

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

Carey Nieuwhof: Well hey everybody, and welcome to episode 316 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Well today's episode is brought to you by Pro Media Fire and LifeWay. I think you're going to be really thrilled you tuned in today. For those of you who are subscribers, this is the drill right? Every time we launch an episode you get it for free. If you're new and you really enjoyed this make sure you subscribe wherever you get your podcast, Apple and Spotify seem to own most of the market there these days, but wherever you happen to listen to podcasts we are there and you can subscribe for free. It's a great way to get an injection every week of leadership fuel. We release an episode every Tuesday and then a couple times on a Thursday every month for about six, and I try to bring you the best behind the scenes leadership conversations out there, period.

Carey Nieuwhof: Man I love today's episode. John Mark Comer is a pastor and author and also a podcaster. His This Cultural Moment podcast with Mark Sayers is one of my favorite that I discovered last year. We talk about that. We also talk about the really move in America to post-Christian culture, and all the problems that people seem to have with time management today. He's got a brand new book called The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry and we talk about how that can improve your life, your leadership, your spirituality, and so much more. I love this conversation with John Mark Comer. I think you will too.

Carey Nieuwhof: Thrive Church runs about 700 or 800 people in attendance during the weekends, and two of their staff members were handing off all the creative and website needs, but the most talented creative then decided to leave. You ever find yourself in that problem where you're like, "Uh-oh, uh-oh, I love my best person." Instead of hiring another internal staff member, their pastor decided to become a client at Pro Media Fire. He purchased a media bundle to cover all the graphics, the social, the video every month. In addition, he got a Wildfire Plan, which took care of their website updates, all the digital marketing to reach people, and instead of hiring one additional staff member that was overwhelmed with their growth, instead the pastor hired the entire team at Pro Media Fire and helped them break the 1,000 barrier. The money they saved in salary they're putting into digital marketing.

Carey Nieuwhof: If you're curious about solutions like that guess what? You get a 10% discount off for life of all plans at ProMediaFire.com/Carey. If you're looking to really improve your online presence and who isn't guys, it's 2020. Head on over to ProMediaFire.com/Carey to learn more and get 10% off for life. It is media support for a fraction of the price of hiring a team member.

Carey Nieuwhof: Now back in August I shared with you I was working on a few exclusive courses that are only going to be offered at Ministry Grid. Hey you got one more week

or so to take advantage of that. These courses cover common leadership challenges, how you can overcome obstacles in your church ministry or organization, and this is really cool, if you complete any of these courses on Ministry Grid, which are already free, their team will send you a copy of my latest book, *Didn't See It Coming*, as a gift no strings attached. Head on over to MinistryGrid.com/Carey, check out the free courses I did that are only available there, and while you're there check out their full volunteer training library that you can use at your church. My church Connexus loves the stuff that Ministry Grid does and so go to MinistryGrid.com/Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof: Hey, before we jump into the interview with John Mark Comer, last month was a really fun month on the podcast. We passed 10 million downloads and you know that we did a contest. At the end of this episode I'm going to announce the winners of that contest, and I am so excited because well a whole bunch of you won Starbucks but then we're going to fly five listeners to Nashville for a day of leadership development with me in person. It's going to be great, so I'll announce that toward the end of the show. Well anyway, without further ado, here is my conversation with pastor and author, John Mark Comer.

Carey Nieuwhof: John Mark welcome to the podcast. It's absolutely great to have you.

John Mark Comer: It's fantastic to be along. I've been looking forward to our conversation.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, yeah, well I have loved your podcast *This Cultural Moment*, I know you've got a couple of other podcasts as well. As I was sharing with you before we started recording, I binge listened. People have been telling me, "You got to listen to the show. You got to listen to the show." I'm like, "I will, I will, I will." Then in the spring I binge listened to the whole thing. I want to start at a bizarre place, which is the secular salvation schema. You did a whole episode on that. I'd love for you to unpack what that looks like because as soon as I heard you and Mark Sayers unpack it I'm like, "That is 100% what I see going on in culture right now."

John Mark Comer: Yeah, okay so at some point you're asking me to be Mark Sayers, who for those of you that are not listening to the podcast, is I would say he's the other half but he's the other 90%, I'm the 10%. I will do my best. I think that started... This is such a classic 2019 kind of moment, but he posted one random little thing on his Instagram story of the salvation's gamma, or something like that. I can't even remember what he called it. I think he called it post-Christian personal renewal model or something like that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

John Mark Comer: He had this little thing that he had posted on his Instagram story, one post. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, we have to do an episode around that. That is..." It instantly rang true with my felt experience in Portland. I think the gist of it is that the human person, regardless of religious orientation or anti-religious orientation,

can't escape this inner drive for what Christians call salvation. It goes by all sorts of other names. I think what Mark did is he ran the typical Christian paradigm of creation fall, sin, redemption, salvation, heaven through the secular lens. What does that look like in a secular world view?

