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. Now, your host, Carey Nieuwhof.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, hey, everybody, and welcome to episode 269 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof. I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. I got to say thank you. I just want to start by saying thank you to all of you who continue to share the message. We just hit an all-time record week last week before I recorded this. I think we had 69, almost 70,000 downloads in a single week. We're seeing over a quarter million a month, and that is because you are getting the word out. I just want to thank you so much for that. Really, really appreciate it.

Carey Nieuwhof: To all of you who are leaving ratings and reviews, thank you. We are pushing almost 1,000 right now on iTunes, and Craig, you said, "I can't believe this is free. Carey gives us a front row seat to the thought leaders of our generation. Thanks is inadequate." Craig, thank you so much for that. I really appreciate it. Somebody who didn't leave a name, just a username, said, "Not only knowledge, but application." You said that the podcast is an absolute must for anyone who wants to grow in their leadership skills or simply just grow in life skills. I'm so glad you picked that up because today, we're talking about marriage, a real, honest look at marriage with Dave and Ann Wilson. I think you're going to love this one. So, talk about life skills.

Carey Nieuwhof: You know what I've discovered just as a leader, honestly? The people you hire, your team members, volunteer staff, they bring who they are in to everything they do. So, I mean, you hire the whole person, not just somebody who shows up 30, 40, 50 hours a week. If things aren't going well at home, guess what? You've got problems at work. So, that's why I like to bring you the wide range of things, and then we'll share one more review as well.

Carey Nieuwhof: "One of the best leadership podcast out there," and this is by it looks Jo Ruce, I don't know. "I always love listening to each new episode that comes out. There's such a wide variety of subject and opinions as it relates to leadership in the church. Some I agree with, and some I disagree with, but it really looks at things from every angle, and gives you a well-rounded approach to leadership," and you also appreciate how I ask the questions.

Carey Nieuwhof: Hey, I'm glad. I don't expect you to agree with everything. Listen. Sometimes I don't agree with everything, but isn't it a great thing that we can have a place where we can bring a variety of opinions to bare and have a thoughtful conversation? That's it. I'm always looking for the story behind the story. So, guys, for all your sharing, ratings, and reviews, thank you so much. It is much appreciated.

Carey Nieuwhof: I also really appreciate our partners and I'm so glad to have TrainedUp back on the podcast. They've been a partner of ours for a long time. They're helping so many churches get so far ahead. Now, they're part of ServeHQ. What they do, this is pretty cool, TrainedUp by ServeHQ equips your volunteers and leaders with simple online video training. It's a library now of over 800 videos. It covers everything your church could need. For example, training on kids and youth ministry from abuse prevention to how to teach the bible to kids, to how to interact with parents on a Sunday morning, and a whole lot more, training for Sunday morning teams like your worship team, greeters, guest services, ushers, production team, security. There are small group leader training, care and counseling training, and a whole lot more.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's a pretty comprehensive approach, and they've built in some really simple features to customize their training or frankly, you can create your own. So, it can be a turnkey solution or you can customize it to the nth degree. You don't need extra cameras. You don't need extra software, and you can try it for free for 14 days by simply going to ServeHQ.church. So, try TrainedUp for free to train your volunteers at ServeHQ.church.

Carey Nieuwhof: Also, we do live in the age of video as I leaked here recently. Do you know some of these episodes are now on YouTube? Yeah. If you head on over to Carey Nieuwhof at YouTube, just my full name, you'll see it there, and we are going to be adding more of those in the future because guess what? Video is the future. We live in a media generation, but the challenge is for a lot of churches and a lot of businesses, it's like, "Great, but we can't afford. We don't have anybody who can do that, and we can't afford anybody."

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, that's why you need to learn about Pro Media Fire. So, whether you have a budget for this or whether you think, "I really don't have a budget for this," check out Pro Media Fire because they have custom graphic designers and video editors who for a very low monthly fee basically become your team at a fraction of the price it would take for you to hire somebody for this, even part-time.

Carey Nieuwhof: So, if you need some fire for your content or your social, check out Pro Media Fire. The listeners of this podcast, guess what? You guys always get the benefits. You get 10% off plans for life, not for a year, forever, by going to ProMediaFire.com/Carey, C-A-R-E-Y. So, go to ProMediaFire.com/Carey, and make sure you get 10% off for life, and get into the 21st century. That's always a good thing when that happens, right?

Carey Nieuwhof: So, I'm super excited to bring you Dave and Ann Wilson today. They've got a brand new book. It's called Vertical Marriage, and they are so honest in this interview. I've been married, actually, the week I'm recording this 29 years. That's right. I think anybody who's been married for more than a couple of minutes will tell you it is a journey, for sure, and we've had a journey. Dave and Ann, Dave's one of the founding pastors at Kensington Church, an awesome church in Detroit, Michigan, they tell a really honest story, and it gets pretty raw and pretty real. Sometimes just knowing that you're not alone is half the battle, but they also provide some real help, and I think some real hope. So, super excited to have Dave and Ann Wilson from Kensington Church. Their book is called Vertical Marriage.

Carey Nieuwhof: Somewhere in this interview, Dave tells a story of saying to Ann, "I'd rather be dead than married to you." So, I got to tell you, it's unbelievable. I'm so thankful for their transparency. You know what? If you've been in love for more than 20 minutes, you know the mixture of emotions that happen. So, anyway, without further ado, let's jump in to my conversation with Dave and Ann Wilson.

Carey Nieuwhof: Dave and Ann, welcome to the podcast. It's good to have you guys.

Dave Wilson: We are glad to be here.

Ann Wilson: It's so good to be here.

Carey Nieuwhof: Coming to you live from your kitchen. Is that correct?

Dave Wilson: We are in our kitchen, our newly ... No. It isn't remodeled.

Ann Wilson: No.

Dave Wilson: Actually, my wife wants to remodel it. That's what we're saying.

Carey Nieuwhof: Aha! There you go.

Ann Wilson: It's a sunny day, so it's good to be with you.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, it's great to be with you, too. So, you got a brand new book called Vertical Marriage. You've already been on the Today Show, you've been on Fox News, you're on Syndicated Podcast. Well, I guess podcasts aren't syndicated, are they, but Syndicated Radio, and then the podcast that comes out of that. Why did you write the book, and why did you write it now?

Dave Wilson: I would say we wrote it to get on your podcast. That was our hope.

Carey Nieuwhof: Mission accomplished. You need a bigger mission than that. I can tell you that.

Dave Wilson: Well, now, I don't know what to do from here. We just hit the ball. So, it's interesting. The book came out of one of the worst, if not the worst moment in our marriage, and when it happened, I honestly had a thought in my head the night it happened, nobody will ever hear the story. It will just be one of these secret little private valleys that we're going to walk through, but we'll just keep it to ourselves. That's honestly what I thought that night when it happened. Yet, you know how God works. He loves to use our pain. He wants to meet us there, and then he likes to use it with others, and we found that people connect with us better through our pain and through our victories.

Ann Wilson: I think, too, that Dave and I started speaking for Family Life Weekend to Remember marriage conferences almost 30 years ago, and we started sharing some of our struggles. What we found was that people resonate with the pain and the struggle that we went through, and we're so surprised that people that people were finding hope in it like, "Whoa! If you guys have gone through this and you've made it, maybe we can make it, too," because the truth is everybody has some struggles in marriage.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, and give us a little bit of context with that. So, you've been married how many years now as of right now?

Dave Wilson: I hope I get this right.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, yeah. Oh, this is a test. This is a test, Dave.

Dave Wilson: I was going to say 40, but it's 39 in about three weeks.

Ann Wilson: Yup, May 24th, 39 years.

Carey Nieuwhof: All right. So, you have some street cred there. This isn't like, "Yeah, we've been married three years. We'll tell you all about it."

Ann Wilson: Oh, that's good. Is that code for "You're old"?

Carey Nieuwhof: No. I've been married 28 years. So, there you go. Almost 29 next month, but you've got some history there. It's really funny because I agree. I tried to sign up for a different plan, where it's like, "No pain in my life, please," but apparently, God does not like that plan or at least moved me to another one. So, here we are, but you're speaking on marriage for Family Life. You're involved in ministry, and we've got a lot of marketplace leaders listening, but also a lot of church leaders listening. I think when you're in that public eye, particularly in the context of ministry, people expect you to have your stuff together, don't they?

Dave Wilson: They sure do. When we got married, we thought we would have our stuff together. We actually went to the Family Life Weekend. I remember that we speak for an hour. We went to it as an engaged couple, two weeks before our wedding pretty much because we were told ... I was in college, Ann was a freshman, I was a senior, we were told, "You can't get married without some preparations."

