 of them are getting opened. That's actually a pretty amazing statistic. You think about if you have 100 people in your church, if you could have coffee with 20 or 30 people on Wednesday morning at 7:00 AM, would you do that? And what if you could consistently, every Wednesdays, have coffee with people and that might be a different 20 or 30 people every Wednesday. Would you do it? Absolutely. You would do it. All the time. You would without fail. So email is one of those ... again, it's not going anywhere. People use it in that kind of in managing their life. It's the kind of thing where it's close to their schedule. It's close to how they interact with people at their bank, and how they interact with their business, and how they interact with other folks in their lives. Even young folks, I know people are like, "Oh, nobody under 25 uses email." Well, I would look closely at your statistics on that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Anyone in the working world uses email and college kids.

Rich Birch: Yes, they still do. And so the big picture on that is your church probably ... and I was talking to a church recently who I was doing some coaching with and we were pounding this email thing and the executive pastor stops me and he says, "I haven't ..." We were talking about it and I was like, "Well, when was the last time you sent like an email newsletter out?" And he's like, "Never. We never have." And they're are a church of 2,500 people and I'm like, okay, they're just missing growth opportunity there because again, all of these things are about keeping what we're doing top of mind with our people.

Rich Birch: What we do, we think is like super important. It's the most important thing in our lives. We're thinking about it a lot, but that's just not the case with the people that attend our church. They've got a lot of other things going on. They've got a lot of other things happening. It's our responsibility as a leader to raise what we're doing up in their priorities. It's our responsibility to kind of engage with them at the level that they'll end up saying, "Yeah, that's important enough not only for me to come, but for me to invite my friends."

Carey Nieuwhof: And you write really good emails. I mean, I subscribed to your list. I actually subscribe to a lot of like others who just write really funny emails to read

because I want to become a better writer. And there is an art to it. There really is. And I know you go into detail in that too, Rich.

Rich Birch: Yeah. So a little tip here again, trying to give you some actionable stuff on today's podcast. So if you look at the way Carey writes his emails ... if you opened up one of those emails, I'm assuming if you're listening, you've subscribed, if you haven't need to go over to the site and subscribe. But if you look at the way Carey writes his emails, those are the kinds of emails that your people will open. They look like they're written to a person. They're not heavily graphical. They don't have a huge banner on the top. Too many churches do that where it's like there are-

Carey Nieuwhof: Church newsletter!

Rich Birch: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof: You lose.

Rich Birch: So you want to have ones that the highest call to action are ones that look as if they're written to you. In fact, actually, I'll give you a bit of an insider thing. I sent an email last year out. This was on the camp side. I sent an email out. There's this guy by the name of Dean Jackson. He's like a communications guy. He does this thing, and you could search this online, called his nine word email, which he swears he swears ... he's been talking about this thing for years. He talks about it as kind of the ultimate call to action, how to move people towards actually doing something.

Carey Nieuwhof: Was it something I said or what was it?

Rich Birch: So it's all ... In his nine word email is literally just, in the subject line, you put their name. So in this case would be Carey and then it's a recall question around something. So in this case, if we're talking about churches, it would be like, "Carey, who are you inviting to Christmas Eve?" And then literally that's it. Then what happens is that begins a conversation and from Dean's point of view is like what you're trying to do is engage people. You're trying to get them to respond. Well, I sent this email out to 5,000 people. Thinking, "Wow, I wonder how many people respond." Literally hundreds of emails back. Now that's great news. That's a great problem to way rather have to way too many people engaging with us. But email's one of those things. You're probably not sending enough. You're not engaging enough. We go into more detail, give you a specific plan. What I would think every time you launch a new series, the kind of emails you should do, the reality of these-

Carey Nieuwhof: Could you cover that in the course?

Rich Birch: Yeah, we talk about that in the course. I give a plan that says, "Okay, every time you launch a series, here is the email sequence you should use. Here's the timing that I would suggest."

Carey Nieuwhof: Templates?

