

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

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, hey everybody and welcome to episode 266 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof. I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Well, it's an incredibly exciting week. We have been in the early stages of the Church Growth Master Class and tomorrow, the price changes, so if you haven't yet checked out what's happening at Church Growth Master Class, we got a special launch rate on for 24 more hours. Jeremy McDonald and I, who I'll introduce in a minute, talk all about church growth. He grills me on the back story of our church. I've been here for 24 years. What were some of the barriers?

Carey Nieuwhof: Sometimes when you hear stuff like, "Oh, church growth," it's like, "Yeah, great. You're going from 1,000 to 2,000 or whatever." Now, we started with handful of people, literally. When you talk about church growth barriers, we had to break the 10 barrier, the 20 barrier, the 50 barrier, the 100, the 200, the 500, the 800, the 1,000, and now the 1,500 barrier. I got a little bit of experience in that area. We talk all about it in the podcast and also, how do you get people who don't want to change to change? Yeah, Jeremy asks me all about that.

Carey Nieuwhof: He's actually on our staff at Connexus, one of our campus pastors. I had him interview me today and I want to give you the whole backstory behind the Church Growth Master Class, some of the things I've learned. Once you register at the Church Growth Master Class, you'll get instant access to this course. You'll learn how to lead your church through seven critical conversations for your church's future growth. It's very true. I just want to say this. I can't make your church grow and you can't make your church grow. Only God can make it grow.

Carey Nieuwhof: However, you can position yourself for growth. There's a big difference. People in your community need to hear the message of Christ and the best way to get that message out is to be equipped to reach them so you can go into the world, change families' lives, destinies. The Church Growth Master Class is going to be around, but the price changes tomorrow. We've got an introductory rate right now, so head on over to churchgrowthmasterclass.com to make sure you don't miss out.

Carey Nieuwhof: Speaking of how things are changing and how to reach people, there's a funny video on YouTube about two younger people trying to dial a rotary phone. Anyone here remember rotary phones? Man, I remember if your friend had like 8s and 9s in their phone number, I used to hate that, because it took so long for the rotary dial thing to come back. Anyway, you need to check out that video. We'll link to it in the show notes. Pro Media Fire realizes, "Hey guys, it's been a long time since anyone's dialed a rotary phone, okay?"

Carey Nieuwhof: I'd you're still trying to use those methods, that was part of my story, like Jeremy and I talk about in this interview. These guys were still stuck in the 70s, 80s when I got there and I got there in the 90s. We had to kind of put the paddles on and jumpstart things. What are you doing to reach out online? What are you doing with your limited budge to really make an impact in your community? That's where Pro Media Fire can come in.

Carey Nieuwhof: We live in a media generation. If you heard last week's episode with Sean Cannell, you know all about it. People are consuming more content online than ever before. If your church or business is not speaking the language of media, you'll not be able to reach people today. That's why a partner like Pro Media Fire is so vital and their team of graphic designers and video editors will create custom videos and graphics for you each month for a flat rate. That's right. You don't have to worry about, "Oh, we can't afford this one more project."

Carey Nieuwhof: If you need some fire for your content on social, check out Pro Media Fire. Listeners of this podcast get 10% off their plans for life, if you go to this URL: promediafire.com/carey. That's promediafire.com/C-A-R-E-Y. They will take extremely good care of you there. Well, without much further ado, let's get into my conversation with one of our staff members at Connexus Church, Jeremy McDonald.

Carey Nieuwhof: He's been around for a couple of years. He's got his own podcast. He does the Canadian Youth Workers Podcast, which is a great podcast. He's a great question asker, really curious. I said, "I want you to interview me about church growth," and this is some of the backstory to my 24 years in leadership, all about how to jumpstart the growth of dying and stagnant churches, how to scale growth barriers and well, a whole lot more. My conversation with Jeremy McDonald.

Carey Nieuwhof: All right, well, today we are flipping the microphone and I am being interviewed by the one and only Jeremy McDonald.

JeremyMacDonald: Carey, it's so good to be here. This is in podcast central, in your basement in-

Carey Nieuwhof: It is.

JeremyMacDonald: In the middle of Oro. It's going to be fun. I'm excited for this convo.

Carey Nieuwhof: Also known as the middle of nowhere.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: Which is where I live.

JeremyMacDonald: Which is where we all live. This is going to be so much fun. I'm excited to learn, as a part of this conversation. I've got questions that I'm continuing to wrestle through in my own leadership, but excited that we get a chance to talk about church growth and talk about some of the things that you've kind of lead with and that you've put out there that have helped so many people already. I'm going to dig down, if that's all right. Can I push back on things today?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, that's great, yeah. Just a little bio of you, so Jeremy and I have worked together for ... Is it two and a half years now?

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, almost three years.

Carey Nieuwhof: At the staff at Connexus Church. You're one of our campus pastors also in charge of ... What do we put in you in charge of?

JeremyMacDonald: A few things.

Carey Nieuwhof: I don't know.

JeremyMacDonald: Our student-

Carey Nieuwhof: I don't know anything anymore.

JeremyMacDonald: No, that's okay. Student ministry and I do some stuff. I oversee a couple of our staff members. Yeah, we have a lot of fun at Connexus, so-

Carey Nieuwhof: That's right.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, that's good.

Carey Nieuwhof: I think of you as a campus pastor, so there you go.

JeremyMacDonald: That is the primary. That's the header on my business cards, so that's great.

Carey Nieuwhof: We didn't have any campuses back in the day.

JeremyMacDonald: Well, and the truth is is one of the fun parts about coming to Connexus has been obviously, we get a chance to chat and I get to learn from you and from Jeff and from our team.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, I get to learn from you. It goes both ways.

JeremyMacDonald: But on top of that, I was a podcast listener and blog reader before I came here. I wanted to know if the stories were true.

Carey Nieuwhof: Like do I lie a lot?

JeremyMacDonald: No, I mean I assumed you didn't lie, but I thought maybe like pastor math on where things started.

Carey Nieuwhof: How bad was it when I got here 24 years ago.

JeremyMacDonald: Was it 24 years ago?

Carey Nieuwhof: 24 years ago, the last week of April. May 1st, 1995 was my first day as a pastor in ministry, in the mega churches of Oro Medonte.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, I've driven by all of those original three churches and I now know-

Carey Nieuwhof: They're not big, are they?

JeremyMacDonald: No.

Carey Nieuwhof: Is that fair to say?

JeremyMacDonald: They are very tiny and-

Carey Nieuwhof: You're in my office. It's not a lot bigger. The churches weren't a whole lot bigger. We'd all fit right there on those chairs.

JeremyMacDonald: Well, and those original days, when you talk about them, I fact checked. I hope that's okay, actually.

Carey Nieuwhof: No, it's great. It's great.

JeremyMacDonald: I fact checked with some of the originals and it's fun. There's still a part of our church now, Connexus. Some of those people that were there way back in the day. How big were those original three?

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, when I started in 1995, I did the circuit of three, traditional mainline churches, average attendance ... Remember, they hadn't grown in three decades. My predecessor was 85 years old. Yeah, yeah. He had been there a long time, all right? The first church was six people, average attendance. Phyllis is still there today.

JeremyMacDonald: Phyllis!

Carey Nieuwhof: Part of Connexus.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: She's part of Guthrie Church.

JeremyMacDonald: Isn't that something? Listeners don't know, but Phyllis continues to come in to our Barrie location and reset our seat pockets. I chat with Phyllis. Probably every other week, I'll see her in there, which is great.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh yeah. Yeah, I see her on Thursdays when I'm in too, and then the second church was central. They had about 14 average attendance and Jim and Kareen Gray, who are part of our church today. Kareen was a young teacher with little kids and they were the only young people, they were in their 40s at the time in the church.

JeremyMacDonald: That's something. If Kareen's listening, we still think she's young. She's just not-

Carey Nieuwhof: She's very young.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, as in-

Carey Nieuwhof: Extremely young. She stayed young.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, she will give us a little, "Hey, what for?" But she still volunteers. Jim and Kareen, spend time with them every Christmas Eve at our Christmas Eve services. That's incredible. Then the last one ... Is that where the Blacks were?

