

- Speaker 1: 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 299 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Well, guys, happy anniversary. It's the fifth anniversary today of this podcast. I know there's like two of you from the very beginning who's got this thing launched. And here we are five years later. Man journeys like this are so fun, and I just... my heart is overflowing with gratitude. Back when we started in, let's see, that was 2014. Can you believe that? It seems like eons ago. And also yesterday, we launched with episode one with Andy Stanley. And man, it's been an incredible journey ever since.
- Carey Nieuwhof: One of my hopes, and some of you longtime listeners and subscribers know this, was I... When I was a young leader, I just wanted to get some time with top leaders, and I had no way to get to people who are on the stage or writing books or that kind of thing. Because I was just trying to lead in the trenches. I always thought, "Wow, if I ever did, what would I ask them?" Then started speaking and writing, and had the opportunity to be in green rooms with some of these people that I had really admired from afar. I would leave after a conversation and thought, "Hey, man, that was so good." I just thought, "I wish everybody could hear it." Then I launched the podcast, and now guess what? That's the MO for this thing. I wish everybody could hear it, and now you can.
- Carey Nieuwhof: I try to bring you the back room conversations, the not like, "Hey, what did you say in chapter three of your book?" But more like the kind of conversation you'd want to have, I would hope with a leader if you had that time with that leader. It's the backstory behind leadership. So we got five incredible years 289 episodes. And, man even more planned for the year ahead. The best way to continue you get this on a regular basis is to subscribe. I really only listen to the podcast I subscribe to. There are just so many of you who have done that, and thank you for that. Thank you for being the ones who have really made this podcast last. You're the ones who are telling your friends, who are discussing this with your team. I want to give you a little orientation around the podcast. First of all, we are doing a giveaway today that winds up today. And it is the stack your library giveaway.
- Carey Nieuwhof: One of the comments we get from you guys is, "Hey, I love the podcast, but like my book budget gets blown because I buy all these books." So we're going to stack the library of nine listeners, and we're going to announce who won today on social media. So head on over and check out my Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, we will be announcing the winners. I think thousands of you have entered by this point. It's crazy. And so we're going to pick a winner. You'll get five bucks of any podcast alum of your choice, and also all of my books, and we'll send those to you. Those winners will be announced today on my social media channels. And again, thanks guys so much for sharing this. Also, hey,

many of you are asking, "What can I do to give back?" Well, first of all, subscribe. And secondly, if you would leave a rating and review in the iTunes Store or wherever you listen to podcast, I would be so grateful for that.

Carey Nieuwhof: We have over 1000. Thank you to Isaac F. who said, "A phenomenal experience, five stars. Ever since I heard Carey speak in Nashville, I've been drawn to how he teaches around the world of leadership. If you're a pastor, business leader, anyone who leads, this podcast will give you so much context and encouragement. Carey knows how to dig out the best of his guests, and I will continue to tap into the awesome potential of this podcast. Thanks Carey and team and yes, thank you for the team." So Isaac, appreciate that. One person says, "Are you kidding me? Three hearts and five stars. I'm so stoked about the fuel this podcast is consistently depositing in my leadership. I love the guests that Carey invites. Yeah, they are eclectic and varied. They're always thought leaders who have a ton of great content." Hey, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. I read them all. favorite podcast ever, best podcast ever, excellent content. Man, you guys. Thank you for that.

Carey Nieuwhof: So hey, that's a little introduction, a little bit of an extended introduction. I also want to thank all of you listeners for supporting our partners. Increasingly, I'm flying to different locations. There are obviously some costs associated with this podcast. So it comes to you for free, and we vet our partners on this podcast pretty carefully. One of them is Remodel Health. Here's the cool part. When you do this, well, everybody wins. Did you know that these guys have only been with us for a few months advertising and already, those of you who listen to this podcast have saved \$625,000, and plowed that right back into your ministry or nonprofit, because you partnered with remodel health. You know the feeling if you're an executive pastor or operations guy, you look at the health insurance summary of benefits for your faith organization. Can't tell what you're reading, they're confusing, it's one size fits all.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, what if you had an expert, a team of experts, insurance, tax and ministry experts who came alongside you and used innovative technology to help you change that. By switching organizations from traditional group insurance to individual plans for each employee, Remodel Health has seen significant savings for both organizations and their teams. Again, podcast listeners to this podcast have saved over 625,000 even though they're a new company, about a year old, they've already plowed \$7.2 million back into ministry or the not-for-profits that they work with. About 10% to the listeners of this podcast. If you're interested in learning more about their innovative solutions, because budget years coming up, visit remodelhealth.com/carey C-A-R-E-Y to download their free church buyer's guide today.

Carey Nieuwhof: Also guys, just so you know, we do transcripts and show notes for every episode. Some of these appear on YouTube now these days to, all the details you can find at leadlikeneverbefore.com. For those of you who like to read or share with the team, I love the transcript option, and they are keyword

searchable. If you heard something, you don't have to read all 17 pages, you just like type in the keyword, boom, away ago. Anyway, looking forward to serving you for many more years. The best is truly yet to come. Now let me introduce to you my guest today Tim Lucas. Tim walked away from church when he was 14, and little did he know that he would be planting a church, let alone a mega church. Liquid Church reaches over 5000 people on the weekend. They have seven locations in all places, Jersey. He's in Jersey.

Carey Nieuwhof: I absolutely love stories of people who are doing almost impossible things in a really hard places, and this is one of those stories. So here's my conversation with Tim Lucas.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, I've been waiting for this moment for a while but it is a thrill to have my friend Tim Lucas on the podcast. Tim, welcome.

Tim Lucas: Thank you, Carey, what a joy to be with you here and virtually almost in Canada.

Carey Nieuwhof: You're almost in Canada. Well, you worked with a Canadian for a while Rich Birch right? So you're almost Canadian really.

Tim Lucas: Well, I'm sending you greetings right at the city gates here in New York City. I'm in Parsippany, New Jersey. About 25 minutes from Times Square.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, that's pretty cool, right? To plant a church in New Jersey. I've been to liquid church, I've spoken in Jersey a couple of times. And it's a big day for you right? A normal day for Warren Bird because his 743rd book has come out, but is it your first?

Tim Lucas: He is a prolific author, and it's a joy to partner with Warren. We wrote the book Liquid Church. And it really was his idea. He poked me a few years ago about this. But Tim Keller had said to me one time, he said, "Don't write anything until you're 50, because you'll have to retract it."

Carey Nieuwhof: You're not 50.

Tim Lucas: Well I'm not, so I said I got to wait till I'm at least like 45 and you can round up. But Warren was a joy to work with. I mean, he just... What a treasure he is to the larger global church. He has a statistic for everything.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh he does.

Tim Lucas: It's incredible. So he's the brain. He brings the national statistics, and I bring the sparkling stories.

- Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, it's really fun too because with the co-authorship... I mean, you've got a big personality, which is something I want to talk about today. But like your personality 100% comes through in the book.
- Tim Lucas: I'm so glad, yeah. We want to capture the spirit of our church where we always like to say... One of our core values is that church is fun, so I always like to say we put the fun back in fundamentalism.
- Carey Nieuwhof: That's great. You do. We've spoken at events together, we've hung out with mutual friends, all that stuff. One of the things I love about you is you're uniquely you. I don't ever get a sense from you that you're trying to imitate somebody else or be somebody else. It's totally Jersey too which is unique, right? There's not a whole lot of giant churches in New Jersey, let alone thriving church plants in Jersey. Tell me about your childhood, where you grew up, what it was like growing up, and I want to see what formed the Tim that we know today?
- Tim Lucas: Well, I think most people when they hear New Jersey, right, they think of Snooki and The Sopranos right? It's kind of like... The Jersey Shore, it's a little bit of the... When we're at these conferences, or speaking somebody said, "New Jersey? What good can come from New Jersey?" It's kind of like the Nazareth diss of Jesus, right?
- Carey Nieuwhof: Right, 100%.
- Tim Lucas: But it formed me in a very powerful way. I grew up in a very small conservative Bible Church about 120 people, same people, and it was very much that fill in the blank, robust theology, but every passage has three points, and it always spell something. By the time I was 14, I'm very grateful for the great scriptural teaching it gave me but I was ready to check out. I basically dropped out of church. And I would actually develop if you can imagine this migraines on Saturday night. It was like a psychosomatic, because I knew church was coming.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Well, pastors do that. But you're talking about, you're not even a pastor and you're getting migraines.
- Tim Lucas: Like 14, 15 years old, because I knew, "Okay, we're going to the service. Then there's going to be Sunday school, then there's going to be the after thing. Then we're going to come back for Sunday night, and we're going through you Leviticus, verse by verse for the last nine years." It was just 14 years old, and that's just not where I was. And so then when I went to Wheaton College, out in Chicago, were Warren also went different years, and I met my wife, I dropped out of regular church going. I was the over church guy, if you can imagine. But coming from-
- Carey Nieuwhof: [crosstalk] Wheaton is like a theological college, so you didn't lose your faith, or...