Rich Birch: We do give templates. But even more important than templates is really the timeline because every series is going to be a little different. Every email is going to have a little bit of a different feel to it, but when you send it, I think is what you say to stay. That's the repetitive part of the process.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, I'm glad to hear that because you know what? It is an art. I've been studying email for years and the other thing that I would say in defense of email, because everybody including me, rolls my eyes when people say email, it's like, "Inbox zero." What a great day when that happens. But here's what's true. Men read emails. Men do not engage social media as much as they engage emails. Number two, people actually do read them. And number three, any marketer I know will tell you that they will trade 10,000 Instagram followers for one email subscription because social media doesn't really sell. So if you've got a call to action email's the most effective way you can take it.

Carey Nieuwhof: The other thing that's really interesting, and I learned this personally a year ago in January of 2018 ... and you guys who follow like social media as your strategy, and you need a social media strategy, don't get me wrong. But Mark Zuckerberg a year ago announced that they were changing Facebook because of the whole Russia thing and influence peddling and fake news. And he said, "We're going to make Facebook about your family and friends again." Now Facebook for five years had been the number one referrer of traffic to my blog and responsible for its growth. Like literally, I'm not kidding sending millions of people a year to my blog because you read something I like, you're like, "Oh, share on Facebook."

Carey Nieuwhof: All of a sudden my traffic was down 70% overnight. Cause Zuck said, "We're changing the algorithm." See you don't own Facebook unless you're Mark Zuckerberg, welcome to the podcast. But you don't own Facebook, you don't own Instagram, and you don't own Twitter. And they're changing and tweaking the algorithms all the time and filtering you out. So what I did was I moved to a daily email strategy, blog traffic group. Unbelievable. Because I started emailing. I didn't have 7 billion people that I have on Facebook, but I had 40,000 leaders that I could talk to directly every day. And I made it in a way that, "Hey, I want this to help you." Short, plain text, no graphics, average email is under a hundred words. And here's the link-

Rich Birch: To the point.

Carey Nieuwhof: Boom. There you go. And huge engagement. And believe it or not, gigantic gratitude because we're cutting through the noise. Here's some stuff that can help you today. Have a great day. Boom.

Rich Birch: Well, and there's a lot of businesses that are listening in that would frankly kill for the email lists and the address list, the physical address lists that we have as church leaders. They are underused to resources in most churches. Most churches ... I shouldn't say most. A lot of churches, they have an email list somewhere and maybe it's in your database, maybe you have a constant contact account that you haven't used in a year. It's there, but you're not leveraging. It's the same with our physical address list. There's lots of businesses that would love to say, "Hey, I would love to pull up all the people who have come to our thing in the last three years." Well the reality of it is we have that as a church because when you check your kids in, people are typically giving you their address and when they donate you get their address and those two combinations alone are underused in most churches. You're not leveraging those. We should be taking advantage of that, getting out and communicating.

Rich Birch: One of the other things I talk about in Church Growth Flywheel is this whole idea of direct mail, which again, it sounds like so old school, it's like, "Man, that's like-

Carey Nieuwhof: A letter on a piece of paper.

Rich Birch: Yeah, right. But again, we're seeing that we just went through the end of the year and there was a couple of churches I was helping with their year end campaigns and again, people are shocked. I'm like, "No, no, you need to write a letter and have a response mechanism in that letter. People will send you money back and I guarantee you that you'll get more money back in those envelopes that you send to people than it costs you to send them." And people are like, "What are you talking about? I shouldn't just post something on Facebook?" No, no, no, think about what the open rate on a letter at someone's home is versus the open rate on-

Carey Nieuwhof: At 100%.

Rich Birch: Right. And then obviously your open rate next on an email and let's say it's even 25% which is probably where a lot of churches are out today may be 20%. That's still fairly high when you compare a social media post, if you're lucky, is getting single digit percent viewership. But what that is, is in the the wall as someone's scrolling by. And so you're seeing it maybe for half a second, maybe if you're lucky. And so again, we need to get smarter on the use of these things. I'm not antisocial media. In fact, there's a whole part of social media or social media, the Church Growth Flywheel that is all about social media.

Rich Birch: It is absolutely important, but it needs to have the right place in the overall mix. It needs to be kind of one part of the strategy. And to your point on email, there

are too many churches are chasing ... and I think we also have seen this hopefully, but I'm just underlining it for leaders that aren't, you're chasing like how many likes can I get on Facebook, I feel great about this number of ... I would think you probably need to be thinking the value of an email is at least 10 times, if not a hundred times more valuable to you. Working hard to collect emails from your people is way more valuable than getting a like on a post.