Carey Nieuwhof: St. Andrews. Yeah, the Blacks were there. The Shelswells were there and they still come. There's a handful of people. Unfortunately, if you have a dying mainline church, a lot of the people when I came were in their 70s or 80s, so unfortunately, they're not around anymore. Yeah, Dave Black, Dave and Luanne Black were there. My favorite story about Dave is Dave was an elder, but he wasn't a Christian. We took him to one of the Billy Graham's ... I think his final crusade in Toronto in 1995 and Dave got saved. It's always a good idea to make sure your elders of your local church are Christians. But there were 23 people at the megachurch.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, my gosh. Dave and Luanne are phenomenal. Dave still serves every Sunday morning on E-team. Luanne does a ton of stuff for us and for our partner, The Lighthouse in town. Carey, to get us started here, I would love for you to talk a little bit about how ... These folks that, 24 years ago, were a part of a dead and dying church that they're still a part of our church to this day. But that they're more fired up about the mission than ever before. You've written before, and in Lasting Impact, I've read through and man, I love the conversation that you sparked from there. You've talked about how the preferences of insiders, they'll trump the passion for the mission in those declining churches, but the reverse has been true for these folks, that they're more passionate about the mission. How did that change?

Carey Nieuwhof: They'd laugh if they were here, but there was nothing to be passionate about in 1995. When you've been stuck for three decades, when your church hasn't grown. I would think they would tell you it was about revival or sorry, survival,

survival. There was one guy who was my boss. He was an older, retired pastor, who was in charge of the upstart student and he believed in revival, but everybody else was into survival. When I came in as a 30-year-old student in 1995, the number one question they had is, "How do we keep this thing open? How do we keep this alive?"

Carey Nieuwhof: There are a lot of churches that church growth is almost unimaginable for them, because they're like, "Growth? All we want to do is survive." I know a lot of leaders listening right now, you're right there. There's been zero growth. There's no growth. There's a decline. There's stagnancy. [inaudible 00:10:51] said years ago that small churches are like cats. When you have average attendances of 6, 14 and 23, those are small churches. They're like cats, because they have nine lives and you can't kill them. It's true. There was just enough money coming in to keep the lights on.

Carey Nieuwhof: You know how broke the churches were. Again, talk to the originals, I call them the originals, about this, because they predate me. We couldn't even afford to keep the building heated during the week, so the boiler would fire up on Saturday night or Sunday morning just in time for Sunday and then go out Sunday afternoon. Seven days would go by and if we had a mid-week meeting, we'd have to heat the church. There was no phone in the church, no internet in the church, no nothing.

JeremyMacDonald: Listeners from California don't understand the essential need for heat.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, well, we are in Canada. We're north of Toronto, about an hour north of Toronto, and yeah, it gets cold here. If you walked into those churches in 1995, it could have been 1965 or 1945. You would have no clue that the 20th century was almost over. If you went a service, you would have no clue that it wasn't 1975. Nothing had changed.

JeremyMacDonald: Okay, so I get that you and your leadership would've been ... You would've been excited to reach people for sure, but there's something that's different ... I can only tell by the stories that even Dave and Luanne would share, but there's something different inside of them when they think about church, when they think about reaching people. How did you see change happen in the lives of some of those long-standing church people that had been around for so long?

Carey Nieuwhof: Part of it was because it was about institutional survival. It was about maintenance not mission. We had to go back to the very early principles of the church and for any church that stuck, that would be like, "I would love to have the problem of church growth. I would love to have a growing church. We'd love to reach more people." Where I started with all that was the mission. I remember some of those early elder meetings and you got to start with the leaders you have, not with the leaders you wish you had, so we had to start ... I didn't know what I was doing. I was 30 years old. I had no clue, just had passion, had what I believed was a calling to lead in the local church.

Carey Nieuwhof: You kind of make it up as you go along, and so we just opened our bibles. I remember reading Ephesians, which is one of my favorite books with the elders. I just said, "Okay, what's the purpose of the church?" As we read through some passages, it seemed to me that we're supposed to spiritually grow the people who are with us and reach the people who aren't. We kind of found the dual mission of the church of discipleship and evangelism that first summer. We said there's no kids in these churches. I guess the larger church, St. Andrews, had a couple of kids, like three kids or something, but there was no Sunday school. It's like, "Well, let's do a vacation Bible camp."

Carey Nieuwhof: I didn't know how to run one. They didn't know how to run one. Nobody had ever done it. We did it. There were like 40 or 50 kids the first year. We just literally photocopied flyers, put them in people's mailboxes, invite some people. People actually came. We had no idea what we were doing. Those are the fun things. Hey, when you start a podcast like this, I didn't know what I was doing. It's just like when you start blogging. I don't know what I'm doing. When I wrote my first book. How do you write a book? I don't know. I have no idea how to write a book, so why don't we just try, right?

Carey Nieuwhof: You have that entrepreneurial missionary zeal and that's what we had. By September, we had kids, not a lot of kids, but we had a couple dozen kids. We started to grow almost overnight. I started preaching every Sunday and having a guy in his 30s, well, I was 30 at the time, preaching and the little bit of passion helped. Then that kind of put a spark in people. One of the things we had to overcome ... I remember a conversation with a really sweet guy. I loved him a lot. His name was Walter, but he didn't like anything I did. I remember saying, "Walter, what do we do that's spiritual around here?" He goes, "Well, we don't do anything spiritual. We're farmers."

Carey Nieuwhof: He says, "We just talk about hay and horses." I'm like, "What? This is the 21st century almost. Talk about hay and horses?" I'm like, "Well, we have to have spiritual conversations in the church." He's like, "We don't do that." Basically, it was a culture club. If you think about a lot of stuck churches, they're really there to cater to the preferences of their members rather than to the mission that we were given. I'm like, "We got to change this."

Carey Nieuwhof: We started to have spiritual conversations. We started a Bible study. It was a precursor to a small group. Again, because we couldn't use the building during the week, I just invited people to our living room. People came and soon we kind of outgrew the living room. Not everybody was into that. People were like, "No, we just want to talk about hay and horses." But-

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, so tell me about some of those people that did just want the hay and horses or even as you talked about the real purpose behind the church. I love that, "Hey, let's open the scriptures and let's go back to what are we really here for, that dual mission: discipleship and evangelism." Surely, that sparked

something in some people. Were there some people that said, "Well, I'm not interested in that?"

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, yeah. You know what? Growth is good and everyone's in favor of it, until it means change. We went through several waves of growth. The first was we just had someone who was younger in the pulpit with kids and I was pretty passionate, I'm still pretty passion, right? I'm pretty passionate, so that's going to help. Then we did a vacation Bible camp and kids showed up. We didn't have a lot of opposition, but then I'm like, "Okay, the music here stinks. Let's just be honest. It's terrible." I wasn't quite that, but you know me. It wasn't-

Carey Nieuwhof: I can be pretty blunt, right? That may have actually come out of my mouth. I will speak my mind. I have the spiritual gift of candor.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, I've been in a couple of meetings of that. That's fair. It's all good.

Carey Nieuwhof: But it was. It was terrible! The whole community had been complaining for years that the music ... No one who doesn't go to your church is ever going to complain that it's terrible, because they're not in your church because it's terrible. That's why they're not there. They're like, "You're irrelevant. You don't speak to me. You don't have anything to offer." I'm like, "We got to change the music." Again, you got to start with the people you have.

Carey Nieuwhof: She was in the room. She's in the house, but if she's in the room, Toni, my wife, would tell you she has grade nine conservatory piano. She started playing the piano. Well, it was better than nobody playing. The music was so bad that some Sundays, I led the singing. That's how horrible it was. Yeah, well, we had nobody to play music, so I'm like, "Open your hymn books to..." It was awful.

JeremyMacDonald: Isn't that some? Okay, well I want to know a little bit more about-

Carey Nieuwhof: It was awful.

JeremyMacDonald: Not exactly the singing. Although, if you would sing on this podcast, I'm sure ...

Carey Nieuwhof: Nope. Nope.

JeremyMacDonald: Okay, but when you think about scaling an organization and trying to reach more people, you're going to need to empower more volunteers, absolutely. You're onboarding new people, you're casting vision towards them. When are the times when you realize, "There's just a job that needs to get done so that we can go to the next level as an organization."

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, well that's where you start. We have an incredible band now, and we do three locations and so I don't know how many ... How many musicians is that? 12 to 15 on a Sunday? Probably.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, well 15 to probably 20, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: Who knows how many? I can't count.