Tim Lucas: No, no, not... No, I didn't have a fall away from faith. But it was interesting. I think a lot of people assumed, "Oh, well, of course you want to Wheaton so of course, you're always going to be a pastor." I was actually an English major with a minor concentration in film studies. So my background is in storytelling and journalism. I was a journalism teaching assistant there. I actually thought I would end up either in film, or maybe the magazine industry, in media in some way. But that leads into how we accidentally planted the church.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, that's cool. So your parents had that kind of... When you were 14 years old, were you thinking, "One day, I'm going to turn this thing upside down?" Or you're just like, "Please don't make me go"?

Tim Lucas: I was saying, "Please don't make me go." But then I'll tell you a funny story where because I look back now, and I'm sure you had this. You didn't know exactly where the Lord was leading you, but you had these flashpoint moments that you look back and you say, "Okay, that was the Lord preparing me." I remember having a summer job mowing the baseball fields in our town during the summer. So what would happen is, on Monday morning, get out there on a tractor basically, shirt off and if you can imagine, remember we had those... Remember the old school iPhones with the string and everything and you have in your ears and everything?

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh yeah.

Tim Lucas: I would be driving out around... Imagine going in circles on a baseball diamond, in the outfield. And basically, I would take the Sunday service that I thought this sermon was terrible, there's a terrible acrostic, the introduction was so boring. He didn't land the ending, there's no practical application. And I would read preach it as a teenager on Mondays when I was mowing the lawns right?

Carey Nieuwhof: Now way.

Tim Lucas: In our town.

Carey Nieuwhof: Seriously?

Tim Lucas: So if people... I can only imagine now, but if people... Oh, yeah so like, I would retell. I'd be like, "Okay so he's... I'd see what the point he's trying to make." Okay, I would open up with this joke. And I would tell this joke to myself, I'm the only person in the outfield on this tractor. And if someone was walking by or driving by they see this nut out in the field, making these wild motions with his hands. "Hahaha" laughing at my own jokes. And I'm like, "That is so funny." I didn't know it then. But that was how like... You had David in the sheep pens, that was the Lord's formation when I was a teenager.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, that's so interesting, because yeah, that probably is the genesis of a calling for you. You go and study journalism, and what happens?

Tim Lucas: I loved Wheaton. The best thing there obviously is pretty rigorous academically, very spiritually rich, but what had happened is that church that I grew up in, I lovingly referred to as the frozen chosen. Maybe some of your listeners can...

Carey Nieuwhof: Well I used to be part of a denomination that has that reputation, but we digress.

Tim Lucas: Yeah, and not name calling, I say that affectionately. Again, this is my family.

Carey Nieuwhof: So do I.

Tim Lucas: I'm grateful to them. But it truly was like, in the service there was no emotion, nobody dared laugh, nobody could really raise their hands during worship. There's like a force field at our belt. Like... You couldn't... You want to raise a hand, but you can't. [inaudible 00:14:06]. It was extremely classic, modernist service. Exactly 72 minutes, we're singing. Here's the first, third and fifth verse. What's wrong with second and fourth? It was always the same lines. I would actually go through the... I would just call it the scorecard, right? Like the program checking off.

Carey Nieuwhof: Score card.

Tim Lucas: There'd be fill in the blank notes, and by the age of 14, I could fill in those blanks, before the sermon was preached, because you heard it all right? So my parents would pay me a \$1 if I could fill in the blanks. So I would fill in the blanks and pass it down to my dad, and my mom would shoot me this look like, "You have to at least hear the sermon." But I wanted my dollar. Of course, my dad... just, you'd appreciate this, he would give me the dollar in dimes. Because, you know where this is going. The first time is going right in the offering plate, so we're going to teach you to tithe. I mean, it was a training school, but really devoid of the life giving relationship with Christ, where we're engaging culture. It was a little bit more of the holy huddle.

Tim Lucas: The philosophy was put up the drawbridge because we're the saved folks, and everyone else is going to hell in a hand basket, but maybe they'll find Jesus someday, and then they can join our club. Fast forward to Wheaton. I meet my wife Colleen, freshman year writing class, and if I grew up frozen chosen, she grew up happy, clappy. Pentecostal storefront church in the Bronx. I remember man, seeing her in freshman writing class. Now Wheaton isn't by Chicago, it's in the Midwest so everyone's preppy, but we're from New Jersey. I'm not like Guido, but I got big hair. Okay, guilty.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, you do a big hair. That big hair preacher handle that you had all those years ago right?

Tim Lucas: Well, so did sheet so I walk into freshman writing class, and I see this big blonde aqua netted bouffant sitting in the first row, and I was like, "Home." There she

was. So I ask her out on a date. I call her Friday night, are you valuable and she says, "I'd love to go with you. But I'm actually, I'm sorry, I can't this Friday, I'm going to prison." And I was sort of like, "Well, I've been turned down before. That's a new one. I haven't heard..."

Carey Nieuwhof: That's a new one. "I got to go to jail, I'm sorry." Yeah. But then I found out she was doing prison ministry. She was tutoring young women who were incarcerated in a correctional facility as part of like her missions work. I was just shocked by that. What girl gives her Friday night to go tutor young women in basic math skills. And that's when I... That really intrigued me, then it moved beyond the big hair.

Tim Lucas: Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: To finding out who is this woman? Well she had grown up Pentecostal, storefront church. Her mom had a radical conversion Christ. My wife's mother was divorced at a very young age about the age of 18, and so my wife grew up I mean going with her mom at the age of 10, 12 years old. She remembers her mom taking her to Studio 54 on roller skates.

Tim Lucas: No way.

Carey Nieuwhof: Bad scene.

Tim Lucas: That famous nightclub.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, bad scene, the whole gamut, Sodom Gomorrah stuff. And her mom had a radical encounter with Christ totally changed her life. And so my wife, same way, she's about 12 years old, sees this mom, her mom changes from the prodigal wild child to responsible loving mother who's leaning into grace. And they start going to this Pentecostal Church in the Bronx where people would come in off the street and get saved.

Tim Lucas: Wow.

Carey Nieuwhof: So imagine frozen chosen world collides with happy clappy. I like to thank, Liquid Church now it's like, we're like baptical right? We're open to things of the spirit, but we got a seat belt.

Tim Lucas: That's fascinating.

Carey Nieuwhof: So you meet your wife in college, how do you end up planting a church?

Tim Lucas: Well, like I said, we're... God tricked us is the answer.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Tim Lucas: Liquid is very much the accidental church plant. Again, at Wheaton, it was the last thing on my mind. My senior year I spent out in Los Angeles in a internship in a Hollywood studio in the screenwriting department. That was my passion, cinema, storytelling, which of course, informs a lot of what Liquid is today.

Carey Nieuwhof: For sure.

Tim Lucas: We have a very cinematic preaching style, that seems to resonate a lot with millennials and Gen Z. But at the time, I thought, well, there is no place for that in the church. And so we came back, and we started attending a little church plant in New York City, that no one had ever heard of before. This thing called Redeemer Presbyterian Church. This unknown country preacher, Tim Keller, and...

Carey Nieuwhof: What year was that, that you would have joined up at Redeemer?

Tim Lucas: So that is-

Carey Nieuwhof: Probably long before most people heard of it?

Tim Lucas: Yeah. It's like 1994, '95, mid '90s.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, yeah. So they're, like five years into it.

Tim Lucas: It's a couple hundred people.

Carey Nieuwhof: Probably one location.

Tim Lucas: It was a few hundred people at Hunter College, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: No way.

Tim Lucas: So we would drive in from where we live in New Jersey, which again, it's only about 25 minutes. But classic Manhattan, right? You pay \$45 for parking, \$20 for bagels.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well there goes the tithe right?

Tim Lucas: Exactly, that's coming right out of the offering. That was a big deal for us. Tim Keller was a very profound influence on my life, because he made this bridge for me where he held up, of course a high view of Scripture. But then he would hold the New York Times up in the other hand, and integrate the two. What does the Bible have to say to the New York Times, including the arts and leisure section? It was just so culturally engaging, I had never seen that model before in church in my life. And they have extraordinary ministries of mercy to street people that

my wife got involved in. So for us it was like the perfect incubation phase to get a vision for what Liquid Church is today.

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay, so pick up the story from there. Where do you go? So you're at Redeemer, and are you planning a career in journalism at that point?

Tim Lucas: Yeah. So my wife was working in the city. She has worked in the media industry for 22 years. One of the reasons why most of the people at our church even though we have seven locations in New Jersey, they're mostly ringing the Manhattan area. And so most of our folks identify with New York City. Again, people aren't from around here, they think Jersey Shore. Yes, we have a lot of orange tanned Italian people. That is true. But most of our folks are very dialed into the culture of... that's happening in New York City. And so, we were living in New Jersey, but what we found is we're getting this first rate teaching weekends from Tim Keller, but we couldn't be involved substantively in the body life of the church during the week. So after about three and a half years there, we made the decision to go to this Baptist Church, 150 years old, closer to where we lived in New Jersey, very traditional, kind of like I grew up in.