Carey Nieuwhof: I don't know whether you'd agree with this or not, but my guess is that a lot of churches, a lot of organizations have camped everything on, "Hey, please come next week and like us on social." And I think it's all gone social and social gets filtered out more every month as we speak by algorithm changes. And what I love about what you're saying is we're ignoring the low hanging fruit. And we're ignoring the ways it can actually connect with people. And I think most church leaders, to get real honest, are just sitting there going, "Gosh, I hope next Sunday is better than the last Sunday." And it's hope. Hope is not a strategy as our friend Tony Morgan says, "Hope is not a strategy." Tell us a little bit about the Church Growth Flywheel course and then I want to talk to you about courses which are becoming more and more the norm, I think, in the online space. So this is your first course, right?

Rich Birch: Yeah, I'm super excited about the Church Growth Flywheel Masterclass. We actually launched today, which I'm super honored that you have me on the podcast. Before we get to that though, I want to challenge everybody with one thing if that's okay.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, go.

Rich Birch: So we've talked about a lot of different things and we talked a lot about church growth. We talked a lot about what do people think, and we talked about email and all these things. But I would love to give you some practical steps, but actually the one thing I'd love for you to do today is this, church leader. I'd love for you to go to that gas station down the street or maybe the convenience store around the corner and I want you to go in there and I'm going to ask you to lie or at least pretend. I'm going to ask you to pretend that your new moving into town and I want you to go into the convenience store around the corner. And if the guy doesn't recognize you because you're in there all the time, I want you to say, "Hey, we're moving into town. What do you know about the church around the corner? What do you know about XYZ church?"

Carey Nieuwhof: Your church?

Rich Birch: The church that you lead in. I want to challenge you to do this. Now, I've done this for years. I'm giving you a bit of an insider kind of secret here. I've done this for years when I've done coaching with churches. Typically I land the night before and you've done this stuff, Carey, you land the night before and I'll be checking in at the hotel and there'll be like, "Hey, I'm here for whatever." And I'll say like, "I might be around on Sunday. I'm thinking about going to XYZ church

on Sunday. What do you know about it?" The interesting, shocking, overall trend that I've seen, maybe different in your community, the overall trend to actually, I think as you're listening, the thing I'm trying to get you think about, church leader, as you're listening is, what do you think people say about your church behind your back? And maybe they're negative, maybe they are positive.

Carey Nieuwhof: Does he even get a reaction?

Rich Birch: This is the thing that is the shocker. Actually, most of the time people are like, "I have no idea." Or they'll say, "I remember once, literally I was at a church. You could stand ... I had a rental car and I was just getting gas. And so literally you could see the church. It was like a kind of kitty corner, catty corner, depending on which part of the country you're in, from the church. And I said, "Hey, do you know anything about that church over there?" And the guy was like, he looked around, he's like, "Oh!" He was surprised that there was even a church there.

Carey Nieuwhof: How about that. Wow.

Rich Birch: And so I think the reality of it is people in our ... if we're not thinking about how we're impacting our communities around, that's what happens. If we're not thinking about how are we getting our people inviting, that's what's going to happen. That's really the driver behind the Church Growth Flywheel Masterclass. What it is, is it's a compression of not only what I've learned from the three churches I've been in that are fast growing churches, but over 300 interviews with church leaders from a whole bunch of different amazing churches. And what we've done is, we've compressed it all down into super actionable step-by-step system to help your church grow.

Rich Birch: So what I wanted to do was take the lessons we've learned and re articulate them in a way that really simplifies for it. One of the things I believe ... and I know you believe this or maybe you don't, Carey, I probably shouldn't put words in your mouth. One of the things I believe is, if you're wanting to learn something new, you want to grow, and so in this case, church leaders are looking for their churches to grow, what you should do is pattern what you do after other people who are seeing the results that you're seeing. Now that doesn't mean you're always going to do that. But what it does mean is it's a starting point for you. And so what I've done is given you the six modules that really are kind of six starting points in a step-by-step manner that says, "First do this, start with these things." And then from there you can move from one system to the next or one part of this system to the next. So I'm super excited about-

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, what are the systems you cover in it?