JeremyMacDonald: Depends on the-

Carey Nieuwhof: Anyway, it's a lot of people. They all play either at a profession level or they could play at a professional level. Now, you've got to play to click. You've got to play in front of many, many people. You're playing to an online audience of thousands. The whole deal, you got to be able to do harmony, play without looking at your music. You don't start there. I always think back. If somebody had showed me a picture in 1995 and said, "Hey, fast forward 24 years. This is what your church is going to look like," I would've had a heart attack and died, but you get there in little increments.

Carey Nieuwhof: When I did was, "Oh, this guy plays the guitar. All right, well maybe we can introduce the guitar or this person is a better keyboard player." Toni would be the first. She was so happy to give that up like, "Let's get somebody in here who can really play. How about not the piano, the upright piano? Why don't we get someone on keyboard?" Then we got a bass player.

Carey Nieuwhof: We started with ... It wasn't very good, but it was better than what we had. I think that's the leadership principle there is you have to start with who you have, not with who you don't have. Particularly, we didn't have social media, so I didn't know what the church down the road was doing. I kept my eyes on the ground.

JeremyMacDonald: Sometimes, yeah, you can't start something if you don't have the person for it, but like in your example of you actually leading worship, sometimes you actually step up as the leaders and do something you obviously can't do indefinitely, but because this next phase needs it, how do you know what it's time to just take a hold of something as the leader and get it done?

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, I think sometimes you ... Particularly when things are small or you're just starting out or you're planting or you're doing a reboot like we were doing when I first started, is yeah, you lead by example. To go back to vacation Bible camp, we did three different ones and I was the director for all three. Now, I was a terrible director, as you can imagine. I wasn't very good, but something is better than nothing. What I said is, "I will do this once. I'll try to figure it out."

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm not a details person, so I'm sure there were ... disasters abounded, I'm sure. We had kids and we had families and some of them committed their lives in Christ. It was amazing. Then I said, "But I'm not doing it again." I had other people who I kind of did it alongside with me. I said, "Next year, it's on you." Then I was involved, but I had a diminishing role year after year. I was told by the time, we don't do them anymore, but the time we wrapped up, that we're the biggest vacation Bible camp in the country.

- JeremyMacDonald: Oh.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, I didn't know that, but-
- JeremyMacDonald: Well, I do hear the stories that the ... those days that it was the Oro fairgrounds.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, we were at the Oro fairgrounds and-
- JeremyMacDonald: That's awesome.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, it was pretty cool. We just rent out these ... because we outgrew the church.
- JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, and Carey, I even think about for us at Connexus, when we started our online service and we were putting these online, you led the charge to get us there, when I think was so helpful, because you started something great that has now connected with thousands of people each and every single week. Truthfully, I'm sure back when you were trying to figure that out, that's still a new thing. It needs to get done. Somebody needs to take a hold of it, but you didn't do it indefinitely. You did it with the intention of empowering somebody to lead that.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, I think that's a good insight for visionary leaders, Jeremy, because I'm a visionary. That's what I do, and I'm a good starter. I'm not a great finisher and I'm a terrible maintainer. I'd rather just have other people run the operation. Once it's started, I lose interest. That's not good. That's just true. It's like new and all that, but I think where a lot of visionaries struggle. As you know, 94% of churches aren't growing. 80% are 200 or smaller. If you're a for-profit business leader, 96% of all businesses, for-profit businesses, never break the million dollar in sales mark.
- Carey Nieuwhof: That's because some people don't want to, but often, it's because the visionary can't let go. The visionary can't delegate. I think that level, the big barrier in church world is 200. If you were the pastor that does everything. You're leading vacation Bible camp. You're leading the Bible study at your house. You're preaching once or twice a week. You're leading all the meetings. The cap for that is 200 people. The next cap for that, because you can have a whole lot of ... You can get operators. Eventually as we grew, I hired staff.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Even here, with this podcast today, we were just working on a problem and I jumped in this morning and made a decision. At first, I said to my podcast producer. I said, "Hey, you handle that one. I'm fine with it." Then I had an appointment. I forgot that I said she was going to handle it. I'm like, "Oh, I don't know whether I like this or not." I jump back in. Then I'm like, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute. You want this thing to grow. You want it to scale." I said, "You know what? You make the call. I trust you."

Carey Nieuwhof: That is a really hard move for a lot of leaders to make, but it's one of these really hard things you have to do where you release and you delegate. The challenge I think in the early years when you're growing and you're scaling is that sometimes, particularly if you have some gifts in the area, you might be better at it than the people that you're releasing it to, but you've still got to release it, if you want the cause to grow. Otherwise, at 200, if you're the person that does everything, you're either going to burn out if you grow to 300, or your church will shrink back down to 170, 180 or even 120, the level at which you can personally service it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Then when you go to the 1,000 barrier, the 1,000 barrier ... I was just on a call with some leaders the other day on this. They're like, "We've been stuck at 700, 800 for a long time." Well, one of the key barriers for people trying to pass 1,000 is simply this: how many decisions still cross your desk? If you're like, "Hey, wait a minute, Jeremy. Don't make that. I need some input into that. Wait a minute. You want to bring that back to me?" Now, there's some decisions you should absolutely ... If you're running a church of 50,000, you're still going to have to make some decisions. You've still got to have input in things, but your ability to release and not even know about it has to increase and that's a big issue.

JeremyMacDonald: Okay, so that's a huge issue. I think even for my leadership and for our Orillia campus, there are things that okay, internally I know I need to be able to hand that leadership over to someone, but what happens when somebody else thinks you should hold onto it? Somebody else thinks you should still know that detail. Somebody else thinks you should still take care of that project. How do you actually wrestle that one to the ground, because then it's somebody else coming in, kind of pointing fingers at, "Well, you let that go too early." That's hard for me at least to deal with, personally.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, it can be. You know where you feel that pressure the most intense is in a congregation that is 200 attenders or under or in a very small mom and pop style business. The pressure is there. First of all, most people ... This has been something that I've had to do. You're leading the largest thing you've ever led at every point in your leadership. This is the largest church you've been a part of. We're not the biggest church in the world, but it's the largest thing you've ever been a part of. It's the largest thing I've ever started and been a part of.

Carey Nieuwhof: Even the podcast, it's different pushing 10 million downloads than it felt pushing 100,000. It's just different. It's complicated. It has scale. It has issues. It's writing your fifth book is different than writing your first book, dealing with major publishers. Everything's got scale issues in it. This was really hard for me, because as a leader, I felt responsible, and first, I felt responsible to do everything. We teach this in the Breaking 200 Course, in the Master Class, but I felt responsible to do everything. I have to do everything.

Carey Nieuwhof: Then it was like, "Okay, well, I can't do everything anymore. I'm going to die or it's going to stay small, so okay, I can't do everything. But maybe I have to lead everything, because I'm the leader, right?" You're a leader. You're the campus pastor. You have to lead everything. You can't do it all, but you can lead everything. It's like, "No." Then maybe, "Okay, well, I have to run everything." No, you don't have to run everything.

Carey Nieuwhof: Then you know the other one? The two that were the hardest for me? I have to attend everything. Because this is the really awkward stage when we had grown ... We eventually amalgamated those three churches and then built a central facility together and just because they were five minutes apart. When they were part, they were horse and carriage ride away, but now, 20th century, 21st century, it's like, "Oh, five minute car ride. Let's just amalgamate these things and start something new together." We did that. When it was 400 or 500 people, I realized I couldn't attend everything anymore. I felt so guilty. I-

JeremyMacDonald: The people must've come and actually-

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, yeah. Where's Carey? What? Does he not care? Is he too busy? Oh yeah, that's huge. I-

JeremyMacDonald: Because your presence communicates value, certainly, so how did you convince those people that your lack of presence didn't communicate lack of value?

Carey Nieuwhof: It's a good way to phrase it. You have to be prepared to be misunderstood. I remember at our old house, the one 10 minutes away ... I lived in two houses in 25 year. Anyway, the the old house, I remember not one ... We had a big picture window at the front where you could see from the street. I remember hiding in the back of the house, because I wanted people to think I was sick or dead and that's why I wasn't there.