Tim Lucas: A little bit more suit and tie Oregon kind of vibe. But we had some friends you know, a couple friends who went. And we went to that church, it was called Millington Baptist Church. When we started going, that's what liquid was eventually birthed out of, but when we started going, I remember my friends saying, "You're going to Millington Baptist Church?" Well, at least they're open about it. But that's what evangelicalism is viewed here in the northeast. It's just talking heads on CNN, who are going to beat you over the head with the Bible or get in the culture wars, but Millington was just a beautiful and still is to this day, beautiful church full of grace, and they gave me a lot. Collen and I when we started going, they said, "Hey, would you guys..." They found out we want to Wheaton, and the senior pastor Peter Pendell, he's a mentor, a spiritual father in faith to me to this day.

Tim Lucas: He said, "Would you guys be willing to teach a Sunday school class for 20 somethings?" Just to show you, Carey, what a lack of colossal vision we had, I mean, I will never forget that. I remember saying, "Well it depends, how early do we have to show up?"

Carey Nieuwhof: Right. Yeah, there you go.

Tim Lucas: He's like, "Well, baptist church 9:30 Sunday school." And is Coll is like, "Well, we can get there by 9:45. We got to get Starbucks." We had no vision for what Liquid would eventually become. But we started at Sunday school class, we other 20 somethings and he said, "Yeah, there's actually about eight of them." Pointed them out, and sure enough. So we started that Sunday school class with I think, including us was about 12 people, mismatch folding chairs, Baptist Church basement, bad coffee. And what we knew is we didn't want to do the fill in the blanks. So we started talking about real life issues, right? Sex,

relationships, career purpose, meaning. Based on my film background, started using a lot of video clips and multimedia, and again that... We don't look at that today as revolutionary, but then it was like...

Carey Nieuwhof: Particularly in that context, it was like, "What is going on?" Right?

Tim Lucas: Yeah, very much so. That's how Liquid was birthed in a baptist church basement.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, I remember the story in the book, because I had the privilege of reading it and writing the foreword to your book, but it grew pretty fast, didn't it? That Bible study?

Tim Lucas: It did. We were surprised. And again, that was not the expectation, nor was it the goal. We're just like, we want to provide relevant content. What we found is people began inviting their coworkers and friends. And so all of a sudden, it went from a class of 12 to 40, 80, 150. And with the church's blessing, we moved out of the basement because they couldn't hold us anymore to a tavern about a mile down the road. I know what everyone's thinking, because they're like, "Oh, I see why you call it Liquid Church right?"

Carey Nieuwhof: Liquid church, yeah.

Tim Lucas: We always said, "We're not we're not serving beer, just Bible study here." But it was the genius of that third place, where you know... Again, something called Millington Baptist Church was very traditional white steeple, the whole thing. I was teaching high school English at that time in journalism. And so my coworkers, I just knew there was no way I was going to invite them into that very traditional environment. They're just not coming to that. But when we moved to the tavern and began calling it Liquid, again based on Jesus talking about the living water. We were like, church should be refreshing, that's why we call it the Liquid.

Carey Nieuwhof: Let's clarify that. Okay so...

Tim Lucas: Well, be honest, right? People hear the name liquid, they assume it's a cult, or a drinking for eternity right? But at that time, we're very interested by Jesus reaching out at the well, to the Samaritan woman saying, "I have living water here, and it's not dry, dusty religion." So, people started inviting their non-Christian friends and coworkers, and that's really where it blew up at the tavern. 150, 200, 300 people. We move back into the traditional church, and start services at night. And that's where it just went on a rocket ship ride to where we are today.

Carey Nieuwhof: Really? Okay. What was the year that you started leading the Bible study?

Tim Lucas: It was right after 911. Again, everything...

Carey Nieuwhof: Really? Early 2000s.

Tim Lucas: Yeah, everything here in New York City's marked around, "Where were you in 2001?" And I remember the first services, the actual... Because up to that point, what do we call it? It wasn't a Sunday school class, it was an outreach. "What is this thing?" "It's liquid, come and see." I joined their staff in 2001, and our first services were two weeks after 9/11. That was a time of... it felt almost like revival. There was a sobriety to people. This chastening that happened, and people were more open and receptive to the gospel than we've ever seen them.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, I mean, I'm far away from New York City, about 12 hour drive, but I still remember preaching that weekend after 9/11. And yeah, it was completely different. People who were never in church were in church, and people were open and asking questions, and the whole deal. So then you launch it as an official church independently in 2000 and...?

Tim Lucas: And seven, so we incubated there really for six years. And again, I give all the credit to the church fathers and mothers at Millington Baptist Church. We had our services in the evening, and they gave us a lot of rope to innovate, to use multimedia and video, do some unorthodox outreaches. I always like saying they gave me enough rope, just enough rope but not enough to hang myself. And as a lead pastor now I look back, I said, "Oh, I didn't even realize how much the elders, and particularly the Senior Pastor Peter Pendell. He really took a lot of bullets covering for us, allowing us to innovate at that time. But it was the perfect incubator for us, and so we launched out with their blessing. It wasn't a church split, nothing negative, but they just realized, like, "Hey, we've given birth to a baby, this Liquid thing."

Tim Lucas: We launched out in 2007 on Easter with, I think enough money to survive for three months.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, that's awesome and you're right, because probably at the time, you didn't realize what a gift that was, and how hard it was probably for him as a senior leader to navigate that with his church, but kudos to them. I got to ask you, a lot has changed in the last 12 years. Liquid Church had a DNA at the beginning, which I'm sure you've modified to some extent. But, as I said earlier, Jersey isn't exactly crawling with mega churches so it's going to take something different... How many weekend attendees do you have now? You have seven locations, and roughly weekend attendance?

Tim Lucas: Yeah, about 5,000 people.

Carey Nieuwhof: About 5,000. 5,000 over seven locations, so that's a pretty fascinating story anywhere, but particularly for Jersey. What did you think it would take to reach a culture like Jersey, and then what over the last 12 years has proven effective in reaching a culture like Jersey?

Tim Lucas: Well, the interesting thing is that here in the northeast, it's very similar to Canada. It's a post Christian culture. So we're not starting with people at zero spiritually on the journey. They're not saying, "Who is this Jesus you speak of?" They're pretty much starting at -4. Again, no aspersions to my Catholic brothers and sisters in the faith, but there are many folks who grew up like in high school, all my friends were Catholic, kind of went through CCD. Kind of gotten through all the machinations but then really stop... they drop out.

Carey Nieuwhof: CCD, sorry, I missed that.

Tim Lucas: It's like a catechism.

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay.

Tim Lucas: It would be the Catholic equivalent Sunday school. But like myself, at 14, you fill in the blanks, check the boxes-

Carey Nieuwhof: Right, I'm out of here.

Tim Lucas: ... it's not woven into the fabric of your everyday life. When we start with people, they would probably be part of those... They would assume they're Christian just culturally, right? Well, I'm not Jewish, I'm not some other faith. I'm not really dialed into church, but I'm Christian. But it would be more of maybe their ethnicity, or their parents had denominational ties. So they've not had a true encounter with Jesus Christ. It's not a life giving, part of it forms everything I do. I actually look it through the lens of the Bible for my daily decisions. So we're starting with people negative for it, and they're very cynical. I think part of the heritage here is you had a lot of the great awakenings actually right actually beginning in the northeast, but those revival are kind of clogged up now. And it's like, "Oh, this is the burn over region."

Tim Lucas: But again, I grew up here, and so I'm like... People are like, "Planting a church in New Jersey, the Northeast, that's a graveyard for churches." But I'm like, "Hey man, we're people of the resurrection. You want to see a resurrection, you go the graveyard. And so we have seen like a bit of a... I don't want to say revival, but I mean, we're seeing the Holy Spirit do something now, in New York City, in New Jersey, in Connecticut. These traditionally very sterile, burnt over regions, the Holy Spirit's just doing a new work. And so I think part of what we have, or at least the spirit... This is what I talk about in the book. I think the Holy Spirit's flowing the fresh way, not through our proclamation just on Sunday morning, what we traditionally think of as proclaiming the gospel, but our demonstration of it.

Tim Lucas: We lead the way. The tip of our evangelism spear is compassionate cause. It's all about serving. Special means children, bring clean water to kids in Rwanda. That's the public face of our church. And we have found that that cuts through a

lot of clutter and cynicism that northeast people have about, "organized" religion.

Carey Nieuwhof: Was that compassion part of like, you started that way, you launched that way Tim?

Tim Lucas: Yeah, and I credit my wife. She grew up in that Pentecostal storefront church in the Bronx. Not a bastion of systematic thinking and strategy, but huge heart for people on the streets. I remember coming back with her for Thanksgiving break and said, "Why don't you come to my church?" Now here I am, right? Frozen, chosen. The guy who checks off the order of service.

Carey Nieuwhof: Right.