Rich Birch: Now, the very first chapter is just called, it's an introduction. So it's an introduction of my bio, it really is an overview. It talks about mindsets. Actually some of the things we talked about today and even drive deeper. Then from

there, the very first thing we talk about is series promotion, which we've kind of scratched the surface on today. In fact, I had a church this last year, Carey, and it was actually a part of the turning point for me thinking about doing this course because I had a church come to me and say, "We did that one chapter and our church grew by 10% in one month." And this church is a big church. They grew by 600 people and they've continued to see that happen. And so, yeah, so there's a whole series on kind of series promotion, what you do on that front.

Rich Birch: Then the next thing we talked about is big days. So there are four days a year or three or four days a year that your church see two things happen. One is your people are more likely to invite their friends and the second is their friends are more likely to come. That's super important for us. If we think about in invitability like there are times where your people are just more likely to say, "Hey, I'll invite somebody." So what are we doing to leverage those days? And so that that one is not ... I think lots of us think about Easter. We think about Christmas, Easter is the next one coming up and then maybe Mother's day after that. We think about those as big days. But are we leveraging them? Not only to see big attendance, but then to see that attendance comeback after and how do people stay plugged in and-

Carey Nieuwhof: And you show strategy on how to talk about how to do that. Okay.

Rich Birch: Definitely.

Carey Nieuwhof: Third session or fourth session.

Rich Birch: The third piece of it, the third module is all about a cause, which is interesting. It's this idea of how are we making an impact in the community around us? How are we really getting to the point where we're taking our people out of their seats and into the streets, which we haven't talked about at all today, but there's this interesting trend in fast growing churches that they're also engaging their people in making a difference in the community.

Rich Birch: Now, part of this just makes sense. It's like, "How are you seeing your people serve the poor?" And because we know that people will talk about their church more if they see their church is a church making a positive difference in their community. And so what are we doing on that front? Then next, we have a whole series on or whole a module on social media. And again, this is obviously a significant change. If we did this course even probably five years ago, we wouldn't have included social media. It's critically important today. We've kind of been dogging it a little bit, but it's critically important, but it's important to use it in the right context. And actually there's a lot of church leaders who I bumped into who just frankly don't know where to start. And so I give them a system for them to start personally. I actually do encourage them.

Rich Birch: How are you engaging? Because actually we're seeing increasingly, even after the shift that you saw a year ago, we're seeing that personal pages, even the

pastor's personnel's page is getting more engagement than the church page. And so we've got to get that right. We've got to get your engagement as a church leader right before we think about everything else. And then finally, talk about the right message to the right people at the right time. And so what that module is about is actually more about the connection side. So five of the six modules are really all about the front door. Of course, it is ultimately about invite-ability. It's about seeing, how do we increase your churches attendance, how do we see our church grow by increasing invite-ability. But the sixth module starts to answer the question around, "Okay, so people are coming, now what? What do you do? How do we get people plugged in? How do we get them plugged in? How do we get new guests plugged into the church?"

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, cool. I'm so excited for this. We've been talking about this for months and we're friends, we live near each other, the whole deal. But the Church Growth Flywheel Masterclass, I think, is going to help a lot of people. So it's your first course. I've done a bunch of courses. You have some courses. Before we sign off today I want to talk cause courses have become a big thing online and I'm a fan. I've taken courses, I've taught courses. What do you think is happening in terms of courses and why did you decide to do a course?

Rich Birch: That's a great question. So this course is based off of work I did for a book that I released a year ago. And it's interesting because a course provides, I think, a couple advantages over a book. First of all, I think books are great. I'm going to keep writing books. But this course is an extension of what we wrote about in the book. See the book, you do write it, you put it up on a shelf and it's done. Well, this has really all the combination of lessons from this last year and it's presented in such a way ... a book by definition, the way it's kind of structured, ends up being more like a menu that you were kind of, "Hey, I'm going to kind of pick and choose." Whereas courses do tend to be more step-by-step.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's like a training, right?