John Mark Comer: Eden or creation becomes your inner child, your inner self, you hear a lot of that language of the romanticization of children, which is I think tied to the decline in family marriage and child rearing because so many of the people that say this are single. You know what I mean? Those that are parents don't have the same romantic view of children.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, yeah.

John Mark Comer: Because you actually know what children are like. God bless them but they're even more narcissistic than adults, they just have less power to do damage with it.

Carey Nieuwhof: Correct.

John Mark Comer: But there's this bizarre Western secular romanticization of the inner child and your inner self and it's tied to I think victimization in our culture and the desire to blame others for what's wrong inside of us, and attribute everything to wounding at some level. There's this idea that early on I was this beautiful inner child, I was not wounded, I was not corrupted by my environment or my family or this, that, or the other religion or whatever. It's an Eden moment, it's a Genesis 1 and 2 moment in the psyche of my inner child. Fall then becomes all sorts of things. It becomes trauma, it becomes your wound, it becomes externally given identities, meaning anything that is put on you from external is now... Because everything since Freud is about the internal, so it becomes any kind of expectations on you based on your gender, or your ethnicity, or your social class, or your nationality, or your career. In your religion it would be a classic example of that.

John Mark Comer: Anything that doesn't arise from your inner self is this oppression that has come upon you. Even binding commitments, be it marriage, be it duty, be it whatever, these things become the fall, the condition that we're in and the main problem. Sin then becomes not feeling happy or not feeling good about yourself or feeling any kind of shame. Salvation then becomes rediscovering your inner self, which is in everything from soul cycle, to yoga, to self-help, to Hollywood. That whole find your inner center, speak your truth, rediscover who you are, the obsession with Enneagram and personality theories. Of course there's some good stuff in all of this, but this in a salvation model becomes how do I get back to that inner self, that inner child that's been corrupted through other people telling me who I need to be or what I need to do.

John Mark Comer: That philosopher Byung-Chul Han is a German Korean philosopher, so fascinating perspective. He calls human beings entrepreneurs of themselves and

how in this whole... He writes about how we've moved from a disciplinary society to an achievement society, meaning 100, 200 years ago we were a disciplinary society, which was governed by no. This is what you can't do based on your gender or your ethnicity or where you live or your class, and taken to the extreme it produces all sorts of neurosis. This was the breeding ground for Freud. We live literally in the opposite, what he calls an achievement society, which is governed by yes, you can do pretty much anything you want to do, be pretty much anything you want to be as long as it doesn't "harm other people." That's exhausting and it's leading to burnout and anxiety and depression.

John Mark Comer: He writes about the rise of depression grows in tandem with the rise of achievement culture because the depressed person is basically thinking, "Nothing is possible," and he has this great line. "You can only think that in the culture that says everything is possible." The depressed person is tired of having to become himself or herself and the anxiety of what if I pick the wrong self to become? What if I don't find my inner self? What if I don't find my inner truth? Then he writes about how it's giving way to doping society as we're escaping into drugs and alcohol and Netflix and work and social media to medicate against the pain.

John Mark Comer: This is, I think, very much the moment we're in. Then heaven, in a secular schema becomes pleasure, happiness, the good life, drinking good wine around a nice table somewhere beautiful and warm with beautiful people. This becomes the heaven with no restrictions, no binding commitments, no external authority on you, just free to be this idealized self in this own set. That becomes the ache that we're aching for.

Carey Nieuwhof: Such a great summary.

John Mark Comer: That's my attempt to summarize Mark Sayers. I want to go on record saying you started with a question that is not out of my brain.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well I got to tell you, it's pretty amazing John Mark because when I heard you and Mark talk about that, my whole ministry and culture flashed before my eyes. You can see that particularly in Millennial or Gen Z culture that that's very much the thing. I don't pray, I do meditation, I do yoga, I'm in to self-discovery, I'm into no pain, no harm, rediscovering who I really am. Of course that's the Gospel without the Gospel.

John Mark Comer: Totally.

Carey Nieuwhof: Basically is what it is.

John Mark Comer: Yeah, and there's just enough truth in all of that to appeal to your soul.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

John Mark Comer: All of that comes to the church. It's not like secular people think that way, followers of Jesus think another way. You know what I mean? There's all this overlap in the middle.

Carey Nieuwhof: That almost passes for Christianity in some circles really.

John Mark Comer: Yes. Yeah, we deal with that on a daily basis.