Tim Lucas: I walk in there and, there's a guy up front with a tambourine and this lady's got a horn. And this is back in the day when the worship leader had like overheads, do you remember that?

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh yeah, that was great. And getting someone who could really do the overheads well, that was an art. You had the guy who couldn't keep up, or it was crooked or didn't change sheet fast enough. Do you remember that? Back in the day?

Tim Lucas: Yes. I vividly remember.

Carey Nieuwhof: That was like... You needed skills man.

Tim Lucas: I can vividly remember a guy with acoustic guitars. The worship leader has got the acoustic guitar, and then he's got a box full of the overheads. And he puts it on, and he sings to the first two lines. Then I see him shake his head. He goes, "Oh, no, not that one spirit." He takes it off and he puts another one on. Sings like... No that one...

Carey Nieuwhof: So he's running it himself.

Tim Lucas: I said to Coll, "What is..." She says, "Oh, we call that being led by the Spirit." And I was like, "Well, I call that unprepared." They didn't have a good service programming meeting, clearly because this is cast. The pastor gave a rambling homily, very anecdotal, not exegetically. And so I'm just sitting there with my nose up, sniff, sniff. Now he's going to get the invitation, I'm sitting there cynical, New Jersey guy, myself, "Who's going to respond to this?" Well, all of a sudden, people start streaming down the aisles, including two drug... one was a dealer, one was actually a drug user out on the streets who had wandered into the church, during the service, give their lives to Christ weeping. And then he says, "We're going to have a spontaneous baptism service." And I'm... I had never seen anything like it in my life Carey.

Tim Lucas: I came from a very programmed to the minute structure of church. And here, this was not structurally sound, and yet people give their lives to Christ. My wife's mom is like, "Well, let's bring them home for lunch." It felt like it... I saw the New Testament, like Acts was really happening. And it ruined me because I said, "Maybe all that stuff, in the gospel that at 14 years old, I got headaches, because it was a head knowledge of the gospel, experientially, could happen today." And so at Liquid, that's really our posture in the community. We're like, we have to go out... leave our seats and get out into the streets to serve and show... Demonstrate the gospel before we can earn a hearing for it.

Carey Nieuwhof: You mentioned cynicism, and I'm glad you mentioned it. Because there, certainly, Tim Keller talks about it in New York City, very, very cynical group of people he's trying to minister to, and then you had the same culture in Jersey. Is that right? You would describe jersey as being largely cynical culturally? Is that fair?

Tim Lucas: Yeah. Again, I think you get that oftentimes around major Metropolis is like that. The same way... Pacific Northwest would probably be very similar. But again, people city... there's cynicism everywhere, particularly now with how partisan and politicized everything is got. So it has hardened and you have to go... For us, we don't assume a dominant posture that like anyone's even going to know what, care what we're talking about, or know the fundamentals of who Jesus is, and we're like, we have to actually demonstrate that in a way that is counterculture.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. And that was my question like, what were the things either at the beginning or since then that you have done that you're like, "You know what? Let's combat this cynicism by doing x." Obviously, it seems like the compassion things you're doing, you're doing because you love Jesus, and it's scriptural. But does that help overcome cynicism as well?

Tim Lucas: Yeah. I remember in the first year of our church, and again, we were paycheck to paycheck just trying to survive, "Can we do another Sunday?" we had this idea, just this real conviction that we have to do something for the immigrant folks who are landing on our doorsteps here. We were in a poor section of the city, and we're like, we can't just say, "Well, let's wait until we have our financial affairs in order to help. We got to do this." We had an idea for an outreach we end up calling a Free Market. Now everybody knows what a flea market is, right? You bring your junk. You bring your junk and try to get top dollar for it. But we said, "You know what, what if we had a free market where it's the opposite. People bring their best, and we give it away for free. But we give it to the low income families." And so we reached out to all of the social service agencies say, "Hey, who are the top... We don't have to know their names, but the top 150 families who really need a hand?"

Tim Lucas: It was incredible, because our people, they caught the vision for it. And so they brought in... They didn't just bring in junk. Some of them brought in brand new

baby cribs and strollers, and had their ski jackets cleaned because some of the immigrant people didn't have warm jackets for the Northeast winter, and basically lovingly package these things and had this giant... It was premium kind of almost like shopping experience, and the only catch was, everything was for free. And so that's the kind of thing that doesn't just catch the attention of the community, it catches where we are. It's a heavy media culture, and so that's where certain media outlets like CNN, New York Times have caught wind of things that we're doing, that they're like, that's not the typical evangelical posture.

Carey Nieuwhof: Right.

Tim Lucas: To say, let's cancel services, and go give away our best stuff to the poor.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's what you did, you canceled services and gave things away?

Tim Lucas: Yeah, that was early on, that was part of our ethos. Again, it was a very Spirit led kind of thing. And we've tried to... Even though we've grown and as a multi site, church have a lot of systems and structures, we try to make room for the Holy Spirit to do something new. I write in the book about the time we did the reverse offering. Again, that was a... That's a leap of faith. We had one-

Carey Nieuwhof: Tell us about it.

Tim Lucas: I think it was 2008, right? Great recession had happened. We got hit with Hurricane Irene, which did catastrophic billions of dollars of damage. And so, here I am teaching about stewardship, and I'm looking at the Matthew 25 passage about where the king goes away, and basically gives hey, three servants five bags of silver, two bags of silver, one bag of silver. I said to our executive pastor, "Hey, what if we gave away the offering?" He's like, "What?" I was like "Just listen. We're not giving away silver, but give away... Fill envelopes with 50s and 20s, and 10s. And we actually pass the offering bucket, which we use a popcorn bucket. Again, it's part of our church, is a fun kind of thing. And people actually would reach in that Sunday, pull out an offering envelope, and they actually get the bill inside 50, 20, 10.

Tim Lucas: Because it says in God, we trust, but do you ever think God trusts you? And we'll ask them to creatively invest it for the kingdom, and then just come back and tell us a story of what they did. That's a risk for a young church. We were a year and a half old I think at the time. At the time, I think was like about \$30,000. Well, that was all we had, and then some.

Carey Nieuwhof: It might as well have been 30 million right?

Tim Lucas: You got it. What our people did, again, it just captured their imagination, it fired up their right brain, not just their left analytical brain, but their heart. Said, "What could they do for their neighbors?" And we said, "Hey, look, maybe

you're a single mom, and you just got \$20. That's God just saying, "Hey, here's gas for your car this week. God bless you use it." But we also had other people. We had these two women who... Do you know the Cake Boss?

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, yeah.

Tim Lucas: You ever see that show? Right. That's New Jersey-

Carey Nieuwhof: I do.

Tim Lucas: ... right? In Hoboken, you know those fancy cakes and all that, or Carlo. And so we had these two women who do the same thing. So they took their... They had a 50, I think and a 20. They buy ingredients and make this incredible designer cake that they put on Facebook and say, "This is what God gave us, the \$70. We made this incredible cake, we're auctioning it off right now." And they ended up earning I think was like 400, \$500 that they gave to a battered women's shelter. So it was like, "We're going to put the power in the hands of God's people, and see him multiply it through them." It was just... Even though we've grown in size and structure, we're always trying to push down on it and keep it grassroots feeling, because that's really who we are. Kind of that gorilla from the ground up, make room for the Holy Spirit, and God does something better than we all could have.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, the thing that I've really appreciated and watching Liquid Church over the years, and I've been tracking you guys for the better part of the decade, it is that really unusual combination of all the things you've talked about, like, as Rich would put out, a you would phrase it, "From the seats to the streets." You're out on the street, you're getting clean water into communities, you're working with women and children shelters, you're giving back to the community. And yet you're media savvy, and you've got a great band, and you use some really fascinating approaches to preaching. I want to talk to you about the media exposure you've gotten. What outlets have covered what you've done, and then how have you made those connections? And how is the publicity been for you? Sorry, that was a big question. But yeah, that was like, "Oh, that's three parts." Anyway, talk about the media exposure you guys have had. Who's covered you so far?

Tim Lucas: Sure, so like CNN had us in to do an interview that Sunday morning, of the day of the reverse offering. Again, I think part of is God has strategically positioned Liquid Church at the city gates of Manhattan, right? Kind of the capital of the world here. Again, not necessarily what we're doing is so new or novel, but, God just has a unique fingerprint on what we're doing. And so they said, "Hey, here's a pastor, we're in the middle of the recession, Hurricane Irene just hit, what can people practically do? Can they really make a difference?" So they called us up on Saturday and said, "Hey, can you come in before you preach Sunday morning, tell us about the reverse offering." This was last minute, but again, we're not too far, about 25 minutes outside Manhattan. And so shot in and

talked with CNN. It was so funny because the anchor was like, "Now do you think people will actually reach in to the offering, or will they get struck by lightning?"

Carey Nieuwhof: Those are great questions.