Rich Birch: Yes. Do this, do that, do that. And then it also, it's more engaging in this particular course. It's the most invested in projects that I've ever done for on seminary. We got a real video crew and really shot it with actual video. It looks amazing. And that is, frankly, more engaging. 65% of people are visual learners. And so we're using a visual medium. And a lot of church leaders that are listening in, I think reason why courses are good too is because you're using them to teach with your whole team.

Carey Nieuwhof: Right. So you can pull the whole leadership team.

Rich Birch: You can pull everybody together.

Carey Nieuwhof: Whoever.

Rich Birch: And we've all been in those scenarios. I've done that where we give everyone a book and then we say, "Okay, three months from now we're going to read it." What happens is the night before, people thumb through it or on the way to the meeting, they're thumbing through it as opposed to a course. Your courses are amazing. Take the High Impact Leader and say, "We're just going to walk through this one module at a time." Friends of mine and the same with your preaching course. Like, "Hey, we're going to use this. We're going going get to get together. Every Wednesday we're going to do this course together."

Rich Birch: Courses, they're more collaborative or work in a kind of group learning environment, which I think ultimately drives lessons deeper. And then the other part of it, because it's digital, it has kind of an evergreen, we're going to update it as it go feel to it, rather than a book where it does have this like, those are my thoughts at that point in time. I put it on a shelf.

Carey Nieuwhof: Very 2018.

Rich Birch: Right, exactly. And so what we've been able to update it and this is true of this particular course and I do anticipate ... In fact, I'm trying to hold myself back from changing things in it already even though we've just launched today. But we're going to be doing updates when we look in the next three, four months, we're going to be like, "Hey, here's some stuff we're going to add to it." And a part of that is just even the reaction with people. And then the other piece of it that I think makes courses so compelling is it actually adds that social element to it. So one of the things that people who are joining this week is they're getting access to a private learning community with other people who are choosing to be a part-

Carey Nieuwhof: So like a Facebook group or whatever.

Rich Birch: Yeah. As part of a Facebook group where they can jump in and engage and ask questions and hopefully share ... What we're trying to do encourage there is, so let's say, hey, we've got Easter's the next big day coming up. Let's encourage some conversation on that. "What are you doing on Easter?" So the problem with Facebook is everyone's on Facebook. And so the good thing is that something like this, if it's a private Facebook group with just people who bought this, then you know all the conversation in there is with people with a similar heart and a similar mindset, which is, "Hey, we're trying to reach our group." So rather than just dumping your, "Hey, I'm thinking about teaching on this at Easter." Into any group, take it into the group like this where it's like, these are people who have a similar mindset to say, "Hey, I'd like to get your feedback on this."

Rich Birch: I think courses are great. You've done a great job, I think, really leading the way in this providing premium courses, premium content. And I'm just trying to keep pace with that content that ultimately drives to a change that says, "Hey, I'm hoping that as people apply these lessons, I'm convinced that if they apply

them, it'll make a difference in their church. They'll see their church grow." And so I'm excited about it.

Carey Nieuwhof: So churchgrowthflywheel.com.

Rich Birch: Yeah. So the two things. People that are listening in today, I actually don't want you to buy the course. So I know that sounds a little bit ... it's a little counterintuitive. I don't want to come out of here and be buy, buy, buy, but what I do want to just actually give you two free videos. I know you are all good Apple people on the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast. So open up your messenger APP and text the word CHURCHGROWTH, all one word to 44222. So 44222 just text CHURCHGROWTH there. And I'm actually going to send you to other free training videos there. One's called Three Myths of Church Growth and the other is Five Questions That Church Leaders Are Asking. And then you'll find out more about the course and it does close in a week, but I'm going to send you those two-

Carey Nieuwhof: So February 12th.

Rich Birch: 12th. Yeah, it closes that day. But I'm going to send you these two free videos today. You can watch those now if that texting church goes to 44222 only works in the States. So if you're outside of the State, just go to churchgrowthflywheel.com/carey. You can drop in your email address there and you'll get the exact same videos cause we love people who aren't in the States as well.