Carey Nieuwhof: What are some of the realities? I mean is that a good summary of the dominant mindset you would see or the dominant cultural milieu that you have in Portland where you are?

John Mark Comer: Oh yeah, I mean 100%. Yes, I mean if I had \$1 for every time I heard somebody say, "Speak your truth." Which is such a fascinating religions aside case study and logic. That doesn't even make sense. Once you put the pronoun your in front of the noun truth you're no longer using the Webster's Dictionary. Man you hear that all the time and yeah, I need to find myself, I need a break, I need to discover who I really am. I mean the word oppression, which has a very legitimate usage, is so overused that it really is any form of external norm, authority, morality, vision that is in any way imposed upon somebody either coercively or non-coercively is thought of as oppression if it comes from somebody else and repression if it comes from inside your own person.

John Mark Comer: That is a radically different way to think about thousands of years of the best of human wisdom and tradition across religions, across spiritualities, across traditions, across ages, and ethnicities, and genders. To think that way about the thousands of years of cumulative wisdom is a very new phenomenon, and I think it is really wreaking havoc. I don't think it's leading to the life that it claims it's leading to.

Carey Nieuwhof: How do you see the symptoms of that expressing themselves in people's lives in the context in which you minister? Obviously everything we believe produces fruit, positive or negative.

John Mark Comer: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: What are some of the symptoms you see from that narrative really becoming the dominant narrative in the culture that you're in?

John Mark Comer: I think the main two things I see is it's leading to loneliness and it's leading to emotional un-health, be that anxiety, depression, mental illness, relational dysfunction. It's interesting how the secular thing takes you to hyper individualism because you reject any kind of norm, any kind of communal vision of life together and it's all you do you, be who you want to be, do what you want to do, speak your truth. All of that takes you into individualism. It's so tied to the progressive sex vision, which is... I mean sex in our city is a soteriology. It is a doctrine of salvation. It's not like something that you do or some people are

into, it's made to be way better than it actually is and people literally look to sexuality for a salvation, a kind of healing of the soul, and meaning, and purpose in life.

John Mark Comer: That's tied because the progressive sex ethic doesn't work well. I've been married to the same person for 62 years and we have 19 grandkids. That's not where that narrative leads you most of the time, and so the result is a staggering amount of loneliness. I live right in the city and it's bizarre more and more like how infrequently you see children. You don't see old people and you don't see young people. You see all these 20 to 45 single people or maybe couples.

Carey Nieuwhof: With their dog.

John Mark Comer: Barely any children. Yeah with their dog. Dogs are literally all over the place.

Carey Nieuwhof: Dogs are the new children. I really am convinced in the next generation dogs are going to be kids.

John Mark Comer: They are. Yeah, and I think that the rise in dogs, which grows in tandem with the secular culture is totally tied into secularism and the breakdown of the family. I think it all goes together, and there's even a weird thing where if you walk into a room with a child people will look at you like, "How dare you pollute the earth or make global warming even worse?" I mean seriously, that's a thing. People are like the best thing you can possibly do for the environment is not have any more kids.

Carey Nieuwhof: I live near Toronto, I get it.

John Mark Comer: Yeah, you get it. Then if you walk in with a dog... You can walk into a restaurant practically with a dog and they're, "Oh look at..."

Carey Nieuwhof: Or on an airplane.

John Mark Comer: It's like with children you see in a church. Going on an airplane, oh my gosh don't even get me started about the airplane. It drives me nuts. I'm a rule follower. I'm like that is not an emotional support animal.

Carey Nieuwhof: I was going to go there and then I thought no, there's a lot of people listening. But yes, it's not an emotional support animal.

John Mark Comer: It's not. I understand there's a place for that.

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm with you John Mark 100%.

John Mark Comer: Not four dogs on every plane, there's no way.

Carey Nieuwhof: My headphones are my emotional support animal, that's what they are.

John Mark Comer: This podcast is your emotional support.

Carey Nieuwhof: You got it. Oh yeah, but it is that whole mindset. You're getting right into post-Christian culture and I've always said as a Canadian, when I go to Portland, when I got to Seattle, when I go to California I'm like, "Oh yeah, I get it here." When I go to the Bible Belt I'm like, "Whoa, this is another culture," but you are the future of America, whether people like it or not.

John Mark Comer: Yeah, or at least a future. I think the Trump election showed there's going to be multiple... There's another post-Christian reality that's on the right that's less urban, coastal, elite and more rural, more small town, but is still thoroughly... I mean Trump is a great example. That was a good wake up call for a lot of us because I think the progressive narrative is... I think about that word progressive. We are ahead of everybody else, the conservatives are behind trying to conserve the past, we're ahead and it's this evolutionary view of human history, that the human species is evolving and moving forward toward this utopian future where we finally throw off the shackles of religion and tradition and gender and all this stuff, and everybody's equal and everybody is wealthy and drinking their wine and having a good time and walking their dog and getting along. Canada's the future basically.