Tim Lucas: Yeah, but it was a chance for us to say you know what? We really feel like Jesus... We take his words quite literally, that we're blessed to be a blessing, and we just think God's people can do that. As we've done these different... That's a unique twist, right? You don't see that a lot. And so we're always saying, let's look at Jesus and some of these ancient parables, experiences that he had, and how can we do them with a modern twist on them, that really serves people at a point of need. And so there's no... There's lots of opportunities for that. So we've had the New York Times cover us, we went down to Asbury Park, which has the largest LGBTQ festival, on the East Coast every year. This was when we were still at Millington Baptist, so if you could imagine. We said... Okay, so Baptist Church is going to a gay pride parade, and here was our radical idea. What if we hand out free water?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Tim Lucas: Right? Can you imagine? What a radical thing. Of course, we get hit with rocks from both sides. The good real conservative folks are like, "Well you got to be going down there and handing out, pamphlets and everything." We're like, "No, we're genuinely just going out, no strings attached, love and grace. It's a hot day, we're giving them clean water." And then the organizer of the parade were like, "Okay, are you here to convert us?" Are you here too... And so, we said, "We're genuinely just here to give out clean water." It was funny, because Carey, there was this moment where it was about an hour before the parade, and the organizers said, "You know what, we don't trust evangelicals, I'm sorry." We've spent a lot of time over meals with them, talking with them and trying to show genuinely from our heart, this is just compassion, no strings attached. Because we feel like, "You know what? Traditionally, the church has been a source of great hurt and pain and rejection towards the LGBTQ community." And so we're like, "Can we just provide water for people as a gesture of kindness?"

Tim Lucas: So they said, "We just can't trust evangelicals." Well, so here we are with the tractor trailer full of pallets of water, and all of our people down there in their Liquid t-shirts saying, "Hey, we're just here to show you God's love." Wouldn't you know it? That day, it goes up to 98 degrees in Asbury Park New Jersey.

Carey Nieuwhof: I'll be right back with the rest of my interview with Tim Lucas. But hey, we have some really special things for you as podcast listeners. It is book release day for Tim's new book that he coauthored with Dr. Warren Bird. It's called Liquid Church. Not only does it feature what we talk about, but a whole lot more. Some strategy that's really good. And, because you're a listener, we've got some

free bonus launch materials. If you order the book today, here's what you get. You get a 52 page small group guide, and downloadable curriculum you can use with your congregation, your group, your team. You get chapter by chapter videos to help with training, and a free 22 page ebook by Tim called 7 Sermon Series Guaranteed to Grow Your Church.

Carey Nieuwhof: So yeah, like sermon series that are just done for you on evangelism, stewardship, volunteer culture. You can head on over to liquidchurchbook.com today to learn more and collect on these bonuses. Tim Lucas and Warren Bird coauthored the book together, and it's a beautiful mash up of research on reaching young adults, plus the story. And it is the story of Liquid Church in New Jersey, one of America's 100 fastest growing churches, according to Outreach magazine. I think personally, the content on chapter five alone, is worth the price of the book. You'll learn a whole lot about their secret sauce of communication, how to increase generosity and evangelism in your church, and raise up high capacity leaders and staff and volunteers, which is always a challenge. So and don't forget the bonuses too. Head on over to liquidchurchbook.com to claim your bonuses today. Now back to the rest of the interview with Tim Lucas.

Tim Lucas: This is right where Bruce Springsteen got his start, right next to The Stone Pony.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Tim Lucas: Okay?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah. 100%.

Tim Lucas: Right on the Jersey Shore. And those organizers they come up to us and said, "Well, Pastor Tim we'll just ask you real quick, we have a troop of drag queens behind the stage who are about to go and perform, but a couple of them are dehydrated. Is there any possibility that you could share some of your water?" We're like, "Absolutely." And so our pastors get our hand trucks delivering that water behind the stage, and we got to serve and wash the feet of 12 drag queens, before they went on the gay pride parade. So the New York Times came and covered that one, that was fun.

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow. I know you've had dozens of media coverages, do you issue press releases? Or how does that work? Does the media hear about it? How does that actually work?

Tim Lucas: Yeah, so at the very beginning, it was very viral. It wasn't calculated, it was just like, we're like, "Hey, we're going to be handing out bottled water at a gay pride parade, you want to join us?" And we put it on Facebook, Instagram wasn't there at that time, but we just put it out there. And so it would get a lot of word of mouth is the best way I can say it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Word of mouse, that's funny.

Tim Lucas: That really is, like for us... I talk about this in the book, like it connects us right? Nothing better than word of mouth advertising. "Hey, I've a taste living you got to come see this, you got tastes yourself." But then for us, word of mouse is a big piece of it. We're very intentional. I don't want to say calculate, but we're very intentional about making sure we put that stuff on social, whether it's Insta or Facebook, inviting people to it, shooting a quick 32 second, 60 seconds little bumper, what's the event of the outreach going to be about. What we found is, that's the kind of thing that really garners the attraction of the media in this area.

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay, so they're following you or some reporter has a friend who shares what you're doing, and they're like, "Hey, maybe there's a story here."

Tim Lucas: Yeah, and we've cultivated those relationships, though. So we've been intentional. I mean directly answer you now, we actually do cultivate like a press release if we know we're going to do a big project. For instance, a couple months ago, we did a thing called Homeless Church, where we... Tell our 5,000 people, Sunday morning mega church. We said, "Hey, next Saturday night cancel all your plans, come to the church, we're going to give you a cardboard box. And we're going to sleep out overnight in the parking lot to identify with the homeless. We're not asking you to write a check. But you come sleep out overnight, and we will donate \$25 for every person that sleeps out overnight, in the church parking lot."

Tim Lucas: We had a enormous turnout. We were able to get \$50,000 towards our homeless ministry, we partnered with an awesome organization, New York City Relief Bus. But again, that's something that like, it's one thing to write a check, it's another to ask people to say, "You know what? Leave your cell phones at home, come sleep out on the concrete." That's the kind of thing that we find media or organizations... and again, cynical Northeastern people they say, "You know what? I don't know if this is a God thing, but that's a good thing." And we're like, "I'll swim and meet you on that island."

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay, let's talk about your approach to Sunday teaching. Because you call it a TGIF world Twitter, Google, Instagram, Facebook. What are you learning, or what have you learned over these 12 years at Liquid Church and maybe even before that, about communication that connects? Because I think your church is... You're an interesting fusion between some charismatic, but also an attraction model. Talk to us about your philosophy?

Tim Lucas: Well, I think it was... A lot of it was planted in the church that I grew up in, which again was extremely word based as most conservative evangelical churches are. But the reality is, we're living in a culture that's very image driven. And I don't mean like... What I'm saying is, people think in pictures, they're right brained.

And so if you think about... I mean, you've talked about this Carey. For 400 years the Protestant sermon has basically been unchanged as an art form.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Tim Lucas: It's man or woman standing up there and holding fort for about 40 minutes, it's a lecture kind of format. A gifted communicator knows some rhetorical tricks to simulate dialogue and get some audience interaction. But for us, I just am aware that more people are watching my teaching via the screen than in person. So at our broadcast campus, we may have two 3,000 people in person on a Sunday morning, but we've got another 3,000, 4,000 who are sitting in our campuses, or they're watching church online, or they're streaming it on Facebook Live. And so I'm like, we have to be able to communicate visually. For me it was kind of redeeming my past in film. The way I like to talk about what we do is more cinematic preaching. That is, we're constantly looking for what does the scriptural passage suggest in the way of symbols, or props, or a kinetic teaching style that engages, I think millennials and Gen Z, but I actually think it's any human now, right?

Tim Lucas: I mean, most people have the attention span of a bumblebee right? So the modern church was always like, "Well, you got to preach shorter." I don't think that's true. I go 50 minutes.

Carey Nieuwhof: I agree.

Tim Lucas: But we have people who walk out and they say, "That just flew by. I was so engaged." Because we recognize it's not just a linear three point sermon, we have to connect people. We got to fire up that right brain lobe, that's... I talk a little bit about that.

Carey Nieuwhof: What do you do? How do you do that? How do you use the time differently than somebody who's just lecturing for 40 or 50 minutes?

Tim Lucas: Sure, so I kind of took my cue from Jesus. He was a very kinetic preacher. His sermons were actually very short. He told a lot of stories, we call them parables, right? And they were so sticky right, that we can... The parable of the lost son, the parable of the lost sheep. We know these stories, but then he also would use symbols. Think about the birds of the air, look at the lilies of the field, how about this net full of fish? And so I've translated that into a particular... I don't want to say it's our formula, but it's our secret sauce for teaching and retaining people's attention to the scriptures for about 45, 50 minutes. It's like a three legged stool. You've got scripture as one leg, but then you have story as another leg, because you have to connect emotionally with people.

Tim Lucas: But the third leg that most communicators I find ignore is the symbol. So scripture, story and symbol. I'll give you practical examples. I did a series on the seven churches of Revelation. We created a Jason Bourne trailer for that, a

video that we put out on social, and it looked like the Bourne Identity but seven weeks on revelation at the end of the day, right? We're going through verse by verse. Well, for each week our creative team said, "What is a symbol that really makes the scripture pop?" You talk about like a pop or color kind of thing. So for the first week was Ephesus, the forgetful church, right. Hey, you guys are great, but you have one thing against you, your love for the Lord has grown cold.