Dave Wilson: So, our big preparation was 48 hours at a weekend retreat, which was actually good, but we sat there the whole weekend with probably what? About 700-800 couples in this ballroom in a hotel in Chicago, and we didn't really take very many notes because we thought, "How hard can this be? We love each other. We love Jesus."

Carey Nieuwhof: "How hard can this be?" I love that.

Dave Wilson: Exactly. We're going into ministry, so it will be easier for us because we're going to be full-time ministers. We honestly thought it won't be that hard. Two weeks later, we got married, and we found out how hard it was.

Ann Wilson: I think that we just thought, "We love Jesus. He'll solve all of our problems," without really regarding the pain of our past, all the baggage that we were carrying into our marriage. We just thought, "Oh, that won't affect us," and boy, were we wrong. Jesus was in the midst of it, but he also wanted to do a lot through that and heal a lot of our past pain.

Carey Nieuwhof: Were you pretty hopeful moving into the marriage as well, Ann, from your perspective?

Ann Wilson: Oh, yeah. I just thought, "I married the best man on the planet. This guy is going to fulfill all my dreams. He's going to lead me spiritually."

Dave Wilson: She got that right, by the way.

Ann Wilson: So, I was so super hopeful like, "This is going to be amazing. We're going to impact the world for Jesus, and it will be unbelievable."

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow! So, what happened? I mean, you seemed like you had a perfect honeymoon because I've read your book, but Dave, nine months into the marriage, you apparently were thinking you'd rather be, am I quoting right, dead than married to Ann? Is that the quote? "I would rather be dead than married to you."

Dave Wilson: Oh, you had to bring that up, didn't you? Yeah. Again, that's another one of those things I thought the world will never hear.

Ann Wilson: Wait! I need to tell this one because here's what happened. We were fighting a ton. We're on staff with crew.

Carey Nieuwhof: So, this is nine months into your marriage, right?

Ann Wilson: Yes. We're at the University of Nebraska as athletes in action representatives working with college athletes on the campus, but we were fighting every night. So, this one night, it's 3:00 in the morning and Dave is not in bed. So, I go looking for him and I find him down in our office. He has the bible on his lap and I'm thinking, "Oh, good! At least he's in the bible. Maybe Jesus can help him."

Ann Wilson: I said, "What are you doing?"

Ann Wilson: He goes, "Oh, I'm just sitting here reading Paul's words. He says, 'To live is Christ, and to die is gain.' I just told God, 'God, I'd rather be dead than to be married to Ann,' to you." It's what he said, "I'd rather be dead than to be married to you." Carey, who says that out loud?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. Well, at least you were quoting the scripture. That makes it somewhat acceptable, right?

Dave Wilson: I mean, it's crazy to think about that, but we were told before we got married that you should share every little, tiny, minute detail with each other. So, I thought I need to share exactly what I'm feeling right now, not knowing how stupid that was. That was just one of those things I should have kept to myself. I mean, here's the amazing thing, Carey. If you think about it, we're laughing now, but I actually mean it.

Dave Wilson: I mean, that's how desperate I felt. I was so disappointed, so discouraged. Here we are seven, eight, nine months into our marriage. We're faking it. We're doing ministry. Actually, we're leading a marriage bible study for college athletes about marriage, and ours is in the tank. So, we'd walk in there, and I don't know how many people do this in ministry, but we just put on a smile, and we didn't share our struggle. We kept it secret. We went home and just fought.

Dave Wilson: So, I was like, "I can't believe this is this hard. I married the wrong person. I'd rather die," and I meant it. I was just like, "This is never going to get better. Let's get out of here."

Ann Wilson: Well, and it's so interesting, too, because that marriage manual that we got in Chicago at the Weekend to Remember, we pulled it out because we were like, "What was in that manual? What is God's plan for marriage because we don't know what we're doing?" We pulled that out and we started teaching these couples. It actually brought us a lot of healing. We did a lot of work through that, and we got through that season of pain. We ended up sharing with these couples that were married, these college athletes not even realizing they were going through just as much pain as we were.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. You're not alone, and I mean, I'm glad all these years later you can laugh at it, but it wasn't funny at the time. What were some of the conflict points in those first seven, eight, nine months that you would just bump in to? I mean, just to be real because there's a lot of people who are right now listening to this, and they're leaders, and they've got this public image, but on the inside, and listen, Toni and I, my wife and I, we've been there, too. I mean, you're leading publicly, but you feel like you're collapsing privately. What were some of the tension points that you had?

Dave Wilson: I mean, we didn't realize early in that first year in sharing or leading a bible study for married couples that the best thing we can do is share the struggles. So, we really did start to share the struggles. I mean, one of the big ones and we write about it in the book, we do a whole section on conflict. I was conflict-avoider. I hated conflict. I didn't know this going in to my marriage, but I brought in a history in my family. My mom and dad were divorced, both alcoholics. My dad had affairs. He was an airline pilot. He used to take me on trips with his girlfriends when I was a little boy not knowing this is my dad's girlfriend. I barely remember it, but all I do remember is mom and dad would fight. Dad was not a happy drunk. He was a mean drunk. So, the fights got loud, and I would run to my bedroom and hide. It ended in divorce. So, here you are, you get married years later thinking you avoid conflict at all cost because it ends bad.

Dave Wilson: So, again, we didn't talk about this before we got married, which is ridiculous. We should have. Ann and I would get in a conflict, and I would literally get up and walk out of the room because I'm like, "I don't want to deal with this."

Ann Wilson: I had no understanding of where in the world he could be going because I come from a family that we dealt with conflict quickly, and not always ... I wouldn't say it was always healthy because we were loud and we would yell, but Dave would get up and walk out of the room. The first time this happened, I was shocked and I yelled at him and I said, "Come back here, and fight me like a man, you chicken!"

Dave Wilson: That's exactly what she said.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's phenomenal.

Ann Wilson: Not realizing how that would impact Dave as a man or anything. We were a mess. I think the other thing that we really struggled with, we both had sexual past. I have sexual abuse in my background. So, just bringing that into the relationship, too, I was young, I was only 19. I felt super insecure. I wondered if Dave was comparing me to other women that he had been with. So, there were just a lot of trust issues. Dave had a girlfriend that cheated on him, so it was hard for him to trust me. We had no idea that all of that would impact us so much.

Carey Nieuwhof: You really do bring who you are into what you do. Andy Stanley says, "There's no marriage issues. There's just people issues, him and her, and they bang up against each other."

Ann Wilson: Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof: Do you agree with that? I mean, I'm not asking you to publicly disagree with Andy Stanley, but I'm just saying I found that particularly helpful in my own understanding of what's going on in our marriage.

Dave Wilson: For us, and I think a lot of couples face this, you think that stuff won't come in to your marriage. I don't know why we had-

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. You think you're bulletproof, right? It's this idea, "I'm going to be a leader. Nothing bad is ever going to happen. I'm going to get married. It will be the best marriage ever."

Dave Wilson: Yeah, and then you look at each other and like, "What in the world is in that bag?"

Dave Wilson: It's like, "Well, that's who I am. I just carry this in."

Dave Wilson: You're like, "No. I didn't see that before. I don't want it."

Dave Wilson: One of the things we've enjoyed over the years even though it's been hard is unpacking that luggage together. The covenant of marriage says, "I'm going to stay here no matter what, and this is going to be hard, but let's figure it out." So, here we are 30, almost 40 years later going, "Okay. We didn't think we'd make it, but it was worth the struggle." I'm not saying the struggles are over, but it was worth it, and it is worth it.

Ann Wilson: I think even dealing with some of our sexual pain and past, I feel like I totally know who Dave is, and I'm not saying that we got into all the details of that, but I'm saying I know where he comes from, I know what he's been through, and I still love him in the midst of that. That was hard for me at first, but there's something about the gospel of Jesus coming in to our situations and he exposes all of our sin, all of our dirtiness, and yet he still says, "Well, I see that, and I still love you, still going to die for you." I think that's the beauty of marriage that we can see each other fully and still love one another.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. Sex and you've got a section in your book on sex, but talking about bringing those issues into the marriage. What were some key? We all bring stuff into the marriage, whatever that is, but when it comes to sexuality, how did you navigate that? Because that is ... Sexual sin, and I always teach it this way, sexual sin is not unforgivable, but it just carries baggage for some reason like no other sin in your life really does. People say, "You can recover from bankruptcy fairly easily," it's still hard, but sexual sin for some reason just seems to have an extra degree of difficulty around it. So, to the extent that you're comfortable sharing, how did you navigate those tensions that you brought in to the marriage?

Dave Wilson: Well, I was just thinking, Carey, I'm glad we're 10 minutes in and we're already talking about sex. So, thanks for that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. You might as well, right? You brought it up. You brought it up.