John Mark Comer: That's why the Trump election and Brexit, as of recording this podcast today, which is the big election in England. It's so jarring to somebody in a Portland or in New York or in LA because there's such an arrogance, such a presumption, such a sense of superiority, and such a sense of we are the future, that you can't fathom that there are people that see your future and see your life and opt out. Say, "No we don't want that." Or can't be a part of it for economic reasons, for social reasons. I think the Trump election showed us there's another version of post-Christian culture that isn't urban coastal elite, that is in Arkansas in a small town or whatever the equivalent would be, and in Canada. I think it's very important that we take that seriously and give it attention and compassion.

Carey Nieuwhof: I've had this conversation, and I don't want to misquote him, but with David Kinnaman just numerous times offline. I think David would agree, and David if you don't I'm sure you'll text me, but that the attitudinal differences you're describing in Portland like that mindset, the secular salvation schema, the whole we don't do children, we do dogs, that kind of thing. I think he might argue, and certainly I'll take responsibility for this insight, but that the data would suggest that that's actually somewhat true generationally independent of geography. That sure, there were some 28 year olds who are part of what you described as the Trump movement, but there's probably more 28 year olds, 35 year olds that would buy into what you started this podcast with, that to a certain extent the next generation feels a little more like Portland then it does like Alabama. Is that fair or would you say that's different from what you're experiencing?

John Mark Comer: Yeah, again that's maybe over my pay grade, but that is based on anecdotal evidence only. That is absolutely my impression. I don't go to the south a lot. Not in a disparaging way, but similar thing. When I go to Toronto or London or Vancouver BC, I feel like, "Oh, this is just a different accent, same thing." When I go to Atlanta or I went to Florida this last year I mean I literally am like, "What planet am I on? I don't even know what world I'm living."

Carey Nieuwhof: They probably ask the same question of you, right? It's like, "Where are you from? Wow."

John Mark Comer: Sure, and Portland in many ways defines itself against America. It wants to be basically Scandinavia or Canada. It wants to be this European Scandinavian thing. That's very much in the ethos of our city. Yeah, that's been my experience. In fact because I've started this little podcast with Mark, which is so funny, I'm not the post-Christian expert, I'm in a post-Christian city trying to make sense of it, hence why I started that podcast to ask questions. I wanted to get his framework deeper into my nervous system so it would come out of me. But now, everywhere I go people want me to talk about the post-Christian thing and you're in Portland and all that stuff. I'll inevitably do a lecture or Q&A or whatever and I've had this experience so many times where I'll do some little talk on post-Christian culture and a number of pastors in the south or sometimes Southern California or other places that are a little bit more conservative will come up to me and basically say, "Yep, that's not a thing."

John Mark Comer: I had the same experience when I was in Ireland, anywhere in that more conservative, Bible Belt kind of world. That's not a thing, we're not there yet, our thing is totally different, and basically say we don't need to think about these things right now. Then the youth pastors will wait around, waiting in the wings.

Carey Nieuwhof: I'm like how old was that feedback because I can tell you.

John Mark Comer: Then there's this... Yes and it's normally 40 or 45 and up, and then the youth pastors come up. They basically say in a very kind, gracious way, "It's absolutely happening here, everywhere you go under say age 28." But the churches don't feel it because when you have 5,000 people in your megachurch coming strong, tithing, going great, conservative, all the stuff and you don't notice, "Oh my gosh, where are all the 23 year olds? Where is everybody?" That's all I think mostly due to digital technology. In order to experience this you used to have to actually get in your car and drive to and move to Toronto or New York or urban Portland or San Francisco or LA if you wanted to actually get exposed to this whole world view. Now all you have to do is open your phone in the morning.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yep, no I think that's 100% true. The other thing that's really interesting is the elimination of accents. This is happening in Europe, this is happening in the United States.