Tim Lucas: So we got actually a heart, this model of a heart and encased it in a cooler in a block of ice. Two minutes before the sermon goes on, I'm going out there, the bumpers playing, and they put a block of ice on a table, on a high with his heart encased in it. Now automatically creates tension, right? People are like, "Wait, what is that?" I'm just ignoring, I'm just talking about, seven churches of revelation, Ephesus. But then we get to the part of, "Your love for the Lord has grown cold. You ever have that happen?" We start going through the motions, and man that original fire I felt. Now as I'm preaching, the block of ice is melting, this heart is there. And then of course, I pull out an ice pick. "What do you do, if you find your faith has grown cold?" And start chipping away. Now that narrative tension is through the roof, because people are just like, "Is he going to stab himself?"

Carey Nieuwhof: It makes it memorable, right?

Tim Lucas: Yeah. And people, they remember what they see and feel. Because what we have found is, when you take a concept out of scripture, marry to an image, and then you connect it to an emotion, it burns in people's brains, and they remember it forever.

Carey Nieuwhof: Do you do that every week? Or I know a lot of people would say, "Well, we'll do something that visual once a series, or once a quarter, or something." Do you think it's something that people should do on a like almost... every time you communicate?

Tim Lucas: At the beginning we did it periodically. I do it almost every week now.

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow.

Tim Lucas: It is truly part of our secret sauce. We've found that God just kind of put his hand of blessing on it, because it's so sticky that if people watch... Think of someone scrolling through their Insta feed, and they see a guy chopping away at a heart in a block of ice, but the sounds off right, automatically. They're not going to read what the... But I'm going to watch that because it's a visual medium. And so, I think there's another reformation happening, right? We're moving from that word based culture, where people are post literate now. The middle age is... Mark Batterson, always just talk about that, the stained glass told the story. Well, now they're watching screens, right? And so we'll do that. Like for that series for instance, we went through the entire churches of revelation. When were on Laodicea, the lukewarm church. Remember, Jesus

says, "Hey, you're lukewarm, not hot or cold, I spit you out of my mouth." For that one, right? I say, "Now I need a volunteer for this one, a volunteer from the audience."

Tim Lucas: So they got this like 15 year old kid in the front row, "Me." I bring him up on stage, and I give them a poncho and a set of ski goggles. You know where this is going. And everyone sort of knows where this is going. But I'm like, "Church, I want to read this. So you got to understand, Jesus actually said, "Your faith makes me want to puke. Spit you out of my mouth." So I take this long drink of a tall room temperature water. And I was like, "Church, go ahead and read it." And they read it you know, "Spit you out of my..." I just do the spit take all over this kid. And he is gone bananas. I mean, people are just like... High schoolers want to be in the adult service.

Carey Nieuwhof: Absolutely.

Tim Lucas: But it's not childish, people remember that thing. It just burns in their brain because that was such a kinetic moment, faithful to the scriptures, but memorable in terms of its symbolism, and then the story we connected to it.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's great. Now, what would you say to people... I'm sure you've heard this. Well, that's just sensationalism or it's gimmicky. What would you say to people who think that?

Tim Lucas: I would say go look at the Old Testament prophets. Right? Was Jeremiah laying down in the middle of the road with a beam on his back. The scriptures are so rich. We're the ones who've neutered them. Jesus was extraordinarily vivid and compelling in his analogies, and we're the ones who... Again, it's more of that modernist mindset that's like, "Well, we just need to make sure there's four points and it spells something, and that's how people will remember it."

Carey Nieuwhof: We've reduced it to a proposition or an idea, rather than anything else.

Tim Lucas: Yeah. You were really helpful to me, Carey. I remember you said... You were talking about what's the difference between teaching and preaching? But said, I think I quote this in the book, you had said, "Teaching is when you listen to a speaker, and you say, "You know what, that's a good point. He's right." In other words you give intellectual assent. You're like, "That's a good communicator, and that is a true thing. Yeah, he's right."

Carey Nieuwhof: "Thank you for that tip, I really appreciate it."

Tim Lucas: Yeah. Whereas preaching, it's where somebody says, "Wow, he's right, I need to change."

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Tim Lucas: I don't know if you're seeing this, but we're seeing a shift, a migration from just that kind of, "Hey, we're all about practical teaching no doubt. We walk away with action steps every single week." But I'm seeing a migration from that just kind of propositional teaching, to more of that high impact preaching that really changes lives.

Carey Nieuwhof: I agree. I think there's a shift going on right now, and it's something I'm trying to reflect when I teach as well. I wonder if it's just the emergence of, that post Christian culture is becoming more and more dominant. It's not really so much about convincing the already convinced about what's right. It's about reaching people who aren't, and even convicting Christians who have kind of... The seven churches of revelation are a good example, who've lost their way. We just get lost in the culture, I need to be reminded, "Wow, my heart was really lukewarm." Or, "I was cold." Or... I think that's true. Hey Tim I want to ask you a little bit, and I know this has been part of your story you've talked about before. But I mean, this just it's an incredible story to build a church that size, but you had a bit of a wall early on, in Liquid Church, right? Did you experience burnout a few years in.

Tim Lucas: Oh, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: Can you talk to us about that?

Tim Lucas: Oh, yeah. Again, I've resonated with your writing, and what you've said and didn't see it coming. I hit the wall early. I feel like it was a gift. I had the blessing of burning out early. Well, yeah, I mean, come on, anybody who has been a church planner, an entrepreneur, starting a business, the first two years, it's exhilarating. It's adrenaline...

Carey Nieuwhof: You run on adrenaline for a while.

Tim Lucas: Long time.

Carey Nieuwhof: You really can.

Tim Lucas: Long time, but in church world, we'll just call it the Holy Spirit right? Even though it's really Red Bull and ignoring my family. It wasn't a dramatic thing Carey. But as liquid grew rapidly in the first couple years, again, we launched with 300 volunteers. First Sunday, right? A thousand people show up, we're like, "Oh, praise God." And then all of a sudden, I just grew it back down to 350.

Carey Nieuwhof: 100%

Tim Lucas: And then the long slog begins. I had two kids who were under the age of five at the time, and I've a super high capacity wife, she's just tremendous. She runs her own business, and she's super supportive, but we had hands full starting in the church. And so she said, "You know what six months I get it, we got to

survive at least till Christmas." And I kicked the can down the road, because she was like, "I need you to engage at home a little bit more." So I said, "Oh, sure. Absolutely. Once Christmas is over." Well, people come to Christmas. And then we said, "Well, we got to start small groups in January." Okay, once we're past the small groups, well it's our first Easter, we got to... The first services, are we going to do Good Friday services? I just kept kicking the can down the road.

Tim Lucas: So my wife was very, very... Colleen, again, she's just extremely gracious, she's my biggest teacher. There's no doubt my biggest strength defying agent like Tony is in you life. But I remember there was one dinner where she said, "Sweetheart..." She goes, "It's not just that you're totally engaged when you're there at work. When you're here at home, you're not here. You're checking your phone, you're cheating with your texts while the kids are trying to talk to you, try to... But you're not here, you're not engaged." So I heard that, but again you're in survival mode, right? We haven't scaled anything. We're just trying to make sure it doesn't go under. Here is my day of reckoning. I will never forget this. I walk in on a Tuesday night seven o'clock when I told my wife, I'll be home at six help with the kids all that.

Tim Lucas: I walk in at seven o'clock, and she is sitting. I walked through the door. I remember, I'll never forget. I had my backpack with me, and she is sitting on the couch, and she has tears running down her face and mascara, the whole thing. And Carey I thought like, "What happened to kids?" Did somebody got hurt. "Honey what is it?" So I run over to her. And she's he's really... she's doesn't got the words. And again, she's not at all dramatic or emotional that way. I said, "Honey, what is it?" I put arm around her. And she says, "I can't..." She can't even get the words out, she says. "You love her more than me." I said, "What?" "You love... I feel like you love her more than me." And I was stupefied. I didn't know what she was talking about. Of her, love who more than you? Is she accusing me of an affair like what...?

Tim Lucas: She says, that church. When she said that, I heard in a distance of rooster crow. Because I swore I would not be that guy who sacrificed my family on the altar of ministry but here I was. Ministry was my mistress, and so I had to not only admit that, but like true repentance, you've got to take action. So we went to counseling extraordinarily helpful. We took a machete to my schedule, and we made a really hard decision at that time, because the church was growing, more requests to do outside speaking. But we actually came to a consensus and we said, "You know what, I'm going to be gone out one night a week. I'm not going to do any outside speaking until the kids are at the age of 10. And then we'll talk about that together and make that decision as husband and wife."

Carey Nieuwhof: Was that like a decade long commitment? Like no outside speaking roughly?

Tim Lucas: Yeah, it was. I think our...