Carey Nieuwhof: I didn't want people to know I was home with my family. There was tremendous guilt, but you know what? Think about all the things that we do now. We're not a program-based church that's open seven days a week, but when you're at an event for Connexus, did people ask, "Where's Carey?" No. No, but [inaudible 00:28:39] shocked if I show up. It's like, "What happened? Well, you're real. Wow. How did that happen?"

JeremyMacDonald: The old timers do love it when you come up to Orillia and they wonder if there's something wrong sometimes.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yes. Are you asking for money or did someone die? What happened? Why are you here?

JeremyMacDonald: Seriously, Carey, because I think there's leaders listening that they know ... If they don't show up to that event, they know the person that's going to confront

them about it. They're going to be misunderstood certainly, but what do you say to the here?

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay, so what I would say ... I'm glad you asked that question. Very specifically, what I would say is, "Hey, you know what? Our church has a lot of gifted people. We want to release them." When you think about where we're going, Jeremy, like you think about the people we're reaching, it will eventually become impossible for me or for anybody, for that matter, to attend all the events. When you have leaders as capable as we have, I don't even need to be there. I want to have some time with my family from time to time as well. Healthy people understand that. Unhealthy people don't.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, okay, so what happens when it's clearly like no, this is a toxic person, because again, thinking about some smaller churches, there's somebody bringing up in a business meeting that you, as the senior leader, aren't coming to enough Bible studies or you're not doing the seniors hymn sings anymore or whatever it might be. How do you deal with that toxic person that's constantly stirring the pot, as you're trying to make the change?

Carey Nieuwhof: You just shrug your shoulders. You say thank you for your input and you move on.

JeremyMacDonald: Did they eventually-

Carey Nieuwhof: They eventually leave. A healthy system will squeeze out toxic people. A toxic system will squeeze out healthy people. We're trying to build a healthy system and I think fundamentally we were more healthy than we were toxic. Yeah, I remember those congregational meetings, Jeremy. There's a reason we don't have congregational meetings anymore. I'll tell you that.

JeremyMacDonald: I'm grateful for it, but you got to tell a story, Carey. Because somebody's got it. It's coming up. They have it on their calendar and they know somebody's going to stand up and try and rip them a new one.

Carey Nieuwhof: You know what? Sometimes, honestly, you've got to be ... This is my approach. I'm not saying it was a perfect approach, but we had lots of congregational meetings and yeah, as we started to say, "Hey, we're going to change some music. Hey, we're going to sell the buildings. Hey, we're going to building something. Oh, guess what? It costs millions of dollars." You get opposition to that. "Hey, we're going to leave a denomination and start something new." You get a little bit of opposition along the way. What I've learned is you've got to be united on your inner core. You've got your top leaders, your senior staff, your elder board. If you guys are united, if you've prayed about it, if you've thought about it, if you've surrendered it and there's really unity at the top, that doesn't mean you're going to have everybody agreeing all the time. But you know this isn't something you thought of at 8:00 AM at breakfast and now you're floating it in front of the congregation that afternoon.

Carey Nieuwhof: No, this is a well digested, prayerfully thought through, carefully weighed decision that you're making together, and then you got to test it publicly and you've got a united inner core. I think you just let those people talk and if they're really toxic, you pull the microphone from them. For the most part, I don't think I ever pulled the mic from anybody. No, and I would never rebut them publicly. I would just say, "Jeremy, thank you so much for that. Is there anyone else?" That has an incredible way of not validating what they're saying. What happens in that moment is usually the healthy people start to silently want to defend you.

Carey Nieuwhof: Sometimes, somebody else will get up on the mic and you don't have to say a word. I'm not trying to say this is what Jesus did, but that is exactly his approach to his trial was he didn't say a word. He just let all of it swirl around him and again, to quote Jesus, "Wisdom is proved right by all of our children." If I'm making disastrous decisions with our core leadership team, that is going to have a way of showing up and becoming evident to even the healthy people that, "Wow, you're a disastrous decision maker." We didn't make all great ones, but fundamentally, we're reaching a lot more people than we ever imagined that we would.

Carey Nieuwhof: Then sometimes I would just say nothing. I would have people streaming forward at the end of those meetings saying, "How did you keep your tongue in tact? How did you just stay silent?" I'm like, "Well, I don't know what can be gained by saying anything." I remember the last time we had some really toxic. It was somebody. I wasn't even making a big salary at the time, but it was still public knowledge. I think it was probably double what he made or whatever. He was one of those guys who was marginal employment. He made a big stink about it in the congregational meeting. "Why don't we pay you all \$20,000 a year?" Kind of thing. It was devastating.

Carey Nieuwhof: I didn't say anything. You know what? He's not around anymore and people who enjoy doing that aren't around anymore, because the mission has that flywheel effect. The train has left the station and it's left a lot of those people behind. Often, they need a smaller organization. They want to be a big fish in a small pond and they want to stir up trouble and they need a place where people will listen to them and if you're just like, "Thank you," and you move on and you don't give them ground, what I've discovered over my time ... We don't have a lot of that. Be honest, last two and a half years, how much time do you spend dealing with toxic, chronic complainers?

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, hardly any at all.

Carey Nieuwhof: Exactly. The reason, Jeremy, is because they can't get traction. They can't get ground. What'll happen is if you feed that fire or if you fuel that fire, it's going to burn bright, but if you just kind of ... Eventually, what I saw happen is yeah, there were times where they felt like, "Wow, because they're loud, there'll must be a large number." It's never more than 10% of your church. I teach this when I

teach on change. Like you have a church of 100. You're like, "Oh my goodness. Everyone's opposed." It's like well, write down the names of the people who are opposed. I've never have taught this to thousands of church leaders and this is true in any business, customer or whatever. If you have an organization of 100, most people can't even come up with 10 names, but those six families, those six people, they're just. They're so loud.

Carey Nieuwhof: You're going to let 10% or 6% of your congregation determine the future of 90%? Then you start to look at the 99% you haven't reached, it's the opposite of the parable of the lost sheep. What I've found is those toxic people just got a smaller and smaller audience. At first, there were 10 people listening. Then there were 5 people listening and soon they're in a corner talking to themselves. Then eventually, they leave, because they're like, "Well, I'm not getting anywhere here." It's like the trolls on your platform. If you're engaging with them all the time, you're feeding their fire. If you just ignore them and you engage the good people on the internet, who is the vast majority of the listeners of this podcast, there's lots of good people out there and go fuel them.

JeremyMacDonald: Does it still hurt emotionally though when somebody takes a run at you?

Carey Nieuwhof: It did a lot more at the beginning. I don't want to say it doesn't. There are times where it still gets under my skin, but I'm just thinking online world. I usually click over. It's like, "Oh, eight followers, okay." Well, there you go. Maybe that's a little bit sarcastic or sinful. I don't know. Often these are people who are really unhappy. You look at their track record and you realize, "Oh, they've done this at five churches. We're number six. Okay, there you go. I get it."

Carey Nieuwhof: You kind of look at their track record. Jim Gray was at that meeting, I remember being at that meeting. We talked about Jim and Kareen. There was an elder's meeting back in the mid-90 or late 90s and we did have a lot of opposition at the time. There's two questions we learned to ask to filter all of the opposition. One was Is there a biblical argument and what they're saying. Because not everybody who criticizes you is wrong. Often, there's a kernel of truth in what they're saying.

Carey Nieuwhof: What I've found is for the most part, there wasn't a biblical argument in what people were saying. If there was, you better pay attention to it. But then the second question was are these the kinds of people that we can build the future of the church on? When you ask that question, even now, start running people like volunteer through that filter, even if they're not toxic. It's like, "Is this the kind of person we can build the future of the church on?" That tells you an awful lot pretty quickly. Oh, good. You want to put into your senior levels of leadership the people that you can build the future of the church on. You can't build the future of the church on a critic.

JeremyMacDonald: Fascinating. Is there a time, like if you come in and let's say there's somebody that's newer to their church and newer to their organization, is there an

expectation that this might take a year or two years to pull together the right group of people that you can build the future on? It can't happen overnight, obviously.