- John Mark Comer: Isn't that sad?
- Carey Nieuwhof: It is sad, but I remember traveling through Germany and because of mass media for hundreds of years you would have a village accent or a provincial accent, and now what's happening if you listen to a 23 year old who grew up in Atlanta, or a 23 year old who grew up in LA, or a 23 year old who grew up in New England, they sound an awful lot alike.
- John Mark Comer: Yeah, it's interesting. Now what we don't know yet, what I don't have a good handle on and maybe Kinnaman's done the research here, is Gen Z because there's going to be... Gen Z is just now entering our churches from the perspective of leaders and-
- Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, being an adult.
- John Mark Comer: Interacting at an adult level. Yeah, they've been in our church for many years, but now they're 20 years old, 21 years old, whatever that cutoff year is. Now they're leading worship and they're leading groups and they're leading ministries. There are some significant shifts there and that's where I'd be really interested to see what happens because there's bound to be a backlash against... The progressive narrative is so emotionally and socially stifling and shame based and angry and exhausting and hyper politically correct, it's like the worst of 1980s religious conservative culture. Mark said that at one point, he's like, "You know the church lady and the symptoms, always grumpy and critical and mind your manners and jumping pouncing on you the moment you make little mistakes? That's what the progressive woke even left is." That's not a play on racial sensitivity. That's what it's become is this you're scared to say anything, you're scared to have your head lopped off in shame or whatever. I think there's bound to be a backlash.
- John Mark Comer: Just this year we're seeing the first... There was a massive... I could not quote the exact stats to you. Andrew Sullivan's been reporting on it recently, but there's been a massive shift in Gen Z over the last 12 months in views on LGTBQ in particular on transgenderism.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Really?
- John Mark Comer: Massive reversal of approval ratings. Gen Z is quietly not responding well to the critical gender theory, gender fluidity thing that's being rammed down everybody's throats right now. We're only a year or two years into that trend, I'm really interested to see where that goes.
- Carey Nieuwhof: Well and from what I've seen too, and again, David you should be in on this conversation because he has the actual data.
- John Mark Comer: I know.

Carey Nieuwhof: Anyway, what I have seen is more financially conservative, a little more entrepreneurial and Gen Z financially conservative debt is bad, I don't want to live a life where I'm financially destitute. Also, sexually more conservative. Sexual activity actually dropping, sexual promiscuity dropping.

John Mark Comer: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: There are some generational differences.

John Mark Comer: It's not sexually conservative though unfortunately. My understanding of the data is it's not that people are getting back into purity of culture, it's pornography and the ability to have interpersonal relationships.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's-

John Mark Comer: Sexuality's way down for Gen Z, but it's partially due to porn. Why go to all the trouble of sex when you have an iPhone. Two, to seduce somebody requires the capacity to make small talk and to flirt and to seduce them, and that requires interpersonal skills, which is that's the most terrifying trend I think for Gen Z is the way that social media and text messaging have almost incapacitated some of them and the ability just to talk and say hey and make small talk and go up to somebody and flirt. I think it's good that promiscuity is down, but unfortunately I think the reasons are not encouraging.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, my spin went off on that one yeah. 100% sure. No, this is really helpful and I think there are a lot of people who really don't understand how profoundly culture has changed, how much that impacts our world view, our values, our beliefs, the way we respond to situations. I have found your voice and Mark Sayers voice to be so helpful with that, so I would encourage people to check that out.

Carey Nieuwhof: Now, shifting gears a little bit John Mark, you wrote a fantastic book called The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry, which I would recommend as a read. For those of you watching on YouTube it's right here. It's extremely well written, you're a great writer, very engaging, funny, but really profound as well. I want to talk to you about something you elude to in the book but don't spend a lot of time drilling down on and that is your time at a rapidly growing megachurch where you were the pastor, a life that you actually walked away from. Can you talk about, to the leaders listening and their leaders in the church space, business space, entrepreneurs who are like, "I feel the crushing demands of leadership on me every single day." That was your experience starting out young in church world. Can you walk us through what that was like and what happened?

John Mark Comer: Yeah, I mean yeah. I grew up in megachurch culture, which is an interesting thing. I don't know if this stat is reliable, but I've read that in the 1970s there were only 10 churches in the entire continental US over the size of 2,000 people.

Carey Nieuwhof: I have read that stat too.

John Mark Comer: If that stat is true I grew up at one of those 10 churches. In the Bay area of California. My dad played in a rock band kind of thing, came to faith in his 20s in the Jesus movement at a Billy Graham crusade, went down the aisle at a Billy Graham crusade. A few years later ended up as a pastor at this megachurch in the Bay area. That's what I was born into in 1980 and grew up in and it's all I ever knew. My dad and I actually planted a church together when I was 23 and yeah, it grew really fast, it grew by about 1,000 people a year for about seven years straight. A couple years in my dad and I changed roles and I took over the lead pastor position.

John Mark Comer: The first couple of years were a wild ride, they were exhausting but so fun, and that plays to all the good part of you that wants to see a city come alive with Jesus and a church flourish, and it plays to all of your ego and ambition and adrenaline addiction, and attempt to escape from the pain of your own wound, all of that stuff. I think my mind wasn't so much there those first few years, it was working insane hours getting this thing up and running. Then a number of years in I just began to grow more and more tired. You can only live that way for a few years at most before either you have a nervous breakdown or you just slip into this flat numb mode where the only emotions you really have left are anger and anxiety and everything else is swallowed up by the machine.