Dave Wilson: I know. My wife brought it up. It's probably a good thing, right? No. It is interesting. Like you said, we did a whole section in the book because-

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, you did.

Dave Wilson: ... so many struggle in this area, and we did, and have as well. Well, the interesting things, when we went to write the book, and you're a writer, you know how you lay out a book concept and idea and chapter by chapter. We did that. We went away and we both had our laptops and I'm like, "Okay. I'm going to write this chapter. You go write that chapter because we've been speaking around the country about marriage, and we had what we want to say. This is funny. Ann did know that as I'm working on my Google Docs, I can pull up her Google Docs and see what she's writing, right? She doesn't even know I could do this. She's out on this deck, and I looked out there and I'm like, "Wow! She is going after ... I can't believe she's typing away on her thing."

Dave Wilson: I pulled up the Google Docs, and I see this chapter title we'd never talked about. I don't even know what it means. It says, "Dave's Neck Problem," right? I'm like, "What is she writing? We haven't talked about it. What's Dave's Neck Problem?" So, I started reading this chapter about my struggle with looking at women, and pornography. As I'm reading this, I'm like, "Number one, this is never getting in this book. I am not letting anybody know about this struggle. This is a private little struggle that we worked through years ago. I'm not letting that happen."

Dave Wilson: So, at the end of that day, I'm like, "Why did you write that?"

Dave Wilson: She goes, "I think people need to know the real struggle that couples have, and we've had this struggle."

Dave Wilson: So, next day, I sit down to write my chapters, and I said, "Okay. I'm writing my side of that story." So, I wrote, "Dave's Neck Problem: Dave's Perspective." As you know, Carey, both of those end up in the book.

Carey Nieuwhof: I know. I got it right here. That's what it says. It's like, "Dave's Perspective, Ann's Perspective on Dave's Neck Problem". So, Ann, we'll go to you first. What was your perspective on Dave's Neck Problem?

Ann Wilson: What was interesting, we were in Florida on a beach, and we were talking on the beach, and as we're talking-

Dave Wilson: First year of marriage?

Ann Wilson: Yeah, first year of marriage. I'm realizing, "Whoa! My husband has a serious neck problem," in that every time a beautiful young woman in her bikini walks passed, he cannot stop his neck from turning and watching her go all the way down the beach. I'm standing right in front of him. I said, "Really? Really? Are you doing this right now?"

Ann Wilson: He said, "What?"

Ann Wilson: I go, "I'm standing here talking to you, and you're watching all these women on the beach. That makes me feel so insecure anyway."

Ann Wilson: He goes, "I don't do that."

Ann Wilson: I said, "Dave, I'm watching you."

Ann Wilson: So, it was interesting.

Dave Wilson: Yeah. I denied it initially. I honestly didn't realize I had a problem.

Carey Nieuwhof: I was going to say you didn't think you had a problem.

Dave Wilson: Didn't even know. I didn't even know. Then when I went to write my chapter, that's the first paragraph. I said, "I think a lot of guys think that's normal," like, "Hey, I'm a guy. I look at women. What's the big deal?" Then as Ann confronted that, I start to realize, "Oh, my goodness! She is right. I really do do this." So, it was the first time I think in my life I said, "Okay. I've got to deal with this temptation and really sin." So, it was a great thing in our marriage. It was very, very difficult, but I'm like, "Okay. How do I attack this?"

Dave Wilson: Looking back now almost 30 some, almost 40 years later, again, I'm not saying that thing is gone, that I never struggled with that, but, again, in the chapter, then I went through the whole journey of my life to the issue with porn, which a lot of pastors don't want to talk about, a lot of men and women don't want to talk about, and I just thought, "I got to talk about it. It was real in my life. It was a struggle. I have victory. Here's how."

Dave Wilson: I just wanted to help couples and men and women, husbands and wives be able to be honest with one another and say, "If you never talk about this, you're never going to win. As long as it's in the dark, the dark wins." The second you bring it into the light, victory, healing can start to begin. I had kept it in the dark for decades. So, now, it's like, "Okay. Here we go." It was hard. It was dark days in our marriage as we confronted this, but it brought healing as well.

Carey Nieuwhof: So, how did you stop the neck from turning and your eyes from wandering, and then talk a little bit more about porn, and then, Dave, I want to hear from you, and then, Ann, I want to hear from you on that.

Dave Wilson: Well, I mean, there's a lot of self-help, "You can do this. You can do that." I really believe for me, and it's what vertical means in vertical marriage is I had to take it to Jesus. I really had to repent, and own it up as a sin in my life, and go to him and say, "Okay. I'm going to start a journey for you to change my eyes, change my ..." It's really your heart. So, step one was talking to God about it. Step two is getting some guys in my life who I can be real with, who could hold me accountable, and we started walking the journey together. I'm still walking it with those guys. It's pretty cool now. I get to walk it with my three sons in this area of life.

Dave Wilson: Again, I'm not saying that's a perfect thing, but it's something we have to talk about now as a father-son. These are all grown men with wives and grandkids now for me, but man, that was a big step to say not only am I going to be honest with Ann and tell her, which for a long time I lied to her. I said, "I'm fine. I'm not struggling," and then when I told her, that didn't go well because that was hard for her to hear, but that's where it started. I had to bring it into the light with Ann, then with some men, and then just started to get some healing to say, "Okay. What's really at the root of this? Why am I doing this? Why am I searching for this instead of finding intimacy in my own marriage?" So many guys, and not just men, but women struggled with this as well, and never get to the root. As I start to get to the root, I mean, it connected all the way back to my dad issues, my broken family issues, all that stuff.

Carey Nieuwhof: I was just going to ask you. What did you think the root was for you?

Dave Wilson: I really think it's something that's not easy today. I have a struggle with intimacy with people. It's really easy as a pastor to stand on the stage in front of hundreds or thousands of people and appear very intimate because you share ... At our church, we're known for being vulnerable and transparent, and yet, I'm not vulnerable and transparent in my own kitchen.

Ann Wilson: I cannot believe you're talking about this.

Dave Wilson: I can't believe I'm saying this either, but it's real.

Ann Wilson: Because this has been something in our marriage that's been big. Even our sons have said some stuff to Dave like, "Dad, I want to know you. I really want to know you."

Dave Wilson: Like, "The congregation knows you better than I do." It's almost like I'm more vulnerable in a sermon illustration than I would be in the family room. I find it easier to be vulnerable on stage than sitting across the couch from my wife or my son.

Ann Wilson: ... or at the kitchen table with us.

Dave Wilson: Yeah, and that's a scary place to go. I think the porn thing was an escape. It's superficial. You think you're intimate, but it's just an escape. So, I had to get to the root of that and say, "Okay. What are you doing here? You got to take some courageous steps to be intimate in real life rather than in fake life."

Carey Nieuwhof: I want to thank you so much for sharing that, and I'll just chime in here. This is your interview not mine, but that's also an issue for me. It's much easier for me to be transparent publicly than it is privately. That's something my wife and I are working with. I have a fear of intimacy. I don't know 100% where that comes from, but for real, for real, for real, that's a thing. Thank you. Thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof: Ann, your perspective on all that? How was it when Dave told you, "Yeah, I'm looking"?

Ann Wilson: I was so upset, so broken, so hurt because I felt betrayed. I felt like, "Wow! You lied to me," because I could tell something was up. I could tell there was a wall up and I couldn't define it, and I kept saying, "I feel like there's something separating us."

Ann Wilson: He'd say, "No. We're good. We're fine."

Ann Wilson: So, finally, when it came out, I felt like, "Whoa! You not only did this, but you've always been lying to me," which was a double hit to my heart, and I didn't respond well. I yelled. I was shattered by it. It brought out all of my insecurities. I also have sexual abuse in my background with different people. So, talk about bringing up stuff where you feel like as a woman, you're just an object or as a woman, you've had abused. So, this almost felt like another betrayal with that because it was sexual in nature.

Ann Wilson: So, I really found myself going to God and saying, "Are you seeing this? Are you seeing what's going on, Lord? Because I need your perspective," because it really did shatter my self-esteem. I think we live in a culture where as women and men now, there's such a comparison. There's so much on the internet where we're constantly comparing ourselves feeling inadequate and not enough. So, of course, that brings up all those insecurities. That was a great journey for me in discovering my own identity of who I am apart from the physical realm, apart from all of what the world says is beauty, and that was a great journey for me to go on with God because he's saying, "No. This is who you are, Ann. This is who you are, not just a woman of flesh, but you are a warrior for me. You are my beloved daughter. You have a place in the kingdom. I have gifted you."

Ann Wilson: So, it was this great truth and identity where I feel like there's such a spiritual warfare in this where Satan is continually telling us lies that we're not enough. So, I think what happened for me, and it took me a while, didn't it, that I could be Dave's partner in it of saying, "How can I help you? What can we do? How can we talk about this as partners?"