Carey Nieuwhof: No, I think you can start right away and you have to start with who you have. You have to start with the best person, the best people you have. See, and all this is related to growth, because long term, you're never going to grow if you're unhealthy. Healthy things grow, so if you've got a whole lot of toxic people or you're letting those four to seven families ruin everything for everybody or the negative voices are in seats of power, you're going to have a really hard time reaching a community with the positive gospel of Jesus Christ. It's like if you came over to our house, which you did today to record this, and Toni and I were having an argument in the living room, you would probably turn around and drive around the block, waiting for it to end, right? Then it's like, "Hey honey, why does nobody want to come over for dinner anymore?" It's because you guys are always fighting. Would you shut up, right? That's a growth barrier.

JeremyMacDonald: You guys actually like each other, which is kind of fun. I think that's good.

Carey Nieuwhof: We do, we do, most days. Most days, we really have a good time. Sorry, I was ... Oh yeah, so you start with what you have. What you look for is the healthiest people and you look for the best leaders you can find. Often the way to do that, particularly for the untapped leaders is looking for what they're doing with their life. Because leadership development, like getting that ministry pipeline, that leadership pipeline in place, is essential for growth. Who's the mom organizing all the moms at the playground or for the playschool? She's probably a leader. You're married to somebody who's a natural leader, right? If I look at your wife, she's a natural leader.

Carey Nieuwhof: Who is the dad heading up the local soccer league or baseball league? What are they doing? Who are the people who are leading at work and who keep getting promoted at work? Whether that's a coffee shop, a grocery store, an online business, real estate, the professions, whatever that happens to be, who are those people? Because if they're leading in the world and they have a good faith, good character, it's probably evidence of a leadership gift that can be utilized in the church.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, and maybe just a ... Like nobody's invited them to a high level of ownership around the mission that God's called us to. Like you put something big in front of them around the church and all of the sudden, maybe they'd be willing to move into the space and be a part of what you're doing in your church.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, and often, you find if you have a stuck or stagnant church, that the people who are in leadership are there. They don't even necessarily have the gift of leadership. Secondly, half of them don't want to be in leadership. They just did it because nobody else wanted to do it, and-

JeremyMacDonald: It was their Christian duty to serve.

Carey Nieuwhof: It was their Christian duty and maybe their grandfather served on that board. Like all of the sudden, it's like, "Oh, that's why." People serve for sociological reasons, not just theological reasons.

JeremyMacDonald: Well, and Carey, in the Breaking 200 course, you talked about how good leaders are often built, not bought, and the idea that if you can build from within that you can actually build an organization that can continue to grow and scale beyond you. I think for us, there are so many leaders that have been a part of our church for decades or for years and the example that you use are Justin and Sarah, which of course are close friends these days. But I would love to know maybe some of the costs that are associated with building leaders, because it's not just that it can happen naturally overnight, but there is a little bit of an investment I think you have to make upfront to build fantastic leaders. Is that fair to say?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, so the idea, just explain to everybody what's the idea. You build great leaders, you don't buy them. We kind of bought you. We brought you in from the outside, right?

JeremyMacDonald: Exception to the rule.

Carey Nieuwhof: You're like, "That wasn't really buying, Carey. I know what you pay me." Yeah, the idea is we all sit there and go, "I don't have the right leaders, but if I could get this guy from Arizona to come and if I could get this guy from New York and this person from Seattle and this person from Vancouver, then I'm going to build my dream team." We ignore the people on. But you look at our staff at Connexus, most of them are raised up from the congregation, vast majority.

JeremyMacDonald: I think almost all of them are, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, vast majority. That, by definition, that's how it has to be. You can have the biggest budget in the world, give yourself \$10 million, \$100 million, pick a ridiculous figure. You still cannot afford to buy all the talent that you need to do what you need to do. You've got to figure out how to develop leaders. What that means the cost associated with that, sure, they eventually make staff, you have payroll cost, but it means you probably have the cost of investing in them, developing them, walking with them.

Carey Nieuwhof: I know I, as a leader, still live in this fantasy world that I can just wave a magic wand and people show up and they're perfect on day one. It just doesn't work that way. You got to develop them. You got to get in the trenches. You got to meet with them. You got to give them the tools. Here's something that churches don't invest nearly enough in: training and equipment. Plain and simple. Like if you're going to hire someone, we're looking at just in the company here, bringing on some new staff, and I'm saying to them, "Hey, you can take like a

month to train yourself." Well, obviously I'm going to be a part of that, but if you need to take online courses, if you need to go somewhere, invest in yourself. That's the first thing churches cut, same with gear. You will back a brand new iMac sitting in my living room, which is going to fuel the podcast for the next three or four years. This one's done its time.

Carey Nieuwhof: Churches are loathe to do that. We will find the old computer that nobody wanted and we'll put that into service. Then you got to sit there for five minutes while your programs load. Are you really equipping your staff for that? Then you've got the hard work of just leadership development. I've interviewed Sarah Piercy, who you've referenced, on my podcast about being my assistant. We'll link to that in the show notes, but she started when she was 22, 10 years ago or maybe 21. She wasn't a great assistant and I wasn't a great boss, but we learned together. Now, she's a rockstar. She's incredible.

Carey Nieuwhof: You have to be willing to invest in that learning curve. Dillon, who's on my team, who's been my EA for the last year while Sarah's on Mat leave, he led a national book launch at age 19. It's like that's trial by fire, but you've got to be willing to make investments and take risks with people. That means things aren't going to be done 100% the way you want and just if you want them done the way you want and you think you can't do it better, just be fully prepared to lead a very small organization for the rest of your life.

Carey Nieuwhof: What you'll discover though ... Let me finish that thought. What you'll discover, Jeremy, is that yeah, first it's not done as well as you would like or perhaps as well as you could do it, but then all of the sudden, you're like, "Actually, these guys are pretty good." It's like being done almost as well or as well. Then eventually, it's like, "Oh my gosh. They're rock stars." Almost everybody who does something other than what I do can do it better and eventually, your ultimate moniker of success is do you have people who can do everything that you do better than you do it?

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, wow. When you think about leadership pipelines, in terms of organization sometimes, we look at some of the bigger ones that are down the road a little further than us and just assume people just naturally flock to those great organizations and we're the only ones that have to fight for people. As you talk with leaders, do you find that this is a problem everybody's facing or is it a problem that is just at the front lines of trying to grow a church from 50 to 100 and 100 to 200?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, if I understand the question right, you're not going ... Most people really struggle to bring talent in from the outside. Even if you're fairly good at it, it's probably going to be 10% of your team, because you think of staff, but then you also think of volunteers. Nobody's flying across the country to join you as a volunteer. You have to raise that up from the inside out. That means it's hard work. You're dealing with actual people who have real challenges and real gifts.

You got to get in there and you got to journey with them. It's hard, but that is the key.

Carey Nieuwhof: I think a lot of leaders get paralyzed into either living in some dream scape where all these people magically appear or they just look at their people and they go, "I don't have the right people." I love one of the interview we did on this podcast was the Brian Houston from Hillsong. One of his enduring points that he made, which I think will stick with me for the rest of my life, is your job is to find the golden people. There's gold in everybody. Sometimes, you got to mine for that gold.

Carey Nieuwhof: If you can't see the good in the people that God has given you ... I'm not saying everybody's right for every job. I get it. There are spiritual gifts and people fit in certain places, but if you can't find the good in people, then you're not going to find the good in the people who are coming in from the outside either.

JeremyMacDonald: Is it possible that some people get cynical though when you think about turnover around volunteers and even turnaround around staff? Have you been burned by this before?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, for sure. We had really high turnover probably when we started, like when we amalgamated the churches for a five or six year window and this would be like 15, 20 years ago. We had really, really high turnover. That was a combination of things. Number one: I was sliding into burnout. If you're unhealthy at the top, like if you, as a senior leader, are personally not in a good place, your whole organization pays the price. It's just true. Healthy at the top, healthy at the bottom. Unhealthy at the top, unhealthy at the bottom. It's just a law. That's the way it is. That's the way this world works.

Carey Nieuwhof: Secondly, we were not really well organized. Third, we were doing way too much. We were a program-based church. We were open five nights a week. We had just constructed a new facility. It was great. We were open five nights a week, but people weren't ever home, so people were burning out. I didn't know how to lead a staff at the time, so I'm still trying to figure that one out. It's super challenging and so we had high turnover. There were bodies everywhere. I'm not proud of that moment. I look back on it and go, I wish I would have learned some things earlier.