John Mark Comer: I began to increasingly, to play on Jesus words, gain a church and lose a soul. It was a real profound time for me. Not just emotional exhaustion and burnout, it was a much deeper early midlife crisis for me around myself, identity, leadership, who am I, and around a little bit of an existential crisis around church, which I guess is a coming of age right for a Millennial pastor. What is church and what are we doing here and what is this really accomplishing? Those three things, the emotional burnout, the spiritual I really stalled out in my transformation, and if anything was in regression, not progression, and then the ecclesiological what is this saying about church? Those three crisis all came together in this perfect storm about six, seven years ago where everything, not blew up in an external level, but blew up in an internal level in my heart.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah, so you got to the point where you were imploding, which I think a lot of us in leadership can relate to. By the way, we're back with fresh audio now half way through this interview. You and I did it with reset going, "Oh shoot, our default settings got ruined," so hopefully this is a little more intelligent than the first half audio wise. Back into the merits of the conversation. I'm curious John Mark, would you say that a lot of church pastors or even leaders who are leading large organizations, is your assessment of life in a large organization descriptive or prescriptive? In other words, do you think what happened to you is unique or do you think if you're leading at a certain level that kind of pressure is inherently unbearable?

John Mark Comer: I definitely don't think it's prescriptive so I have no advocacy every megachurch pastor needs to resign right now and go do a smaller church or whatever, that's definitely not my take. I think a lot of it is in people want to blame the megachurch for everything because it's an easy target, it's low hanging fruit. When the Hybels scandal broke a year ago or whatever and we're all watching this church implode and all of these inner dynamics come to the surface in the New York Times and all this stuff, I remember listening to a podcast and this guy I love and wonderful guy but he basically was shredding, "This is the problem with the megachurch and it's leadership structure and this CEO thing." I was chuckling. One because Willow is known around the world for its leadership structure and two, because there was a church in Portland of 120 people that was the antithesis. It was led by a professor who's an intellectual, it was right in the city, it was anti-mega, anti-big, and they literally were having the exact same thing play out but nobody was reading about it because it was 120 people.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

John Mark Comer: I'm thinking man, the problem here we want to blame everything on well this is the megachurch. Megachurches often have way better systems, way more accountability, way more integration than small churches do at some level. That's not to say that systems don't matter and sizes of churches don't matter and that there aren't acute dangers in large churches, but I think the main problem is a spiritual formation one. It doesn't matter what structure you have or what accountability you have in place, how good your board or elders are, if you have people that don't have Christ-like character it will implode at some point, it's only a matter of time. The best structures can do is mitigate against the implosion, not stop it.

John Mark Comer: I mean Willard has this great line that I think was normally applied to politics, which is absolutely true but I think people often apply it to leadership culture too. Where we want to design a system that's so air tight people no longer have to be good.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

John Mark Comer: I think the reality is if people aren't good there's no good system. Systems are made up of people and the system is only as healthy as its least good or least emotionally healthy person. Be that a small business or a megachurch or a nation. That's not to deep downplay systems. I'm a systems guy, I'm a strategy guy, I teach in the Myers-Briggs, I love all that stuff. I think that man, the megachurches, it's low hanging fruit, it's easy to slam and critique and point fingers at. I think the problem is actually much deeper than size of church. With megachurches there's two different ways that people use that phrase. One is just a size of church, that is 2,000 and up or whatever. I honestly have no issue with that. I like Tim Keller's phrase of a Gospel ecosystem in a city, and I think that a city needs different types and sizes and strategies and traditions of

church to actually... Not to reach more people as the saying goes, but to fill in the kingdom of God in that city.

John Mark Comer: There are things that megachurches do incredibly well that our church can't do or small churches definitely can't do and vice versa. There are things that house churches nail that no megachurch could ever touch. We need, I think, a wider respect. The problem, at least in America, is that we don't celebrate a wide enough band width of types of churches and types of leaders. We tend to only celebrate the big or the cool or the sophisticated. The other way of thinking about the word megachurch is a way of doing church. I remember reading a blog post years ago and I forget the author, but he defined megachurch by three attributes. One it's Sunday centric, two it's personality driven, and three is what he called consumer oriented programming.