Dave Wilson: Yeah. I would just add, I don't want anybody to think we solved this in a couple of months. It was years, not just me getting victory, but us getting-

Ann Wilson: Becoming partners.

Dave Wilson: Yeah, becoming partners in it. It was really hard. I talk to a lot of people, and especially pastors, it's an area in Christian leadership that's often a secret. We're up there leading a congregation or leading a community, and we wanted to be our leadership as an overflow of our heart and our walk with God, and I think that's what the people want. When you've got something like this going on or your marriage is really in trouble and you won't ever deal with it, you're up there faking it. At some point, it's going to be exposed. I think there's so many in Christian leadership that their marriages are really struggling.

Dave Wilson: It's one of the reasons we wrote the book. We said, "Man, you got to tell somebody. You got to be real, and meet God in the middle of this thing, and not only will he meet you in your marriage, he's going to make your ministry better because you're going to be authentic in front of your people, and it won't be just a sermon. It will be real life, and then the effect to the ministry will be an overflow because it's authentic and coming from your heart."

Ann Wilson: I think what happened for Dave and I, this was really, it was why we wrote the book because at 10 years into our marriage when Dave would be up there speaking, I would be rolling my eyes like, "Whatever." We were really struggling because I did think like, "Dude, you are not living this out at home." It was traumatic, and it was really an area and a time that we were in trouble."

Dave Wilson: I'll just add, Carey, I didn't want her to be that honest. Come on. Gee whiz!

Carey Nieuwhof: I want to get to your 10th anniversary, but you've mentioned a couple of times the sexual abuse that you experienced, and again, I don't want to ask anything inappropriate because there are thousands of people listening and that's their story, women, but also men. How did you move through that within the context of a committed relationship?

Ann Wilson: Well, it's interesting because I had told Dave about it when we got married. So, it wasn't a secret, but I had no idea how when we came in to marriage together, how it would affect me. We were in seminary together before we had kids, and we were taking some classes on how to do counseling. It's because we knew we would be in full-time ministry. So, really, as we went through this counseling class, that's when it all came out.

Dave Wilson: It became a counseling class for us.

Ann Wilson: Yes. I found myself reliving and going back into it, going through all the grief and anger, and telling Dave about it, but I'm not sure, Dave, that you really ... Do you feel like you really got it at that point?

Dave Wilson: No. I initially just thought, again, it's in the past, it's going to stay in the past, it really isn't going to have that much implication in the present. I was that naïve. I do remember reading Dan Allender's book, Wounded Heart.

Ann Wilson: Right. I had read that, and I asked Dave, "Please read this, so you get it."

Dave Wilson: That's when it hit me. He has a chapter in there for the spouse of someone that's been abused. He just basically says, "Wake up. This is going to be an issue. It doesn't just go away when you get married. She/He has brought that into your marriage, and here's how you need to respond." So, the first thing I needed to do was listen and say, "Tell me. I don't need details, but just tell me how this has affected you, and hurt you, and how I can help," and Ann started to share.

Dave Wilson: Again, I was like, my first thought was, "Well, get over it. It's 10 year, 20 years go," and yet, I was like, "No. You just don't get over that. That is not, 'Get over it.' It's like, 'We got to walk through a process together.'" So, now, I look back. Again, this was 30 years ago. I look back and thank God we walked through that together. That's the beauty and the pain, the victory and the darkness in the valley of marriage together, but it was hard.

Ann Wilson: It's this beautiful agony that we go through in marriage. What happened, too, as we got in to our physical intimacy, as we're married, as we get busy, as we're having kids, what happened was Dave wasn't as affectionate. So, sex, to me, felt like, "Whoa! I'm just an object." So, that brought up all the pain of feeling that as a kid growing up, feeling I'm just an object.

Ann Wilson: So, even that, I feel like there were times it would surface. Even I felt like when we started Kensington, I felt like I wanted to talk about this on stage. So, I'll never forget this day. I shared my entire story at church at Kensington. I felt this great relief in exposing it, of saying that God can meet you in the midst of that, he can heal you, it's not an overnight process, but in time, he comes in and just continues to heal those wounds.

Ann Wilson: Afterwards, I got this note from a woman and she said, "You glorified Satan today."

Carey Nieuwhof: What?

Ann Wilson: I was rushed. Yes. She just felt like by exposing it and showing what had happened in my life, it wasn't glorifying to Jesus, and nothing could have crushed me more because I felt like, "No. God gets the victory in this because he's our healer. He's the one that comes in. We expose the lie, we expose the sin, and yet, God comes in and mercifully restores us, and heals us." I feel like to keep it in the dark, really, just Satan can have his way to bring it out into the light, oh, it frees us. I feel like every time I have shared that, I have received more healing. If I can set someone else free through it, that would be the greatest thing that I could do.

Carey Nieuwhof: Two questions. The Dan Allender book, what's the name? We'll link to it in the show notes.

Dave Wilson: The name is Wounded Heart. I think it's The Wounded Heart.

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay. Wounded Heart. We'll link to that in the show notes. Also, this may have been years ago, so it may not be available, but is that message available when you've spoken or is message a time that you've told that story available?

Ann Wilson: Actually-

Carey Nieuwhof: Because we'll link to it.

Ann Wilson: Yeah, not that one because it was so long ago.

Carey Nieuwhof: It was a long time ago. Yeah, yeah, I know.

Dave Wilson: It was the '90s.

Carey Nieuwhof: That was the '90s.

Ann Wilson: I did just one a few weeks ago at church a little bit about that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, if we can get it, just check the show notes, listeners.

Dave Wilson: We can get that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, and we'll link to that. Obviously, we're not just talking about that, but I really appreciate you sharing that. Let's move forward to your 10th anniversary. You tell the story so well in the book. So, Dave, you're Mr. Romance. Tell us how you laid down the 10th anniversary gauntlet, and how awesome you were.

Dave Wilson: That was a pretty awesome night, I think. I'm starting to notice the cheapskate around here. So, to go to a nice restaurant and dress up and do the whole nine yards, and it's a long story, but bottom line is it was a 10-year anniversary, so I'm thinking our marriage is really great. We're going to go out and celebrate how great our marriage is. I had all these little surprises in the night. One of them was I gave the waiter 10 roses when we got to the restaurant and I said, "Hey, when I give you a look, just bring one rose over at a time." So, I gave him a look, and he brought a rose, and he laid it right in the middle of the table." That was year one. So, we talked about year one. Then I looked at him again and he brought another one. So, we did all 10 years one rose at a time.

Carey Nieuwhof: That was pretty romantic. You got some points for that.

Dave Wilson: Yeah. Listeners can take notes on that one. So, again, I'm sitting there thinking it's romantic, we're having a nice meal, and we're doing what Ann loves to do, talk, T-A-A-A-A-L-K. She doesn't want to talk. She wants to talk about our relationship. So, we're driving home, and I had one last little surprise, and that was to pull into the parking lot of this middle school where we had just signed a contract that we're going to rent their cafetorium to start our church in just a few months. Ann hadn't seen this place. It's about midnight, and I thought, "This will be fun. We'll pull in there. Nobody will be there. We'll park in the back of the parking lot, and we'll pray that God is going to just do something great in the school and start a church there." Then I thought it would be fun to just go parking.

Carey Nieuwhof: Parking? Yeah. There you go.

Dave Wilson: You know what parking is, right? They do that in Canada?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yes, we are aware of that. Yup. I know the term.

Dave Wilson: So, that was my idea. The scary thing was it's not going to go well. We're in a Honda Accord. So, there wasn't any room. Long story short, I leaned over to kiss Ann in the front seat, and she turns her head.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, boy!

Dave Wilson: So, I thought she just didn't know. I'm like, "Hey, I'm trying to kiss you." So, I tried again, and she definitely turns away. So, I'm just perplexed because it's been this unbelievable night, romance, the whole thing, and so I just stepped back and say what every husband doesn't want to ask, but I asked this question. I just said, "Is something wrong?"

Dave Wilson: She said, "Yes."

Ann Wilson: Well, it's interesting because Dave and I, at this point in our marriage, we had a four-year-old and a two-year-old. Dave was the chaplain for Detroit Lions, so he was on the road traveling with the team. We were just starting Kensington, and we had just started speaking for Family Life Weekend to Remember. We had a lot on our plate. Dave was gone more and more. Of course. We had this dream to start this church with two other couples. We're super excited about it, but I almost felt like, "Wait a minute. This was our dream together. You're off doing your thing, and I'm left here feeling like you're running off without me, and you're leaving me in the dust."