Carey Nieuwhof: And that's C-A-R-E-Y. So churchgrowthflywheel.com/carey. Landing Page for listeners of this podcast. So, Rich, I'm going to tell you why I love doing courses and you and I've talked about this cause we compare notes all the time. But speaking's wonderful. But speaking has some problems with it. Number one, not all churches can afford it. I mean forget the honorarium. I mean by the time you fly somebody in, put them up in a hotel, buy a few meals, you're a couple grand into it and that takes out probably over half of churches right off the bat. It's just ... can't afford you.

Carey Nieuwhof: Secondly, I get way more speaking requests than I can possibly do. Like we're saying, "No." 90% of the time. You're in a similar position where there's only 365 days in a year. You're married, you have a family, if you want to stay married, don't be on the road all the time. There's a limited number of engagements. So that's a challenge. And then here's the other thing, three, I do a number of speaking engagements every year. I can't go into the level of depth that I can go into in a course, whether that's the High Impact Leader, or Breaking 200, or we got another course coming out this spring, which I shot a couple of years ago and we forgot about, but we're going to bring it back-

Rich Birch: How many courses did you forget about?

Carey Nieuwhof: It's been around, but we haven't done anything about it. And so we're going to release that. But if you flew me in or I'm going to assume, see if this is true for you, flew you in. I said, "Rich. Spend a day with our team." You actually couldn't walk them through all of this-

Rich Birch: Oh, no. That's absolutely true. So I do coaching with churches, absolutely. We've done this content with churches and I can't get it done in a day. Typically, it's like two or three days of, so I'm like I'm back multiple times. I've found over the years it doesn't make sense for me to meet multiple days, just they need to chew on stuff. They've got to kind of, let's talk about it. You chew on it for a month and then we'll come back together. Then you chew on it for a month and then we'll come back together. And so you're at least two or three flights. Again, irrespective of whether you're going to pay me to do anything, just getting me there, even if I'm going to stay in your basement, all that, of course is way less expensive than any of that stuff.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. You're talking about dimes on the dollar.

Rich Birch: Yeah, absolutely. And so there is this weird thing where it's literally competing with yourself where it's like ... but I think it helps more in churches. Yeah

Carey Nieuwhof: But it sales. I mean, if I was speaking more ... I think I have 50, 40, 50 engagements this year for 2019, maybe I had the same last year, that's 40 or 50 churches I can help. That's it. That's my capacity. If I want to stay vertical and alive in this world and married and all that stuff, and do the other stuff I'm called to do, I get to help thousands of leaders through courses and at a price they can afford. So that's good. Also, there's pricing incentive on your course for this first week, right?

Rich Birch: Yeah. So we've got bonuses that are ... We'll send you more information if you could sign up earlier, but we've got that a couple of other mini courses that we're putting in that are just this week. And we're also doing group coaching calls that are only available for people who buy between now and the end of the week. So all the bonuses go away on the 12th, so you really want to get in in the next few days.

Rich Birch: It's funny, I did these two other courses. The team told me I shouldn't do this, but we did these two other mini courses. One with a guy by the name of Dennis Snow, which some people might know. He's a former executive at Walt Disney world. All on helping your church become more kind of guest friendly. We know once all these guests show up, we want the people to love it. And then the other was, we did this four part course with Carlos Whittaker on planning your next big day. So we've included those with this course. Plus if you order this week, you get five copies of the Church Growth Flywheel book for free. So we're just going to include those. We're going to mail them out to you. And again-

Carey Nieuwhof: I didn't know that.

Rich Birch: Yeah, the team was like, "You should not include all those." And I'm like, "No, no, we should. I want to provide lots of value."

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, it's your first course.

Rich Birch: Yeah. So you get those, but those all go away on the 12th so you're going to want to get in. Again, if you just texted those numbers or email there or go to that website, that'd be fine and I'm super excited for you to learn more about it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, I wanted to pop the hood because one of the things we do is we don't just talk about what we do, but why we do it and how we do it. And I just want to encourage leaders who are out there. Maybe you have content or a book or that kind of thing. You should seriously think about doing a course because if you've got demands on your time, if you've got content that really doesn't ... it's too much for blog posts. It can live beyond the book. I think online courses can be the best way. And I'm a utilitarian, greatest good for the greatest number. And you can do it at a price that's pretty much affordable for everybody. And I think at a certain point you and I were talking about this. If you give it away for free, most of my stuff's free, but people don't value free and there is a certain lean in if you pay a couple hundred bucks for something where people are like, "Okay, I'm going to take this, I'm going to do this, I'm going to pay attention, we're going to lean in and we're going to grow." So, Rich, I'm really excited about that. One more time. Give us the text number and then we're done.