John Mark Comer: Sunday centric meaning if I asked you, "Hey tell me about your church." You instantly tell me about Sunday, what the experience is. "Well we meet in this building and it's like this and this is what the music is like." You don't actually talk about the church, you talk about the event. Two, it's personality. "Oh I love my pastor," or "We have so and so is our worship leader," or whatever. Three consumer oriented programming is a cynical way of saying young moms group, and the high school group, and young professionals group, and singles group, and singles from 25 to 30, and singles from 35 to 40. Where it's like attracts like, not all of which is bad. I have a high value for stage based apprenticeship to Jesus.

John Mark Comer: If that's what you mean by megachurch, Sunday centric, personality driven, consumer oriented programming, I know a lot of 80 person megachurches. A lot of 150 people and it's Sunday centric, it's personality driven, and it's consumer oriented. These are deeper systemic issues that go into the heart and the West itself and the Western ethos that I think are harder to root out. My beef is less with large churches and more with the fact that we only celebrate these types of churches, we don't celebrate other churches enough and with that trifecta of Sunday centric, personality driven, consumer oriented. I take great issue with that. That will hollow out your soul.

John Mark Comer: The big challenge for I think megachurches is to find their place in the world and to have the right metrics for success because when you have everything going well by some of those external metrics, it's really easy to think things are going better than they actually are. But when there's a megachurch, I just chatted I won't name him for fear of embarrassing him, but I just chatted to a Canadian pastor actually of a church of 4,000 people and man I've been hearing amazing things about this church. It's doing all this insanely rad work in the world and I thought, "Man, if every megachurch was like this I would think every church would be a megachurch." It's holistic and charismatic and Biblical and all culturally engaged, but unfortunately those are the exception to the rule it feels like a lot of the time.

Carey Nieuwhof: When you stepped out of that church and you resigned, can you describe how you were feeling leading up to that moment and in that moment? What were some of the symptoms that said, "Okay, I can't live this way anymore."

John Mark Comer: Yeah, I mean before the moment... As I had mentioned there were three layers to it. One was just emotional exhaustion, burn out. I mean I literally was so frayed emotionally and exhausted and I could not do another day of 16 hours of meetings. Two was a spiritual crisis, not like a crisis of faith, a crisis of spiritual formation. Just meaning if the spiritual journey is about growing and maturing into people of love through the healing of our soul and restoration of union with God. Early on in my journey, through high school, college, I grew up in the church, always been following Jesus since I was a little kid. Through my early 20s I felt this upward, is probably not the right word, but this forward trajectory. I was becoming more loving and my capacity to receive love from God in prayer and to give love to others. I felt like year over year it was moving forward, and then in my mid-20s I felt like I stalled out.

John Mark Comer: The moment that hit, all the Enneagram stuff, the deep ingrained habits of sin in my body and in my genetic code passed down to me through epigenetics from my great-grandfather kind of thing. The stuff of my culture and the assumptions of my family of origin and my compulsions and my addictions to whatever, the moment it hit all of this stuff it's like all of a sudden the way that I had been following Jesus, the church tradition that I came up in's formula or rule of life... We would not have used that language but of church on Sunday and read your Bible and do intercessory prayer in the morning. Then use willpower, say rely on the spirit but we don't really know what that means, it worked well for a while and then it stopped working. It's like I hit this concrete wall and I was banging my head against it.

John Mark Comer: Then as I grew more and more exhausted due to the pressures of adult life, of leadership, and now the phone is in my life and I have this whole digital distraction thing I'm interfacing with. I actually felt like not only was I no longer progressing, I felt like I was regressing and year over year I was becoming more grouchy and critical and angry and exhausted and out of touch with my soul and out of touch with Jesus and unable to sense God's presence and live in the easy yoke. I felt like I was actually going backward and not going forward. Then all of this brought me to... Something about the way that I was following Jesus was not actually leading me forward in the kingdom of God. That was a major wake-up call for me.

John Mark Comer: Then the deep crisis even below that was an ecclesiological one where I realized, "Oh no crap, my church is full of people like me." My church is full of people who had some major wins early on in their healing and salvation and experienced some change into the image of Jesus early on. Then like me they hit this wall, this glass ceiling and they stalled out and they settled for the quasi Christians aren't perfect just forgiven nonsense of low expectations for transformation where the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6, and 7 was not

normative for hardly anybody in our church. I realized that they were in the same boat as me. It's not that they didn't want to change and it's not that they weren't trying to change. They did want to change and they were trying, if anything too hard through willpower. It's that they, like me, did not know how to change.

John Mark Comer: Those three things of the emotional crisis of burnout, the spiritual formation crisis of I'm not becoming more like Jesus year over year, and then the ecclesiological crisis of my church is not helping people reach a high level of maturity in Christ. Those three things came together and that's what I was feeling that finally brought me to this dramatic early mid-life crisis, I need to change the trajectory of my life, I need to resign from this church. I need to do church differently, my discipleship to Jesus differently, and my emotional and holistic life very differently.