Ann Wilson: So, we're fighting a lot. It's so funny because Dave thought we had this great marriage, and I thought we are in trouble. So, on this 10-year anniversary, I did think, "Dude, you are awesome. This was amazing. You've pulled out all the stops," but when he went to kiss me, I thought, "Oh, I can't even go there." I have nothing. Dave thought our marriage was a 10. I thought we're a 0.5, honestly, a one, probably closer to a 0.5. I was even more mad that he didn't know we were there. I was like, "How do you not know how bad we're doing?"

Ann Wilson: So, when he said, "Is something wrong?" at first, I didn't want to talk about it because I thought, "Tonight was great. You put so much into it," but I also thought, "You're too late. You're too late."

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, wow!

Ann Wilson: So, I told him at that point, I just said, "Dave, I've lost all my feelings for you. I've got nothing. I've got nothing left." I was expecting him to get so angry. This was our pattern. He get defensive and he get angry, and I would get angry, and I thought, "Here it goes. Here it goes again," but this night, it went a little different.

Dave Wilson: Yeah. So, when she said, "I lost my feelings for you," I mean, that was the moment. I was like, "I never wanted to hear that ever from my wife and here we are." I knew, I could tell by the way she said it, this was not flipping. This has been brewing. All I had to do was just think back over the last few months, and trying to start this church and meeting with our core team, and leading this. I mean, I was just gone all the time. Again, she's right. I started to get defensive. I was going to prove to her that I was actually home more than she said because she's starting to share-

Carey Nieuwhof: Did you not pull out your calendar? Is that right?

Dave Wilson: I reached for it. I actually did. Back then, it was on a paper, in a Franklin Planner. You probably remember those.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Dave Wilson: It was in the backseat. So, I'm reaching back there, and she's sharing how her heart went from bitterness to resentment, and I honestly, and this doesn't happen very often in my life, but I heard the voice of God, and it wasn't an audible voice, just a nudge from the Holy Spirit that lives inside my soul and he said, "Shut up." It was that clear, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow!

Dave Wilson: It's like, "Shut up. Don't touch that planner. Listen." It was just two words, "Shut up." So, I didn't open my planner. She didn't even know I was reaching for it. I just pulled my arm back and I sat there, and I said, "Tell me more," and she did. Then I heard one more time. The Lord said one word and it was simply this, "Repent." Here's the thing. You're a preacher. You preach, I preach. I know what the word repent means. I know metanoia and the Greek. I know I've preached it. I've called people to repent.

Dave Wilson: So, it's really interesting. I knew in one word from God what he meant by this word in my life. Repent in my life was this. I was lukewarm. I was up in front of people speaking. I was up in front leading bible studies. I was doing chapels with the Lions' players, doing marriage counseling with the players, and my walk with God was almost nonexistent. I was opening the word of God for one reason, get a bible study, get a sermon, go give it or I'd be leading meetings, and I'd be praying on the run. I mean, I just hadn't been sitting and being intimate with God like I had for years. For decades, that was my daily routine. I tell you, I don't know how many pastors do this, but I was doing ministry for God and leaving God in the dust. It just was ...

Dave Wilson: You can get pretty good at it, actually. You learn how to do a good sermon and how to move a room, and you can do it without even God. That's what I was doing. So, here's what one word in my car that night meant. Repent meant if you think you can solve this marriage just you two horizontally, it will never happen. You have to put me first. I knew that in one word. This marriage has no hope unless Jesus really is what I say he is, the center and the foundation. I say it, I preach it, I'm not living it.

Dave Wilson: So, I knew in one word God was calling me back to him. Carey, I didn't think of this that night, but later, it hit me. What does he say in Revelation 2 to the church that lay out to see that, that he says, "You've lost your first love," and that's where I was. He says, "Repent, and do the things you did at first."

Dave Wilson: So, again, I didn't have that thought in my mind, but I knew I needed to repent right then and there. In other words, go vertical. Put him first, and then let's talk because we still have something to talk about, but we don't have hope without God's power. So, I, right there, said to Ann, I said, "Hey, you don't need to do this, but I do, and I need to do it right now."

Dave Wilson: She's looking at me like, "What are you talking about?"

Dave Wilson: I said, "I just need to do this."

Dave Wilson: I felt like I needed to be on my knees, which I don't always pray on my knees, but that night I felt like I need to be in full submission, full surrender. So, to this day, I don't know how I did it in the front seat of a Honda Accord, but I pushed the seat back, and I got on my knees on the floor board there, and put my elbows on the driver seat, and I just prayed out loud and I said, "God, I repent. I'm lukewarm. You're not number one. I say you are. I tell others you are. I tell others to make you number one, but you're not number in my life, and I need to put you back in control, and I need to serve you and only you, and I ask you to make me the husband that my wife longs for, and the dad my kids need. I surrender my life and my marriage back to you. Help me."

Dave Wilson: So, then I turned to Ann like, "Okay." I was talking. I turned not knowing because my eyes were closed, I looked over and she's on her knees on the front seat of the passenger side.

Ann Wilson: Well, it was interesting. When I saw Dave get on his knees and he started to pray out loud, I was instantly convicted. It's so interesting. I love Proverbs and the practicality of scripture because Proverbs, a verse in Proverbs says-

Dave Wilson: "A gentle answer-"

Ann Wilson: Yeah. I just forgot the verse. "A gentle answer turns away wrath." Dave's response wasn't in anger. He just said, "I want to hear your heart." So, that softened my heart, but then when I heard him praying out loud, I was convicted because I realized, I felt like God was saying to me, "Ann Wilson, you have been trying to find your life through Dave, and I never equipped him or created him to meet all of your needs. That's my job." I realized I had made Dave in our marriage an idol in my life. I had almost taken my eyes off of Jesus thinking, "If Dave, the pastor, would get his life together, I would be happy, and our family would be great if he would just get his act together."

Ann Wilson: I really realized it almost became my focus, my obsession like, "Oh, if he would just do this and that, we would be great, and I would be happy." I felt like God was saying, "No. That is not his job. That's my job. I'm the one that needs to bring that to you." So, I got on my knees and I said, "Lord, I've been in sin. I've made my marriage. I've made my husband an idol, and you are the source of my life. You are the source and meaning of my life, so I resurrender and put our marriage, my life on the altar, and you need to help us, Lord, because we give this all back to you. Make our marriage what you want it to be."

Ann Wilson: It was interesting. That was a pivotal point in our marriage, and the beginning of change. It didn't happen overnight. I wish it would just happened overnight because when you lose feelings, it takes a while to get those back. There's something about being in ministry, too. When you have a partner in ministry, there is a guilt factor that goes with that. You feel guilty about feeling like you need time because they're giving their time to God. So, you feel like you're-

Carey Nieuwhof: So, you're stealing from Jesus.

Ann Wilson: Yes. Exactly. You feel like you're in competition with Jesus and like, "Oh, he should always win." So, it's hard to know whether you should say anything or not.

Carey Nieuwhof: I don't want to sound trite. That's a powerful, powerful story, but I want to ask you guys because I think a lot of people listening have had moments like that, recalibration moments, but practically now, almost three decades later, what does that mean? How do you know God is first? Because in the same way that you realized in that moment you were lukewarm, I think it's really easy to trick ourselves or at least for me speaking personally that, of course, God is first. I mean, I sat in that chair this morning at 5:30 in the morning, and I read my bible, and I prayed, and I journaled, and I wrote down things I'm grateful for, but is God really first? What does that actually mean? What does that mean for you guys?

Dave Wilson: I mean, in the simplest terms, it would be not my will, your will be done. I mean, as trite as that even sounds, it's really a surrender daily then of, "It isn't about me, it isn't about what I want, it isn't even about what Ann wants or Dave wants, it's about what God wants for us in our marriage." In some ways, it's a resurrender daily, as you know. It's almost hourly. It's one thing to get on your knees in a car, in a dramatic moment. It's another thing to do that daily. One of the things that we started to do, which did changed us is we started to pray together daily as a couple. I was praying, she was praying. We were-

Ann Wilson: I'm going to admit this, too.

Dave Wilson: We rarely prayed together as a couple. I mean, our church probably thought we did, but we didn't. It's like a rhythm. We said, "We need to bring this in our marriage because that means we're going vertical, but now we're going vertical together," and that changed us.

Ann Wilson: I think there's a drift that can happen with our own lock with God and in our marriage. I think the world just pulls us apart. The world pulls us away from Jesus. The fact that you have that time with Jesus at 5:30 in the morning, I'm like, "Well, that is putting Jesus first," because you're hearing his call. You're spending time with him to make sure he's there. I think for Dave and I, we both drifted from that, even though as disciplines.

Ann Wilson: So, to pray together, what happened is the further we were going apart in our marriage and God, I didn't want to pray with Dave. Here's what I thought. I thought, "Well, if you're not going to initiate prayer, I'm not going to initiate prayer because that's your job."