Carey Nieuwhof: Was that hard for you?

Tim Lucas: Again, I see it as a blessing, that early burnout, because I've got friends now who you know what, it was catastrophic, because it went on for 10 years. For me, it went on for about two years, and the Lord and His sovereign, a severe mercy, but he intercepted it with my wife being, "You are that man." There was that Nathan moment.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

Tim Lucas: Again counseling to us was so helpful, because it wasn't just like, "Hey, this is..." It's thrilling, ministry is thrilling. When you're reaching people for Christ, when you're making an impact serving the poor, but it wasn't sustainable. And so I was like, You remember that movie? Ferris Bueller's Day Off?

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh, yeah.

Tim Lucas: It may be a bit of a classics, right? It's on TV I was watching... I remember, there's that character, Cameron and his father has this red sports car that he loves, and there's this moment at the end where Cameron gets so angry, and he's trying put the odometer back, so the car is gone... the wheels are spinning backwards, and he starts kicking it, kicking it, kicking it. And he says, "You love her more than me." Almost the exact words that my wife said. It was about his dad who was absent from his life, and that he loved this sports car. I just had this image of like, you know what, we could win the World here. 5000 people, 10,000 people, we can make an inroads here in a graveyard, in the northeast. And if my son ends up at 15 years old, where I was, I got headaches on Saturday night, and my parents dragged me to that church. He's standing there behind the church kicking the side of it saying, "You love her more than me." I will have failed.

Carey Nieuwhof: Wow.

Tim Lucas: That was a sobering moment. I do feel like the Lord let me have that taste of burnout and the wreckage that could have come if I was still in that obsessive ministry disorder pattern that I think just comes very easily to three types on the angiogram.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, yeah. Is that you? You're a three?

Tim Lucas: Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: 100%. One of the questions... like we've interacted numerous times at different seasons Tim, and I sense you have a lot of energy. I mean, what we're hearing on this podcast that's sort of just you. And I've come back on the other side of burnout, with a lot more energy and passion, probably than I had pre-burnout. What have been some rhythms, patterns and disciplines that have really 'cause I mean Liquid has grown, you're in seven locations now, you've done building projects. I mean, the whole deal, you got a large staff, you've got lots of

responsibilities and pressures. What have been some of the rhythms, disciplines and patterns that have kept you fresh for this long?

Tim Lucas: Sabbath keeping is at the top of the list. I had not grown up with a good theology of the Sabbath. I knew what it was on a theology test. You rest every seven days, theoretically, but man, I got energy. What happened is, again, in the wake of even that burnout, that was one of... We took a machete to my schedule, put those guardrails on my time around my leadership. But then we also said, you know what? We have to have a legitimate Sabbath. And so now I work, essentially my workflow is Sunday through Thursday. It can go into to the wee hours, we do have this thing called Thursday night gospel hour, it's a live rehearsal of the Sunday service with all the bells and whistles and media and music. But we lock it down, because Friday is our family Sabbath.

Tim Lucas: It was really a cool thing, because recovering that for me personally, just the insanity of life in the northeast, it is fast paced, that is bell to bell. It's always bigger, better, faster, more. It's slowed me down. And my kids were at that age where that became informational to our families rhythm. So my wife would, she changed her schedule, so she'd be off on Friday. So I would come home... I might come home at 1:00 am Thursday morning, after our live rehearsal for Sunday, but we're locked and loaded. And we said, we're not going to talk about Liquid Friday morning. She's like, "I don't care what time you get in wake up. But your body's in that bed, and we go out on a date, we go for a walk in the woods behind our house, we're right by Drew University. And then we go out for lunch.

Tim Lucas: We just go to local diner, and we just catch up right on what's happened that week. And then we would go get our kids from school. And this was so beautiful. It's great. I remember waiting for our kids and we're out in the schoolyard, and the bell rings, and here they come out. And my son comes flying out the doors. I think he was like in third or fourth grade the time, and the doors burst open in front of all the parents who were just standing there talking in the school yard. He goes, "Daddy, it's Sabbath time."

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh that's awesome.

Tim Lucas: And of course, everybody's like, "You're Jewish?"

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, your Jewish, yeah.

Tim Lucas: And everyone else is like, "No, he's a priest. Wait a minute, he's married. What the..." But in his mind, Sabbath meant, man, there is no Liquid, I got daddy all to myself, and it's our special family time. And that became real sacred to us. My kids are teenagers now, but we still that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Because they don't burst through the doors going, "Daddy" anymore, yeah.

Tim Lucas: They do but they don't say Sabbath time, they act a lot more cool about it, but they'll actually text me at 2:45, "Hey, can we go fishing? Can we go..." So that's become very life giving Carey, because you can't... There's that, you can do it all. Well you can do it all but you have to prioritize in a sense and realize there's seasons. So it was really liberating. I remember Andy Stanley saying that, this was helpful to me. Where he said, "It's not a no forever. It's a no for now." And so like, even with this book, I knew there was a book in me, I knew the Lord was writing a story here, and there's some transferable principles, that'll be helpful for others, but I was like, "Now it's not the time. I just got to keep my eye on the ball, which I got these 18 years, my family, my daughter is 17 and so I got one more year with her before she's off to, college, university.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh yeah, it flies man.

Tim Lucas: I'll never get it back. So yeah, there was some things that I would have liked to see happen sooner, but again, I look at it, it's much more healthy, to allow God to set the timetable.

Carey Nieuwhof: Do you have any protocol for your phone, on the Sabbath, because I can imagine that, okay, you're ready to go, but the text start to come in... Or, how do you handle that?

Tim Lucas: Yeah, you know it's become, I've become a much more humane leader, I like to think with even our staff, because I used to send out emails... And your, somebody I know who's, maximized time and you have a workflow, but I would set up emails writing the night before, and then have them boomerang to send at 5:30 in the morning. And...

Carey Nieuwhof: And they think you're up, yeah.

Tim Lucas: Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. And it would give this impression that, like, "Hey, he's up at 5:30 in the morning, he's raring to go, and he's talking about a strap plan." It would just create this crazy cycle. This manic expectation that we're on all the time. The first thing you wake up, well, you better be checking your phone. And the reality is here, I'm given mixed messages. I'm like, "You better be spending time with the Lord." We can go into ministry and we have... A lot can.. " This is one of the great secrets right, that nobody really acknowledges. We can accomplish a lot in our human strength and energy. Like it's amazing what the Lord has gifted men and women with leadership gifts to do. And most the time the world doesn't really know what comes out of the flesh or comes out of the Spirit.

Tim Lucas: But long term, it is always revealed. So here I am telling our staff that, it's your time with the Lord, let it flow... The overflow of that, your leadership. And then I'm hitting them with requests and emails at 5:30 in the morning or shooting them a text that, 10 o'clock at night. We do have those guardrails around it, it's

really during working hours. Now, of course, there's exceptions and things. But nowadays, it's way more the exception than it is the rule.

Carey Nieuwhof: Because you lead that way, and everyone knows that your Sabbath, is it a common day off? Like are Liquid offices closed on a Friday, or how do you work that?

Tim Lucas: Yeah, so we have central staff, and then we have our campus staff. The campus staff would have a very similar workflow, would go Sunday through Thursday, with Friday off, but then we'll have our central people who are Monday through Friday. Those might be, could be finance, small groups, HR, that stuff. But I have to say this, one of the one of the commitments we're making right now is we come around all the time, people are like, "Man, you got to have a Saturday night service." And we've just drawn a line not judging anybody else who does, but just for us. We said, "You know what? We're not going to be a seven day a week organization." As a church, organizationally, we are going to be a six day a week and we're going to have a seventh day of rest. We're not legalistic about it, it might be Friday it might be Saturday, but we have actually said we're going to reach less people, but we're going to disciple our leaders better and healthier for the long haul by saying we're going to observe the Sabbath as a church.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's good. That common day for everybody is Saturday?

Tim Lucas: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: Where everybody's off. Yep. Okay, talk to us before... Man, we could go in so many more directions, but gospel hour. I love what you guys do. I've heard about that. So you actually live preach your sermon before you deliver it in front of a congregation, before you deliver it publicly? Can you talk to us about that?

Tim Lucas: Well, I think most communicators, right they rehearse on some level, it might be in front of a mirror. The key is this is with a live panel of judges, American Idol style. I think a lot of guys and women, if you're a communicator on a regular basis, right? You want to have a trial run, you want to get into your muscle memory, you want to see what jokes work, what goes sideways, what was unclear. But a lot of times we use the 9:00 AM services or guinea pig, right? I always hear that. I hear it... I have listened to world class communicators who actually when they're telling their thing they're like, "You know, and then I make adjustments after the first service." And I'm like, why do we... Maybe this is why no one comes to the first service, they're crash test dummies. We started a thing, I mean, this is some of the very beginning and it end up being called Thursday Night Gospel Hour, just because it was on Thursday nights. But it was when we instituted the Sabbath on Friday.