Carey Nieuwhof: It was so bad, and some leaders can relate to this, that when we're using pictures to celebrate, I would have to look at the picture and it's like, "Oh, we can't use this one because half those people left." It's funny because I was talking to someone just this past weekend who found a YouTube video from literally a decade ago, from the early days of Connexus. Their comment, unsolicited, was, "I can't believe how many of those people are still part of our church."

Carey Nieuwhof: Now, that makes me feel a lot better about this past decade than the previous decade, but I was young. I was trying to figure it out. That was the visionary without a whole lot of operators and processors to use Les McKeown's language around him, I was learning how to lead a team. I was learning how to build a church. Yeah, there were bodies everywhere. It wasn't like I screamed at people and they ran out, crying. It was just they got exhausted. They were tired. We were disorganized and we paid a price for that.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, I want to shift gears, if I can.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

JeremyMacDonald: I've got a question that I'm really excited to actually dig in on, because in Lasting Impact, you talk about prioritizing kids and teens. In terms of churches, obviously for church leaders listening, kids and teens are critical to the success of a growing church. There are departments, if you're a business leader, I'm sure that you don't have necessarily like your finger on, but they're still critical to your success. The last time that maybe you walked through a kids environments might have been a long time ago. Yet, because of their intense ... Like they're just so important, how do you, as a leader, make sure that that gets led super well without your direct involvement?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, so in the early days, me leading VBC, it wasn't led particularly well, because I was leading it, but what I learned early on is the next generation is the key to the future and it's the key to the present. I realized, first of all, you need to hire in that area. I learned a little bit later on, you need to hire well in that area. What that means, to get really practical and really granular, is you need to pay well and you need to fund it. William Vanderbloemen would say ... My conversations with him. One of the most sought-after positions in the American church today and the North American church would be the next gen director, family ministry director. It's also commanding a higher and higher salary.

Carey Nieuwhof: Because you think of the skill set. Most people would say, "Well, my number two's operations, so we pay our operations person really well." Yeah, and that's complicated. You got a budget. You got that stuff, but my goodness, nobody ... You look at our church. Nobody leads more volunteers I think than Shawna, our next gen person. That's a highly complicated job. When you need hundreds of volunteers to serve in next gen ministry, someone who can oversee that, that's a very high level of skill and leadership. You need to fund the program well.

Carey Nieuwhof: I think a lot of pastors, it's like, "Oh, we have some volunteers. It's not really important. It's just fine." It's a do-it-yourself attitude. Well, if you have a do-it-yourself, doesn't cost me much, dollar store attitude to the next generation, you're going to get those kinds of results. We have a strategy. We're fortunate that we've worked with Reggie Joiner since we started Connexus. We've been an orange church since day one, so we've used that strategy consistently of engaging the parents and refining the message. That part's done, but it's just

raising up the volunteers, setting a high bench where ... a benchmark, I should say, where we ask our volunteers to serve pretty much every week so they can build relationships with the kids.

Carey Nieuwhof: Man, those are some decisions we made early on, when we started Connexus that have paid back again and again and again and again. I think every single year, our family ministry has grown, even if our adults have backed off a little bit and we had a big high growth year last year all around, but the kids are the most important thing. You really want to build an incredible ministry and leaders, that means investing.

JeremyMacDonald: Obviously, Shawna is one of ... Man, she's a brilliant leader. We love her. She's a self-starter. She's driving it. Take us back to pre-Shawna days, if that's all right. How do you, as the senior leader, continue to drill down and make sure that you're tracking in the right direction in that environment that, again, you're not going to get a chance to be a part of on a week to week basis?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, I think some of that is you need to set a shared strategy with your family ministry people, your next gen leader, your student leaders. You need to make sure that they are properly funded, that they have everything they need to do the job. Of course, everybody has restraints, but what often happens is you're like, "No, we'll just spend the money on new cameras for main rather than really funding what they need in family ministry." Your job as a senior leader is not only to get on the same page. To get on the same page, you need to be in the same room. You also need to be able to remove all the barriers. It's asking those people, "What do you need?"

Carey Nieuwhof: When we do our environments, we spend a lot of time and money thinking through the physical environments for our kids' ministry. That's at our portable locations and our permanent locations. I would say it's things like that and then they should probably be a direct report. Somebody in next gen, I'm not saying everybody, not children, not student necessarily, but again, next gen, somebody in that area should probably with a direct report to the senior leader.

JeremyMacDonald: Oh, that's really good to know. Were you a part of those early conversations around the strategy as we were kind of locking in on-

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, 100%, yeah.

JeremyMacDonald: Okay, so that set the tone as an organization. It was aligned with the vision of the senior leader.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, and then the other thing to remember too is 70% to 80% ... Well, I think it's higher at Connexus, but the vast, vast, vast majority of the people, preachers, that you're talking to week after week are parents with children at home. You have to engage that reality. They're in the mix of parenting, trying to

figure it out. That gives you an opportunity, a vision cast to deal with the real life issues that parents are actually dealing with.

JeremyMacDonald: I know the answer to this question. I think it's good for listeners though. Your kids are grown and gone. How do you, as a communicator, make sure that you still are able to speak to audiences that are a little bit younger than you.

Carey Nieuwhof: A lot younger than me. It's hard, man. I'll be honest with you. That's one of the reasons I'm really looking forward to the day where we have more younger voices on stage. My friend, Reggie Joiner, he has grandkids. We don't, but he seems to have this gift, this propensity to just speak into the next generation really well. I'm more into adult issues. That's my thing, so I think you'd have to have diversity on the platform from a number of perspective, but one of them is through age bracket as well. As you've heard me say a million times, we need more communicators with diaper change stories.

JeremyMacDonald: That is exactly what you say.

Carey Nieuwhof: Been a few years. I say it all the time.

JeremyMacDonald: But listen, you can come by my place anytime and you can get that diaper change story.

Carey Nieuwhof: No, I don't need to change diapers. No, I don't miss that at all. Yeah. Exactly, but you've spoken at Connexus and-

JeremyMacDonald: Well, not only that, but I think truthfully for you, you sit at so many tables with so many other younger leaders and I'm always amazed at your openness to A, feedback and then B, to input as you plan out what's coming up next, that there's just a voice for those of us who are decades younger. We'll just leave it at decades.

Carey Nieuwhof: Thank you. You've made me feel wonderful.

JeremyMacDonald: You authentically listen. You get ten messages and it's like, "Oh, that came out of that meeting where we sat and there was feedback and there was input."

Carey Nieuwhof: You raised a point. I've talked about this a lot. I'm 54. You can't be surrounded by men in their 50s. You need women. You need people with different perspectives and most of my team are people who are decades younger than me. When you surround yourself with younger people, you tend to think younger. My own tastes and preferences are probably young for my age, but I don't actually know what it's like to be 21 today. You got to surround yourself with people at that stage who can call you and be open. Don't sit there expecting to be Yoda on the mountain and all these people flowing to you. You got to go and be a student of them.

JeremyMacDonald: Oh, that's so good, right? That is actually something that you honestly model.

Carey Nieuwhof: I try to. Yeah.

JeremyMacDonald: And bring in that feedback. That's good.

Carey Nieuwhof: Younger leaders, younger adults give me a lot of energy. I find sometimes cynicism and age are frequent companions and sometimes you get around an older crowd and they're just complaining about this or how their backs hurts or whatever and you're like, "Get me out of here." Sorry.

JeremyMacDonald: I love it. I love it. Okay, Carey, thinking about church growth, what's the most frustrating excuse that you hear from leaders about why they can't grow?

Carey Nieuwhof: Aha! Well, you don't know my community. Excuse me? All right, all right, you want me to get going here? It's different in my city. it's different in my region. It's different in my area. You don't know my community. It's like, "Really, you're that fundamentally different? You're telling me that no one in your community ... You all have different cars. All the cars that get sold in every other city don't get sold in your city, and all the clothes that get worn in all the other cities don't get worn in your city?"

Carey Nieuwhof: I've heard people like, "Oh, it's different on the west side of the city." It's like, "Really? Like Starbucks won't locate there? Are you kidding me? Starbucks won't locate there? Let me guess, you're listening to none of the music that anyone else is ..." We live in a mono culture. We do. People watch the same movies. Sure, you got your team, blah, blah, blah, go whatever. But people watch football. People watch baseball. People watch hockey. People watch soccer. It's a mono culture.