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ann Wilson: So, then neither of us would pray. So, we go to bed in silence and isolation, but I felt like God was saying, "If I put prayer in your heart, then don't wonder about Dave. Just put your hand on him and pray. Who cares if he prays or not? This is about me and you, and your praying." I feel like the enemy hates it when we pray together. There's such a power and unity. When you don't like each other, it's hard to pray.

Ann Wilson: So, that was the first thing. We started to date weekly, and here, I loved that Dave did this because we would go out weekly, Carey. We had done this before, but we were getting lacks in it, but this time, we would sit down, and Dave hated this.

Dave Wilson: I hated it.

Ann Wilson: Here's what he would say to me. "On a scale of one to 10, how do you think we're doing in our marriage?" I'm telling you that's so courageous because he thought, "My number is always going to be higher, and your number is going to be less." Well, I'd give him a number every week, and he would say this to me, "How do you think we can get that number higher?" I mean, that's just boldness because it was-

Carey Nieuwhof: You hated it, Dave. Did you?

Dave Wilson: Well, yeah. I mean, I like going out on dates because we go get a meal, and go to a movie, and hopefully, come home and make love. That's what my great day would be. I realized after that night, she really longed to talk, and she wanted to talk about us. I'll tell you, I avoided it. Why? We've already talked about it. I'm afraid of intimacy, anyway. This is going to get intimate real quick, and it's not going to go well because she's going to think we're not doing as well as I do.

Carey Nieuwhof: You thought you would always be in trouble.

Dave Wilson: Always be in trouble. So, I was the guy that thought, "If you got to talk about it, there's something wrong. If you don't have to talk about it, we're great." So, I never talked about it. I'll tell you what, going on those dates, and we still do this, and I'm not kidding, we made it a weekly rhythm, which so many couples-

Carey Nieuwhof: So, you would ask for the scorecard, right?

Dave Wilson: Yeah. We're like, "Let's go out. Let's get a sitter. Let's make ..." I'll tell you, one of the quarterbacks that came in to Detroit Lions years ago, the first thing he said to me when he got here was, "Can you find me a babysitter? I need her every Monday night."

Dave Wilson: I go, "What for?"

Dave Wilson: He goes, "We date."

Dave Wilson: I go, "You date during the season?"

Dave Wilson: He goes, "We date, and every city I've been in, I get a sitter, and I want the same girl every Monday and I'm taking Jenny out."

Dave Wilson: I'll tell you, it's one of the best marriages I've seen in the NFL. Part of it was, "We're going to make this a priority even in a high-stressed job." It was the same thing for us. I mean, you talk about ministry. You talk about high-stressed job. Everybody wants your time and so many of us as leaders don't say, "Now, the most important person in my life is my spouse and even my children," right? So, we had to carve that out and say, "We're protecting this. I'm not going to go take a speaking gig that's going to give me a good honorarium in place of this. This is written in pen. It's not pencil. Other things are going to be moved." So, that was a priority that we had said was important but weren't living, and now, it had to be real.

Ann Wilson: The things that are important to us get our time. I mean, I work out, and that's always been a priority like, "I'm going to get my workout in." It's interesting how we can let things slide like that time with Jesus, that intimate time. Those relationships that are so important, we have to work at those to keep them vital and thriving with our walk with God, and our relationship with our husbands, and even our kids.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. What I said earlier about my time with Jesus, yeah, it is a daily rhythm, but sometimes I can still be a jerk. That's my challenge.

Dave Wilson: Yeah. Not me. We're never that way. Not us.

Carey Nieuwhof: No. So, almost four decades of marriage. Obviously, well, maybe it's perfect, but most of us who've been married even a long time, what are some of the challenges you continue to navigate, and how are you navigating them?

Dave Wilson: I think for me it's still a battle of the calendar and time. I can easily be drawn to sexier things, ministry opportunities, church things going on, and pull myself even away. I mean, we're empty-nesters. There's no kids living here anymore. It's just Ann and I, and yet, I can find ... You know what? The neat things about writing a book together is we did it together. 50% of the book is my words and 50% is Ann's words. Yet, so as we go around the country and talk about it, it's a blast to do together. We're doing the radio and podcast together. So, that's really been fun, but I know this. I can be pulled away and lured away in not ... I can say it again that she's my priority, and often neglect that.

Dave Wilson: It's really interesting. The thing that she experienced growing up in her family was not being seen. She was the youngest, and her brothers were seen, and her sister was seen, and she was missed, and here I am, her husband, not seeing her as well. So, it's a deep wound that really gets at her. A lot of couples have the same issue, a carousel around in their marriage and that's going to-

Carey Nieuwhof: I was going to say it's funny how 30 years later it's a different version of the same thing.

Dave Wilson: Yup.

Ann Wilson: Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof: I can relate to that. I can 100% relate to that. Ann, what would you say?

Ann Wilson: I think for Dave and I, we are really fortunate that God has called us into ministry together. One of the things that I've seen with so many couples that as our kids are getting older or their kids are leaving, they're wondering, "What's our mission? We were raising these kids together. That joined us. That combined our passions, but now what?" I think so many couples are wondering, "Well, what's our mission now?" I just feel like, "Oh, God so much for us as couples." So, that's not one of ours.

Ann Wilson: I think the thing that I will always struggle with in our marriage, even though I've realized that, I think it's really important for couples to recognize the pain in your past comes in to your present. So, recognize if you're struggling with your pain in your present, go back to the extension of what it's connected to because I always know that's going to be my little button of, "Oh, I'm not seen. Am I important? Do I matter? Am I here?" So, that's always mine. It's just helpful that we're doing it together now. I wonder about Dave sometimes like, "Oh, is that lure of ministry always more fascinating than me?"

Carey Nieuwhof: Whoa! Yeah. I think you've just owned a lot of ... I mean, Toni and I, my wife and I this week had a conversation, and that would be her complaint at the worst part of our marriage is that everything went out over her. It is not that same intensity, but I mean, the opportunities as you guys know, they come in every single day, and you're flying here, and you're flying there, and you got this, and you got that. It's like, "Do I really matter?" We were just talking about our rhythm this week and how we need to recalibrate, and the empty nest years are really interesting. We're just into them now, but you have a lot of time together as you know.

Dave Wilson: I know you've written about this. I think starters, entrepreneurs, business leaders, church planner starters that are catalytic and start new things, that can pull us. We get excited about that kind of stuff. If it has a little bit of success, it's like a drug. You're just addicted to it. You're like, "Come on, honey. Just come with me." She's over there going, and it could be the other way, it could be the wife doing this, but it's like, "Do I matter?" At the end of the day, we both know this, when it's all said and done, the thing that matters most is who's with me. If I left in the dust and I have accomplished all these great things, I mean, how many business owners would tell you that? "I was very successful. I lost my marriage, and it's empty, and it's no different-"

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, yeah. You know what's so interesting, Dave, is we know that. We know that, but it is ... Intellectual knowledge and heart knowledge are very different things, and the other thing, just for the free counseling session here that's happening, but for those of us who fear intimacy, activity is a great substitute and a great way to avoid it, right? You just keep that calendar full or full enough or you're alone. Go ahead, Ann.

Ann Wilson: I have a question for you two men.

Dave Wilson: Don't do this.

Carey Nieuwhof: Uh-oh! Here we go.

Dave Wilson: This is not your interview.

Ann Wilson: As a spouse, as a spouse of somebody that maybe that's hard for a guy or a woman to be intimate in their relationship, what do we do? What do you think would be the best thing to do to draw men out or women out into that area?

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, that's a great question.

Dave Wilson: I'm going to let Carey answer that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh! I'm like, "I don't know." It would be interesting to see what Toni would have to say. This is where my guy, my head goes. This is really ... Okay. We've all talked about stuff that we've never talked about before. So, this is good. Now, we're equal. I would say empathize with what I'm called to do. Don't see it as competition. See it as a compliment. Now, too much of it, disaster, but it is actually the meaning and the purpose of my life, and something that we have been called in to together.

Carey Nieuwhof: One of my great joys right now, Toni is a lawyer by practice, and she retired her practice a year ago, so that we could spend more time together as my life got fuller and busier, and we're heading off to London together next week, England. We've done trips together, and it's the most rewarding and meaningful thing in the world to do it, but just because you're together doesn't mean her love language is quality time. Mine is acts of service and words of affirmation. So, "I'd rather have you do something for me."

Carey Nieuwhof: She's like, "No. Just sit and be still and pay attention to me."

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm like, "Can we do something else?"

Carey Nieuwhof: So, that's the particular poison in our relationship. We're doing better at it, but I don't know that you solve that. What would you say, Dave?