Rich Birch: Yeah. So just open up your phone, go to the messages app, the texting app, and text church growth, all one word to 44222 or you can go to churchgrowthflywheel.com/carey, C-A-R-E-Y. And both will end up in the same spot. Just give us your email and we'll go from there.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, Rich, I've been a beneficiary of your leadership for years now and we're benefiting from it at Connexus. So thanks for sharing with our leaders today. It's been great to have you.

Rich Birch: Thanks Carey. Love what you do here.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, Rich has got really great stuff. And, Rich, thanks for being so generous. I'm excited for this course. I really think courses are just getting started. You know how blogging is 15 years old and podcasts were X number of years old. If you just need technical training, that's why I do courses like the High Impact Leader and Breaking 200 because as Rich and I talked about when we went under the hood, I just can't respond to all the speaking requests I get and honestly to bring a speaker in or a consultant in is just off the shelf price-wise for most people.

Carey Nieuwhof: And I lived a good chunk of my life in leadership in that category where it's like, "I'd love to bring so and so in, but we just can't afford it." Well that's where courses can be so, so helpful. So make sure you check that out. All the links are in the show notes. You can find that at careynieuwhof.com/episode243 or Rich's

actually on my blog and podcast a bit, but you'll find it pretty quickly if you go to leadlikeneverbefore.com. In the search engine, just type in Rich Birch, B-I-R-C-H. You will find all the things and of course you can listen to this episode and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts. And in 2019 I'm subscribing to some new podcasts. So if you're a new listener and you haven't subscribed before, it's free. Just hit subscribe. We do about six episodes a month. They will automatically deliver to you and then you won't miss a thing. And we are building a big leadership library that you can go back to it anytime for study with your team.

Carey Nieuwhof: And, man, I just love being able to bring the guests that we bring week after week. And speaking of that, we're dropping another episode in a week. And who do we have? Scott Sauls. Scott just released a brand new book called *Irresistible faith*. Not to be confused with Andy Stanley's book called *Irresistible*. I love Scott. I don't know about you, the culture of outrage we're in really bothers me and the extremism we're seeing really bothers me. And Scott is one of those voices that I just think we need. And we talk about why non Christians hate Christians, what ineffective evangelism is, and what resilience looks like in a turbulent world. Here's an excerpt from next week's episode.

Scott Sauls: It reinforces our self righteousness. It just keeps us in our echo chambers where the only people that are listening to our preaching is the choir and it doesn't do any good for the world. And so the less mean spirited we can become ... and that doesn't mean don't have convictions. That doesn't mean don't stand up for justice. But maybe start by defending somebody else's rights instead of defending your own. Let's get to your rights later on and defend somebody else's rights for a while and see what that does in terms of your kingdom impact. My guess is that it will increase your impact substantially over the strategy or method of defending your own rights.

Carey Nieuwhof: So that is Scott Sauls next week. I'm really looking forward to that. Hey, if you have not jumped on board with the cloud based creative team and that's what you're looking for, head on over to promediafire.com/carey, you'll save 10 to 40% and remember rethinkleadership.com to head on over to Rethink Leadership in Atlanta, Georgia. We have VIP reception access to top speakers you don't usually get access to. This year it's all personal and we want to make sure that you, as a senior pastor executive pastor or campus pastor of a church, those are the only people we let into that event, walk away not only with peer support, but your question answered.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's a different kind of event. Don't think of it as a conference. Think of it as a way to edge up your leadership in a serious way. Head on over to rethinkleadership.com where you will find out more. And guys, thank you so much for listening wherever you are on the treadmill, on your bike, on a walk, on a hike, washing dishes, on a commute or whatever you do when you listen to these things. Thank you so, so much. You have a great day and I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before.

Announcer:

You've been listening to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast. Join us next time for more insights on leadership, change, and personal growth to help you lead like never before.