Carey Nieuwhof: I hear this from Canadians all the time. Makes me sick. They're like, "It's so different in Canada." No, it's not. Have you ever traveled anywhere? Have you ever been outside your little bubble? It's not that different. You might say out and about a little bit different because you're east coast, but ...

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely. I can put it on. It can get thick, but-

Carey Nieuwhof: Can it get thick?

Carey Nieuwhof: I thought it was thick.

JeremyMacDonald: You've kept the Canadian out of your accent.

Carey Nieuwhof: Have I?

JeremyMacDonald: Reasonably well, I think. I don't know.

Carey Nieuwhof: See, I have a Toronto accent.

JeremyMacDonald: Oh, there you go.

Carey Nieuwhof: Toronto doesn't really...

JeremyMacDonald: The center. The center of everything.

Carey Nieuwhof: The center of the universe.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof: I have a Toronto accent. No, you know what? It's just your context is not that different.

JeremyMacDonald: What separates then? Because there's places. There's pockets, in the US in particular, where we see massive life change happening, massive churches, people are coming to know Jesus nonstop. What then is happening in those environments? Why are those leaders seeing such great growth and it's not happening in other parts of the country?

Carey Nieuwhof: Because they ignore the obstacles and saw the opportunity. You want to pick a tough context. My buddy, he's been a guest several times on this, Mark Clark in Vancouver. It's not easy to grow a church in Vancouver, but Mark's got 5,000, 6,000 people on the weekend of five locations. You can do it. We've seen churches grow in Seattle. We see them grow in California. We see them grow in the most unlikely places. You see them in Vermont. Chris Goepfner in Vermont has got just a ton of people. Josh Gagnon in New England. We've had so many guests on this podcast who are growing churches in unlikely places and a lot of that is the mindset. What I would say one of the keys to overcome, and I address this in the Church Growth Master Class is you've got to get past the can't do mentality.

Carey Nieuwhof: I run into far too many leaders who are like, "Well, here are all the reasons this isn't going to work." Well, to quote one of my favorite quotes, Henry Ford, whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right. If you're like, "Here's why it's not going to work," guess what? It's not going to work. Now, just because you think it will work, doesn't mean it will work, but I'll tell you, if you think it won't, you're pretty much condemning yourself from day one.

Carey Nieuwhof: I remember George Cunningham, that boss I talked about when I first started here, he said, "I believe it's possible. I believe we can grow a church in the middle of nowhere." We are in the middle of nowhere, as you know in Oro Township, an hour north of Toronto. Guess what? God did it. It was the fastest growing church in the country in our denomination and the second largest, third largest in the country. It grew it in a cornfield, literally.

JeremyMacDonald: It is very much in the middle of nowhere, like-

Carey Nieuwhof: It is. No, we're not making this up.

JeremyMacDonald: The seventh line of Oro.

Carey Nieuwhof: As Mark Clark said, he was like, "Dude, you have cows for neighbors." It's like, "Yeah, we do." Some of them are Christian now. You have to look at what's possible. I started this podcast. Everyone's like, "Man, your podcast, your podcast." It's like, "We're in my basement of my house, okay?" We live in a world where anything is possible and we have a God where anything is possible and your mindset as a leader, you can't guarantee that with a positive mindset, it's all going to go the way you want. I've had train wreck periods in my life too. If you're just there going, "Well, here's why it won't work and here's why." Guess what? It's not going to happen.

JeremyMacDonald: Okay, so Carey, somebody's listening and they're like, "All right, I'm in. I want to try something. I'll take a step." What's the next step for somebody that's willing to take a chance at seeing their church grow?

Carey Nieuwhof: You got to cast a vision big enough to die for or at least to give your life for. You start with a really big vision and you're worried about challenging people. You're worried that people might not ... "Oh, that's too much. What, your kids ministry people, they serve every week," or "You're asking people to sacrifice?" We launched Connexus ... That's a whole story for another day, but it was a really interesting year. Long story short, when I announced the church, we didn't have a bank account and then even after we got a bank ... I had to start it all out of my own savings, and then when we finally got a bank account to receive donations, we didn't have charitable status.

Carey Nieuwhof: I had to go out and raise over half a million dollars saying, "Jeremy, I want you and Chantelle to give sacrificially to this. I can't guarantee you'll ever get a tax receipt. Are you in? Now, we've applied and maybe the government will give us one, but are you in?" And people gave over \$550,000 in 10 days under those conditions. You got to look at somebody and say, "Man, this is worth giving your life to. Are you in? Because I'm in. We're in. Are you in?" That's where you start. If you don't believe in it that much, why are you doing it?

Carey Nieuwhof: If you don't have that level of conviction as a leader, then why are you even in leadership? You shouldn't be in leadership. If you're not willing to die for it or at least live for it, then how can you call other people to live for it? It starts with your conviction. I'll tell you, when that happens, that inspires people.

JeremyMacDonald: Carey, you may not want to share this and we can cut this out of the podcast, but when we met and I was deciding whether or not to move my family here, I asked you about your journey of coming north of Toronto after school and

taking those three little churches and what sparked that for you. You actually had a better offer, if that's fair to say.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh yeah, we had a better offer.

JeremyMacDonald: You told me a story about a guy that changed everything for you. It's fascinating.

Carey Nieuwhof: Reality is lost my background, as a lot of regular listeners would know. I did my law in downtown Toronto. Loved it. Absolutely loved it. God called me out of it supernaturally. Again, I'm not one of those people who hears from God everyday, trust me. A handful of times, two handfuls of time in my life I would be like, "Wow, that was God." There was no question. I had been serving at a church in Toronto that really catered to the downtown core: lawyers, accountants, investment bankers, that kind of stuff.

Carey Nieuwhof: I was very comfortable in that circle. I was serving there's, preaching there, leading the youth group there. I really didn't know what I was doing, but it was my local church involvement. Then we were trying to figure out my calling. Long story short, we'd heard about these student charges an hour north of Toronto in this place I'd never heard of called Oro, where I now live. It was these three little churches that we started talking about. I came up here and I preached and did preach off with another guy.

Carey Nieuwhof: I thought, "Well, maybe they just won't ask me and then I'll stay in Toronto." I told the guys at the church in Toronto. I'm like, "Hey, just so you know, I threw my name in the hat an hour north of here." They had an emergency session meeting, elders meeting, and they came back and they said, "Here's the deal. We're going to pay you X amount of dollars," which was double the salary up here, "Going to pay you X amount of dollars." It was less than I made in law, but it was still decent for ministry. "We'll make you senior pastor within five years of then one of the most prestigious churches in Toronto. You'll be senior pastor within five years." I'm like, "Well, that's a pretty good deal." But I had my name in up here in Oro.

Carey Nieuwhof: I thought, "Well, maybe they'll reject me. They won't want me, and then the decision's made. That's nice and easy. I don't have to make a decision." That nothing, when they were meeting up here in Oro, we were at our apartment in Toronto. My wife and I were praying about it. I got a call just around 10:00 from George, who was in charge of the whole voting process here and he just said, "Carey, we want you to come here. You won by one vote." Cora, who's still part of our church, was that vote. She'll tell you that story one day.

Carey Nieuwhof: "So you won by one vote," not exactly a ringing endorsement, but I didn't know any better and I said, "Oh, I don't know. Now I've got a choice to make and I'm struggling so much with it." I said, "George, just give me three days and I'll let you know down the road." But I was deflated because now I had to choose. He said, "Aw, Carey, why don't you just come up to Oro and help us." I'm like,

"George, I can't make the decision on the spot." I hung up the phone. I said to Toni, "Now what?" She said, "Why don't you just open the Bible. We'll see what it has to say."

Carey Nieuwhof: Sarcastic me, it's like, "You don't just open the Bible and hear God's word like that. You don't do that." She goes, "Well, what would the apostle Paul do?" My mind went immediately to Acts 16 and it was the story of Paul trying to decide where to go. He had this vision in the middle of the night, because he tried to go to Pamphylia and Fragua and other places. He was prevented. In the middle of the night, he had a vision of a man from Macedonia.