Ann Wilson: That's interesting.

Carey Nieuwhof: What do you think would help you?

Dave Wilson: The thing that first came to my mind has been a struggle for us that I think we've seen victory in. We write about it in the book in the area of all I hear is boo. What I meant by that is there was a story in our marriage where we're talking to a women's group and I just basically said, it's a very long story, but the short end of it was I feel like as a man and a lot of men feel this, we get cheered everywhere we go as a little boy in sports or music or whatever it is. Somebody is cheering us, our mom, our dad, a teacher, a coach. We choose our wife, and because she says yes to marrying us, she's saying, "Of all the men in the world, I choose you," so it's another cheering, applauding. We get married. It's like, "This is awesome. I've got my biggest cheerleader. She's going to be there." I shared this at a public setting, and I'd never told Ann this. So, this didn't go well, but-

Ann Wilson: We were together.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, yeah. When you share publicly? Go ahead, Ann.

Ann Wilson: Yeah, and we were together and I was like, "Oh! What's he sharing? This is new. This is interesting."

Carey Nieuwhof: Uh-oh!

Dave Wilson: So, then I said, "So, then after you're married for a while, you come home and all you hear is, 'Boo! Boo!'" We look at each other, and we had a long talk after that little sermon. What ended up happening is it led us to a conversation that I really did feel that. I felt like everywhere I go, not everywhere, but most places I go, I get applauded, at the office, when I do a sermon, leading the church, bible study. People are saying, "You're the man. Good job. You're great." I come home and I felt critiqued. I felt like I disappointed her. I even said to Ann, I said-

Carey Nieuwhof: You feel like you're failing all the time.

Dave Wilson: Yeah. I said, "I know you love me-"

Carey Nieuwhof: Which perhaps you are.

Dave Wilson: "I don't think you like me." She looked at me like, "Well, I'm trying to make you better." So, all that to say this. I feel like when I'm being pulled and Ann is feeling left in the dust, when she actually affirms who I am, it pulls me back, and it's the last thing you want to do to somebody that seems like they're pulling away, but it's like, "Man, I see this in you. It's greatness. I see this." It's respect. It's like a magnet to a man.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's interesting.

Dave Wilson: You want to run home. You want to be with that person, whether it's another guy, a friend saying that or your wife. So, I found that when Ann approved me and cheered me, I don't want to run away from her. I want to be with her. Again, I know that's a simplistic answer, but it really does pull my heart back to her.

Ann Wilson: It makes you bring down walls, kind of. You feel safer to bring-

Dave Wilson: Oh, yeah, to be vulnerable and authentic because she's my cheerleader. She's my partner, and she isn't bullying when I'm coming in the door or saying, "There you go again." She's actually saying, "Way to go. How can I help you?" I want to say no to other things and say yes to her.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. Any other thoughts on that, Ann? That's good. Thanks for asking the question.

Ann Wilson: Well, I think for me as a woman, I'm a strong woman, and I had a fear of being a doormat, of not having a voice. I really did think I would see these things in Dave, and this is embarrassing to say for Dave, but I would think, "Whoa! I see who you are on the stage. I see who you are as a leader. Can that guy come and live in our house?"

Dave Wilson: She actually said those words to me once.

Carey Nieuwhof: I may have heard those words at some point in our 28 years.

Ann Wilson: I realized that that sounded like boo to Dave, but I was thinking, "Are you kidding me? I am helping you. I'm booing, of course. I'm pointing out the things that need to improve. Doesn't that motivate you?" Basically, no, that doesn't motivate any of us.

Carey Nieuwhof: No. It doesn't motivate me. Nope.

Dave Wilson: Hey, Carey. Carey, here's an amazing quote I just read today. Ann, you don't even know this. This is on Twitter. Somebody I follow on Twitter said this, "The flaws that she sees and the things that hurt her are the very things God most wants to address in you. Your spouse becomes a mirror through which you see where God wants to move next." Guess who tweeted that out?

Ann Wilson: Oh, is that the famous Carey Nieuwhof?

Dave Wilson: Yeah. Carey, that's-

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. You know what? That may have been after a very painful conversation with my wife, where the Lord kept saying to me, "Would you just look inside? Would you just take this one?" It's interesting because I think that is the power of a longterm relationship is nobody sees you more naked, nobody sees you more who you really are, and nobody has that kind of access where they can actually see, "Ah! This is perhaps." So, it was a lesson for me, man.

Dave Wilson: Oh, I mean, that is a great quote because it's so true. It's like God wants to sanctify us and he's going to use our spouse. It's a hard thing, but it's a beautiful thing.

Carey Nieuwhof: I was teaching myself with that tweet.

Ann Wilson: I love what Andy Stanley said. He said one time, "Your spouse should be able to know how much God loves them by the way you treat them." I thought, "Whoa! That is so good."

Dave Wilson: It was either Andy Stanley or me. I'm not sure. It might have been me.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's confusing sometimes, isn't it, to know who said it better. Yeah. So, man, this has been so rich, so rich, so rich. I know you help so many leaders, so many people, and giving people hope. You have raised several times, and I have lived in the tension myself of leading publicly while struggling privately. How did you navigate that? Because it got pretty tensed at times. You're leading marriage seminars, and planting a church while you're like, "I don't have any feelings for you anymore." How did that happen? How did you manage that tension? Because I don't sense hypocrisy. I sense real. Do you know what I mean? Maybe sometimes what we do in ministry publicly is what we want to be, and then we come home to who we are.

Dave Wilson: Yeah. That's a very good way to say it. I think we learned early the best way to do ministry is to be real and authentic. We've been told our book is too real, too raw. The first person who read it said, "Man, my marriage is a lot better than yours," which to us, and it was a really good friend, to us, that was a compliment.

Carey Nieuwhof: Good for you.

Dave Wilson: That was a compliment.

Ann Wilson: My dad, who is 90, he's been married 69 years, called me and said, "You're so mean to your husband."

Dave Wilson: So, all that to say I really believe, and it's really a goal. In every sermon, in every bible study, in anything we lead, we want people to feel that we struggle like they do. We're not in a different world, and because we're ministers or something, we're living in a higher plane. No. We have brokenness, and we struggle just like they do. At the same time, and I consciously think about this when I write sermon notes, it's like I also want them to feel like there's a power of God that's real in the middle of their struggle that I may not know, and that's what I want to know.

Dave Wilson: I want to know what vertical marriage really feels like in a home. So, sort of both. I always ... We say it this way at our church at Kensington. It's a value. We recognize and reveal our brokenness to point to the power of God. So, it isn't just we recognize and reveal it. That could be just the end like, "Okay. You struggle like me, but I have no hope."

Carey Nieuwhof: That becomes despair or, yeah.

Dave Wilson: Yeah, but at the end it's like, "You are like me, but you're not like me because you discovered a secret. You discovered, which isn't a secret, you discovered what the gospel can do in a man, in a woman, in a husband or a wife, in a family that's beautiful and I want that." There really is victory. Again, it's not happy, happy Jesus all the time, but in the brokenness, there's a God that's still there, and he can bring you through that, and it's going to be hard, but he's there.

Dave Wilson: So, that is what we've discovered is real ministry. People respond to that. That's what Jesus was on the cross. He was broken, and yet, that's our connection point with him that led us to victory.

Ann Wilson: I have an illustration of that. When I'm trying to learn how to cheer for Dave, and how to bring the gospel into my marriage of seeing my spouse, seeing Dave the way Jesus sees him. So, when I had gotten in this habit of booing Dave and critiquing him, thinking that that would help and motivate him, I decided to go to God and say, "God, what does this look like? Help me to not speak anything before I first take it to you," which is hard for me because I'm a verbal processor.

Ann Wilson: So, this one night, Dave came home and he said, "Man, I've been getting all this critique lately on my messages as I'm preaching, and as I'm leading. I just feel like I'm continually critiqued." I'm embarrassed to say this, but this is around that 10-year, maybe 12-years, I remember thinking, well, and I almost said it, "Well, if you'd spend more time with Jesus, your sermons would be better."

Carey Nieuwhof: Jesus juked him before Acuff came up with that. That's great.

Ann Wilson: I didn't say it. I took that thought, and I said, "Jesus, here's my question. Should I say it? If I should say it, should I say it now? If I should say it, how should I say it?" Just to give that, to bring God the vertical into it, first, say, "God, what does this look like?" I've had this thought come in to my mind, and I thought, "This is only God because God brought this to me."

Ann Wilson: I said to Dave, "Wow! I can imagine how hard it is for you, and the weight that you carry because you feel probably responsible for thousands of spiritual walks with God. People are putting their walk with God. You must feel the burden of people's spiritual walk is based on you."

Ann Wilson: I said, "What a heavy thing for you to carry."