Tim Lucas: So we said we're going to stay as long as it takes, where we have the videos loaded, the slides created, the music, everything, all the props, everything in live rehearsal. But the key was, and to this day, we have a table of four or five, I use

the word judges, but it really is a mix of staff members, different ages, different ethnicities, and trusted congregants sit behind a table with a manuscript of my entire message. And then I preach it live from start to finish, and I give each of them a red pen, and before I start I say, "Now, don't be nice to me. I want you to take out the knives. And I mean, everything. A joke falls flat, you circle it. I say something foggy or something like offensive, you underline it, you red line it, I want know everything. If there's something I said that wasn't even part of my message that just was Spirit inspired, "Like man, go into that."

Tim Lucas: Or you have a better idea, there may be a better passage of scripture that will illuminate that point more." It's been transformational, because they not only highlight the good flag, the bad, but they red line the ugly. And what has had is I have a much more... A male who is middle aged with my particular background, how do I speak to the diversity of people God's bringing our way? How do I speak to, Indian American immigrants who are here with their third culture? How do I speak to an LGBTQ person who walks in and wants to know where we stand? And so, behind that table, oftentimes we'll have a female pastor. We have one who oversees our counseling ministry. Gosh, when I'm doing a message on relationships, or marriage, she is able to speak in with nuance, and practical examples that I just simply don't have. And it reaches... It just drives the message so much more deeper.

Tim Lucas: Having an Indian pastor helped me add nuance when I'm talking about racial reconciliation, but hey, here I am at the dominant culture. One of the big secrets I have with speaking with folks in reaching people who, again, post Christian or just far from God, I always make sure I have a brand new Christian or a baby believer who always calls me on religious jargon. I'll never forget this. I don't know if I can say this. But I remember one time, like, literally, I'm preaching... And then what happens, I preach the whole message, and then I sit down with them and we go page by page, they tell me what they think. What they flag, put a question mark next to red line.

Tim Lucas: And he says, "Page seven. He just goes, "I'm sorry." I just see him scratching his head. and he says, "What the... is substitutionary atonement?" I was like, "Said nobody ever in seminary." So he forces me to put theological concepts into everyday language, because that's invisible jargon to me, I don't even know it right. We're the frog in the puddle.

Carey Nieuwhof: You're not even thinking about it, yeah.

Tim Lucas: Not even thinking about it. And so I always have now in my ear, it's like, I have an earpiece in, four or five of these coaches who I'm always saying, "Oh well Karen would... Now if I said that, Karen Woods gave me a much better example of that. And then Greg made me sure don't say substitutionary atonement, just put it in a very clear language where people can understand what happened at the cross." You know I'll have a single adult sit in there. And she'll say, "Hey you use, always use marriage examples or parenting and it makes me feel a little

isolated, and kind of like what place do I have?" That feedback session Carey if the message takes 45 minutes, that feedback session, that rehearsal, the debriefing of it takes 90. Double the amount of time of the message.

Carey Nieuwhof: And then when do you do the rewrites? Like you're supposed to have the next day off.

Tim Lucas: Yep. So I will stay here till whatever our with my wife's blessings, to rewrite to reorganize, to sharpen. We've gotten it now, though, that where there's really... It might take me a couple more hours afterwards. But can I tell you what that does to go home on Friday to know that not only have I written the message, got it locked and loaded, I field tested it. What that does even for our campuses, they know how long it's going to be. So because we time it, we time it page by page. And so they say, "Hey, it was 48 minutes, but you spent eight minutes on the story in the middle that quite honestly, you could shave it down to four.

Tim Lucas: And so then we can tell our guys, "Hey, guys, a video coming... The broadcasts you're getting on Sunday, it's 44 minutes." That is a gift to so many people in the organization beyond me as the communicator, all of our campus teams, the people in, Liquid family or student ministry. They know how long they're going to be in the classrooms to prepare with the kids. It just is a gift to the whole organization. So a lot of that Thursday night gospel hour is part of our secret sauce in the kitchen.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's great. Well, Tim, there's so much more in the book. It's not just a story. It's the strategy of reaching young adults and you've reached thousands and thousands of them. And there's a whole lot about acquiring churches and so on and so forth. Anything else you want to share though? I want people to get the book but anything else you want to share?

Tim Lucas: Well I think the subtitle the book Liquid Church: 6 Powerful Currents to Saturate Your City for Christ. I think I would worry that somebody might think, "Well, I don't live in a city." It's not about being in the urban environment. Again, we have suburban campuses, we have some that are more urban. But wherever they live, there's one thing I know, right? Like, whether it's Canada, Pacific Northwest Midwest, there are spiritually thirsty people who may have given up on church, but they haven't given up on God. Like I'm not seeing that. In fact, more than just like the nuns like none of the above and the surveys religion. I'm seeing more of the "dones". Like, I'm sort of done with church as I knew it. And I think it's more of a critique of the style of that kind of again, where it's just a word based analytical propositional church.

Tim Lucas: I may be done with the seeker sensitive thing. We live here in New York, our band is phenomenal. We're not going to outclass anything being done, though, 20 minutes away in the Beacon Theater in New York. So our people aren't coming for like, "Wow, they have an amazing light show and fog machine." Like that's not... But we have to put the gospel into... You wrote the forward for the

book Carey. And what I appreciate is, it's based on Ezekiel 47, and that was the prophecy that gives me encouragement for the next 10, 20 years. Ezekiel sees the temple leaking water. And so this water is flowing out of the temple, when he realizes it's really a picture of the New Testament Church flowing and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Tim Lucas: And what just... I mean, just blew my mind. I'd seen that passes before, I'd never preached on it before. But in Ezekiel 47, the first 12 verses, the further away the water gets from the church, the deeper it gets. You ever have people say I wish we would go deeper in the church. Well, watch. You get out of the church, that's when you go deep. And so Ezekiel has this image, and that water is up to his ankles, then it's his knees, then it's his waist. And finally, he's almost swept away, and an angel pulls him down, and he says, "Do you see all this? This was going to be like in the last days." It's God's people flowing in the power of the Spirit from the seats into the streets. That's actually how the church is going to grow. So we're reaching spiritually thirsty people, whether they're we like to say Jewish, Catholic, Jedi Knight, we don't really care what your background is, they are desperate for grace, I mean, the real gospel of grace.

Tim Lucas: And so we kind of have that tension of grace and truth and we're just finding that it's earning a whole new hearing for the gospel with millennials and Gen Z.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, book is called Liquid Church and Tim Lucas is the lead pastor of Liquid Church. Where can they connect with you and with Liquid?

Tim Lucas: Sure, so I'm on the Gram. You can follow me on Instagram at Pastor Tim Lucas. It's funny I used to do Twitter but honestly like Instagram is where I live, my kids live more and more a billion people live right? And it allows me to marry that word and image together picture and propositions. And then the book itself they can find out more at liquidchurchbook.com.

Carey Nieuwhof: Okay, liquidchurchbook.com. Tim, it's been a joy, it won't be the last time. Congratulations on the book, and on this launch day and thanks so much for investing in all these leaders.

Tim Lucas: Thank you Carey. God bless you, man. Love you my friend.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, that was fascinating. And make sure you head on over to liquidchurchbook.com to get your bonuses today, including the one I'm most excited about a 22 page ebook with seven done for you series on how to grow your church series that are really guaranteed to grow your church, so make sure you check that out. Everything of course is in the show notes. So you can find those at careynieuwhof.com/Episode289, or just Google my name and Tim Lucas' name together and you will find the show notes. We have transcripts for you there, quotable that you can share, and a whole lot more.

Carey Nieuwhof: Guys Today we're picking the winner of the book giveaway I'm so excited about we're going to stack your library, make sure you head on over to the socials and again all the links for that are in the show notes. And check out what Remodel Health is doing. Be one of the churches that saving now over \$600,000 in health care costs, go to remodelhealth.com/Carey. Hey, thanks to all the partners who bring this to you for free week after week. We have some really exciting guests coming up. We have let's see Chick-fil-A VP, DN Turner, Louie Giglio, Gordon MacDonald. I have been looking forward to this interview for a long time, marketing guru Alejandro Reyes, Patrick Lencioni, Albert Tate, Carlos Whittaker, John Acuff, Francis Chan. Yeah, how's that for a lineup coming up?

Carey Nieuwhof: And again, if you subscribe, you get it all for free. Next week, we are back with Max Lucado. Man, I love the time I spend with him. And here's an excerpt from my conversation with Max.

Max Lucado: I'm a happier person if I don't feel like I have to have a quick and ready response to every question that surfaces. Sometimes I'm listening, because I honestly don't have a word of wisdom yet. And I'm waiting for the Lord to tell me, and I've made the mistake of speaking prematurely and living to regret it. So if I just listened to the problem, or listen to the question, or just interact on those, "How do you feel?" "How does that make you feel?" level, then inevitably something good happens.

Carey Nieuwhof: Again, subscribers, you get that absolutely free, and we'll see you next time on the podcast. Thank you so much for listening, and once again, I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before, and thank you so much for an incredible first five years.

Speaker 1: 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.