Carey Nieuwhof: I knew enough about the New Testament to know that Macedonia was poor, just like these little churches were. The man in Paul's dream said to him, "Why don't you come to Macedonia and help us?" That's exactly what George had said to me on the phone five minutes earlier. We cried, we prayed. I called George back and I said, "We're coming." Then I told the Toronto people, "We're not." Here we are, 24 years later and we've seen God do just unbelievable things.

Carey Nieuwhof: We've scaled all the barriers, the 200 barrier, the 400 barrier, 800 barrier, 1,000 barrier, multiple campuses. Now we're pushing 2,000, trying to figure that one out. Thank goodness, Jeff Brody's leading that. I share all those things in the Church Growth Master Class. I just wanted to say very clearly, it is not a guarantee of growth. Nobody can guarantee that. God gives the growth, but you can position yourself to facilitate it or you can get in the way. I've been spending 24 years trying to get out of the way.

JeremyMacDonald: Awesome.

Carey Nieuwhof: So as we wrap up, that's some of my story, but what has been your favorite part of being up here, at our church and seeing God move?

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, Carey, you told me that story when we had breakfast at the Grape and Olive in Orillia, and the thing from start to finish that drew my family to this place is this vision that God might do something through this church, that we might actually see people come to know Jesus that at this moment don't know him, to create a church that unchurched people would love to attend and then to get to lead them to Jesus is just such a white, hot vision that it makes decisions for us, it speeds things up for us, it draws I think people into leadership for us. Then I think people actually are coming to know Jesus. I think of Nancy's story.

Carey Nieuwhof: I was just going to say. You have to tell Nancy's story. That's where we're going to close.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, well, and it's just such a great journey to see. There's so many stories.

Carey Nieuwhof: Jeremy told me this story and I'm like, "I don't really believe it," but it's true. I've seen her video, her baptism video.

JeremyMacDonald: It's true. A year ago, this lady comes in for our baptism Sunday and needs to get baptized because she's accepted Christ. You can find her story on our website, because it was a part of-

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, we'll link to it.

JeremyMacDonald: Yeah, absolutely. She came out of an abusive relationship. She ended up having to have brain surgery, actually.

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow.

JeremyMacDonald: Her whole career, up until that moment, was as someone who did tarot cards and seances.

Carey Nieuwhof: In the occult.

JeremyMacDonald: In the occult. It was 100% an occultic career. People would call her for all sorts of different kinds of readings and crystal ball readings and she had, after her brain surgery, a near death experience, where she had this really, truthful experience of feeling like she was being led into the afterlife, but into hell. She would say she smelled smoke and hellfire and-

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, the nurse smelled smoke.

JeremyMacDonald: The nurse came into the room.

JeremyMacDonald: Wondering what was burning. For Nancy, that moment, she cried out to Jesus and her vitals came back, she came back to life and she realized and recognized in that moment, that Jesus had saved her, that she didn't deserve and yet Jesus had saved her life. For the last year, her story has been not only just following Jesus, but then desperately trying to tell everyone that she meets that the hope comes from following him.

JeremyMacDonald: Get this, she gets, you've seen this, she gets people calling, wanting readings. "Nancy, tell me about my future." She'll tell them, "Oh, I am so sorry. I don't do that anymore. To be honest, that's not where you find the truth, but I can tell you where to find the truth."

Carey Nieuwhof: That's unbelievable.

JeremyMacDonald: "Why don't you come with me to church?" She's brought dozens of people to Connexus. We just now know when she walks in with somebody that's new, we know the story.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, you know the background.

JeremyMacDonald: It's just a blast that we get a chance to celebrate. That's one, but that's somebody's life that's been transformed, because decades ago, there's a group of people willing to take a risk, willing to look beyond themselves and willing to actually sacrifice for this mission that God has laid on their hearts, on your heart, on the hearts of the people in those original churches. To be a part of that and to see now thousands and tens of thousands of people just here locally and then beyond, the opportunity that we get to hopefully help many more people come to know Jesus. It's the most compelling thing in the world.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, and that's a vision that I would have for every church leader listening and for every church, honestly, anywhere, any church, anywhere, is these original churches, nobody would have believed that they would happen. One of the great joys for me is that Phyllis and Jim and Kareen and Cora and Dave and Dave Shelswell, there are others who I probably just haven't got their name right now, but nobody would have ever believed it and it can happen. It can happen in your church and it's needed in your community and God can use you to do it. That's the hope is that you would just reach more people. If you can get your congregation out of its funk and have a white hot vision, that's what some of the course is about. Then if you can learn how to stop doing everything and how to delegate and organize and lead staff and lead volunteers and find the volunteers you're with and really lead at the level where you don't even know everything anymore ...

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm the worst guy to do a building tour of our broadcast campus, because people ask me all these questions. I'm like, "I don't know. I don't know. I was just the leader. I just raised some money and vision." You've got to get to that point where you're very strategic about what you know and what you don't know. It's like, "So Jeremy, what exactly do you do what Connexus? I know you're a campus pastor, but what else do you do," right? You have to get comfortable with that, that place. That's what all this is about in the Church Growth Master Class. Again, no guarantee of growth, but just if you do some of these things, you'd be amazed at what can happen. Jeremy, thanks.

JeremyMacDonald: Eh, thank you for the opportunity and thanks for letting me learn and honestly, for anybody listening, it's just a privilege. Carey's the real deal, and you really should, you should take this step. You should jump in and be a part of this course, because you're going to learn from somebody that lives it. It's the real thing and I hope it'll be helpful for you.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, that was a lot of fun. If you want to do the deep dive into this, head on over to churchgrowthmasterclass.com. Today is the last day to get it at this rate. The price increases tomorrow at midnight, and I would love for you to get in on everything. The Church Growth Master Class is the most comprehensive resources I've ever released on the subject of church growth. There's a start edition. There's an advanced edition. The starter edition, it can help you out if

you're like, "Wow, I sound an awful lot like those churches, all those years ago. Nobody wants to change. Nobody wants to grow. I feel like I got to put the paddles on this church." That is what the starter edition is about.

Carey Nieuwhof: Some of you have another problem. You're reaching new people, but you're not growing. You've been stuck at 100, 75, 50, 200, 500, 800, that's a huge barrier, for year and you don't know how to get past that. Well, we address that in the Church Growth Master Class as well. Head on over to churchgrowthmasterclass.com today while you can still get this introductory pricing, which is going to disappear tomorrow. If you haven't yet checked out Pro Media Fire, listeners of this podcast get 10% off for life. Go to promediafire.com/carey and get some media reaching your community today. They will do all your graphic design, all your videos, etc, etc, and do such a good job.

Carey Nieuwhof: Hey guys, if you subscribe to this podcast, you get it absolutely free and that's what I'd love for you to do. I hope this episode has really helped you. We have a new one coming down the pipe next week with Margaret Feinberg and I had a lot of fun with this conversation. We talked about why writing is now 95% marketing and how do to it well, connecting with your audience. She's got a number of best selling books. She's sold millions of books. It's going to be a lot of fun. Here's an excerpt from next week's episode.

Margaret F: Everybody I believe has a creative window. Even if you don't consider yourself creative, you are creating. Whether you are making architectural designs or whether you are building spreadsheets, it does not matter. I believe that every person has a certain rhythm to their creativity and for me, my strongest days are Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, if I've had a weekend off. I may write for 12 or 14 hours on a Monday, 12 hours on a Tuesday, 10 on a Wednesday. Honestly, by Thursday, I'm no good anymore. I may be able to write three or four hours, but then I shift sides of my brain into the editing mode and then on the last day of the week, I'll do more administration, task-oriented. I coordinate, maximize my creative writing time for my creative peak time to get the most out of it and I can be the most efficient.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's next week on the podcast, really looking forward to my conversation with Margaret. It was really powerful. When somebody has sold millions of books and tells you how to do it, I get that question all the time, as an author myself. Like, "How do I sell books? How does that work? etc, etc." you don't want to miss it. Anyway, guys, thank you so much for listening. By the way, I don't think I mentioned transcripts. We have them along with show notes, so you can go to careynieuwhof.com/episode266 or just head on over to leadlikeneverbefore.com and type in "Jeremy MacDonald": M-A-C-Donald, MacDonald, and you'll see the show notes for this one.

Carey Nieuwhof: We will catch up with you next week and in the meantime, I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before.

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