Ann Wilson: It was interesting. I said that and he grabbed me. We were going to bed and he pulled me, and he hugged me, and he whispered in my ear, "You are my life."

Ann Wilson: I think about that like, "Whoa!" I think about the many times that I've critiqued him or I've said things that don't bring life, but as we go vertically to Jesus and say, "Lord, how can I encourage my spouse? What can I say? Should I say it, first of all? If I should say it, how would you say it?" I feel like that's so ... Jesus brings truth and life to every situation when we go to him first. It's not easy as leaders in ministry and pastors, but we carry so much weight in one another's worlds.

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm so glad you said that, "I'm a verbal processor." That is something I am actually going to adopt. That's so tangible because I know what I think after I say it, which is so dangerous sometimes. I mean, it makes you a good blogger, and I have decent Twitter, but a terrible human being sometimes. I think take it to Jesus before you say it out loud, and that is a really good refining thing. That is really good. Well, oh, yeah, is there a question about marriage you wish someone would ask you that nobody's asked?

Dave Wilson: Well, you've asked a few-

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, I've asked a couple. We've had a good time together.

Dave Wilson: ... that nobody really asks. I mean, it is really interesting. When we went on the Today's Show, it was a fun deal, and we didn't know anything. They wouldn't tell us any questions. Just show up. It's scary thinking millions of people are going to watch this, and yet, Craig Melvin, one of the hosts, his question at the very beginning was so insightful. I thought, "That's the question everybody is asking." He said this, "So, you get God in your marriage, and it all just works out. Is that how it goes?"

Dave Wilson: He was trying to understand vertical marriage, and in some ways, I think, "That's a good question," because it's really easy for people that even go to church just think, "Okay. I get God in my marriage, and what else? Because it doesn't work. Just add a little Jesus and my marriage is going to be good. I've tried that, dude. Come on. Give me something else because it's not working." Right?

Dave Wilson: I do think it's one thing to go to church, it's one thing to add Jesus to your life, it's another thing to surrender, and really say as we said earlier, "Not my will, your will be done. I really want to be the man you want me to be, God. I really want to be the wife and woman you want me to be, and I want to honor you, as scary as it may be, as hard as it may be, I really am going to put you first, and I'm going to put my agenda aside. I'm going to say, 'It's not about me being happy in this marriage. It's about me serving her, serving him, and honoring you in the process, and happiness will come from that, and if it doesn't, I'm not going to make it about me.'" That's a really hard thing to do because I always want it to be about me. Come on.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's a pretty good deal if you can make it all about you all the time. Isn't it, Dave? Ann, any question you wish someone would ask you that you don't get asked?

Ann Wilson: I think about young married couples. We have a real passion for pre-married, young married couples. I see women ... We live in such a consumer culture, where so many women are saying, "Oh, I can't wait to see what he brings me." You know what I mean? So, I wish women would say, ask me that question, those young married, "What is the one thing? What is that one thing that I should know as I come in to marriage?" It's really what you just said, Dave, like, "Oh, wouldn't it be cool for the rest of your life that you thought, 'Jesus, first of all, what are you giving me that I can bring to my spouse, to my family, to my friends?'" It becomes, "How can I serve?" rather than, "How will you serve me and how will you meet my needs?"

Carey Nieuwhof: That's really good. The other thing I would say, too, it's interesting that one of the critiques you got was, "Wow! Your marriage is a real disaster compared to mine," which I get. Sometimes I wonder, and this is not hopefully from a place where I'm judging other marriages, but I know that there are levels of intimacy as much as I have a few of intimacy. There are levels of intimacy and connection. It is easy. I feel like we are drilling down over the years to new depths, depths of relationship, depth of feeling, depths of oneness.

Carey Nieuwhof: The reality is you could stay up on the shallows. You could stay up on the surface, and just call it a day and go, "Yeah. We never fight. We don't argue," but you've only really, you barely started tapping in to what is there. As we go deeper and deeper in our relationship, in our life, and that's with God, but also with each other, it feels like, "Oh, yeah," and there's more struggle at this level, but it also is what makes life worth living, ultimately.

Ann Wilson: That's really good.

Carey Nieuwhof: I don't know if that resonates. That's my soul.

Dave Wilson: No. That resonates because one of the things I ... I think we've both been a little surprised at empty nest stage is how awesome it is.

Carey Nieuwhof: I know. You don't want to tell people with kids at home, but it's pretty cool.

Dave Wilson: Yeah. It is pretty cool.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's not about sipping piña coladas on the beach all day long. There's a mission. There's stuff to do. There's fulfillment. There's mission. It's exciting. To be able to do it with your best friend, it's pretty incredible.

Dave Wilson: I think back we almost missed it. We almost gave up.

Carey Nieuwhof: I mean, I take it it's axiomatic, but you guys but for your faith wouldn't be together today.

Dave Wilson: Yeah. You fight for it. It's worth it. It really is.

Ann Wilson: Really worth it. It's the beautiful egg in your marriage.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's the beautiful egg in your marriage. Well said. Well said. Okay. Where can people find you guys online and get the book? It's widely available. It's from Zondervan, but do you have a special site or anything that people can go to?

Dave Wilson: Well, obviously, they can get the book anywhere. Books are sold, but we have a website, DaveAnnWilson. Our Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, all the same thing, DaveAnnWilson, one word, and there's no E on Ann, just DaveAnnWilson. DaveAnnWilson.com, and then Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Then if they want to listen, we're on the radio everyday with Family Life Today Radio. That's also a podcast. They can just download the Family Life app, and listen to us talk to people about marriage and family and parenting, and you name it. It's a wonderful show to help families and help marriages.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, you guys have impacted tens of thousands of lives in Detroit through Kensington Church. I mean, I know I've been there to see you, but I was there 17 years ago as a young church leader trying to figure out how to do church back in the days sitting in the back row, taking notes. I just want to thank you guys for all that you do to help couples, but also the local church, and I think you helped me today. So, thank you.

Ann Wilson: Thanks, Carey.

Dave Wilson: Well, you've helped us a ton. I read everything and listen to everything you do, and it's a real blessing to us. Thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof: Appreciate you guys. Thanks.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, that was awesome, and that was real. Dave and Ann, thank you so much. Thank you so much for being so transparent. If you want more, everything is in the show notes, including transcripts. So, you can head on over to CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode269. You'll find everything there, including links to everything that Dave and Ann Wilson are doing, and the book, and so on and so forth.

Carey Nieuwhof: Next week, we are back with a fresh episode. Jenni Catron is coming up. I'm super excited to bring you a conversation with her, and we got some fun news, too. Yeah. I do a lot of speaking, and I have some friends who do speaking, and we're launching a Speakers Bureau this month. That's right. I'll tell you all about that in the next episode.

Carey Nieuwhof: Also coming up, we have Ken Coleman, Kevin Jennings, let's see, Sam Collier, Ian Morgan Cron is back with more on the Enneagram. We've got Ron Edmondson, who's now at Leadership Network, David Kinnaman, John Townsend, Christy Wright, Max Lucado, so much more. That's a good reason I think to subscribe. Here's another one. It's free. It's absolutely free. Don't forget before we go to check out Pro Media Fire because you can get 10% off all your video and graphic design needs for life by going to ProMediaFire.com/Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof: If you haven't yet tried Trained Up for free, you can do that today. You've been hearing about them for a long time, and you're like, "Ah, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know." Free trial, guys. 14 days. Go to ServeHQ.church, ServeHQ.church, and try volunteer training online for free for 14 days just because you listen to this podcast.

Carey Nieuwhof: So, here's a little snippet from next week's episode.

Jenni Catron: In that context, I also felt a lot of pressure to be more like the pastors around me because I was a bit of the outlier and being the one who's ... My spiritual gifts are leadership and administration. I mean, I'm going to build a plan, I'm going to figure out how to get a team to align, and help accomplish the vision. That is what I wake up thinking about. I was surrounded by all these pastors, and I felt like I had to be more pastoral, and I actually had one of our board members says, "Hey, Jen. We hired you to bring you, and you've taken some hits," because we had some people not very kind about my style and coming in as a female in that seat within the church, and was that okay. So, you've got all those kind of dynamics going on.

Jenni Catron: I took some hits over it. So, I felt like I had to become this other thing. I had to be more like the pastors that I was around, which is not bad, but it wasn't my best gift.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's not you.

Jenni Catron: It's not me. So, I think I had swung to that and I'd lost me.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, that's going to be exciting to have that conversation with you guys next week. Jenni is brilliant, and I just love the opportunity that we have to interview so many fascinating leaders and fascinating people. Hey, on that note, thanks again for your ratings and reviews. If this episode helped you, please share it. Get the word out there. I appreciate all of your support, all your love, all your encouragement. I really 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.