Carey Nieuwhof: How did that process begin? What did you almost immediately start changing or how did you even know what to do?

John Mark Comer: Yeah, I mean again it's three steps forward two steps back. There are clear before and after moments in the journey, but life is messy and complex and you can change all of your external stuff and you're still there, you carry you with you everywhere you go. I mean I think big picture basically I... It's a long story. To make it short we were a multi-site church and I was leading three, soon to be four, different sites and basically I didn't quit, I didn't abandon the church. I demoted myself. I basically asked if I could go on a sabbatical and then come back and just leave one of those churches. Then over a two-year process, for all good reasons, not like a church split, each church went autonomous.

John Mark Comer: Basically I stepped down from leading these three, four churches and 100 people on staff and I went on a three month sabbatical, I started therapy, I started Sabbath, I started really leaning into spiritual formation, silence. We moved into walking distance from the church where I sold my car, just started doing my best to live a very slower, more simplified, more integrated life. Then I came back, led our much smaller church right in the city. Not small, but much smaller. Eventually every church went autonomous, and that's been six years or so now. Now it's been a little over half a decade of trying to simplify my life, slow things down, have different metrics for success, different priorities, both for myself and for the church that I'm a part of.

Carey Nieuwhof: Can we talk about metrics for success? Because you're right. I think there's a marker change. Most of us would say the bigger the better as long as everything's up in the right we're great. Talk about how your metrics of success have changed.

John Mark Comer: Yeah, well I mean I think before... Again I don't want to add cynicism because it's really not helpful, there's enough toxicity in our world. If this is a little cynical forgive me, but I think previously my metrics were the four... I would not have

said this out loud, but I think honestly if I were to look at them they were basically what I call the four B's. Butts, budgets, buildings, and buzz. Butts, how many people are there? This is through a pastor metric obviously. Buildings, what's the real estate scenario? Is it cool? Is it urban or is it big? Do you own or rent? Budget, what's the giving right now? Buzz, what are people saying? Is there momentum? Is the church planter word, is it growing, are people into it?

John Mark Comer: Now that's a very cynical way of people saying all sorts of people are coming to faith and people are having incredible experiences and we're getting amazing feedback and people are being generous and look at this beautiful space we're in. I don't want to add cynicism, but I think those metrics are brutal metrics to live by. I mean they will hollow out your soul. They're so fickle and then they tie you to... They create a constant temptation to compromise as a leader because you need things from people and what you need from... You know what I mean?

John Mark Comer: You need people to give money, you need the building to work out, you need people to say positive things. You need that upward growth curve, and that sabotages prophetic and pastoral leadership. Because prophetic and pastoral leadership has to go against the flow of culture, it has to have a high level of differentiation in psychological language or detachment. You have to be able to do what you know before God is right even if people are mad at you, less people will come to your church, people will not give money. Because it's the right thing to do to lead people into Christofornity and to Christ likeness. Those are not good metrics to live by emotionally because they're meritocracy metrics, they're winners and losers, and at some point everybody's a loser.

John Mark Comer: That's what people don't realize is no matter how big your church is, there's always one that's bigger or cooler. Has more sophisticated famous people in it. You know what I mean? It's a fool's errand attempting to achieve inner fulfillment through external success. I mean whatever your leadership thing is, it is a fool's errand. We hear that from all the people that become rich and famous and then come back to tell us and we're like, "Yeah, but they don't know. What do they know?" If I was rich and famous, if I had a megachurch, if I had a best selling book, if I-

Carey Nieuwhof: Then I would say the same thing after. Well give it to me now.

John Mark Comer: After it, but let me be the exception to the rule. Yeah, I don't know if that's getting at it, but I think that's right.

Carey Nieuwhof: That is good. What are some of your new metrics? When you look at your own life or you look at your ministry what are you like, "Nah, this is what I got my eye on now."

John Mark Comer: Yeah, and again we've sat down... I remember I was an elder team and a staff, we spent a day or two attempting to articulate. If those are the old metrics what are the new metrics? They're harder to articulate because you have things like

the fruit of the spirit in Galatians, and the nice thing about the old metrics is you can get most of them in an email on Monday morning. You know what I mean? Here's how many people came. You can get the numbers, you can get the raw data. How many people came, here's what the offering was, here's how many people did this on Instagram or whatever. The new metrics, if love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithful, and self-control. I don't get an email on Monday morning being like your church is up in patience 13% due to your sermon yesterday.

John Mark Comer: That's part of why ministry is tricky and that's why constant temptation for me... I was just reading Alan Fadling's book on leadership, and he points out that programs are easier to manage than people because they make us feel like we're in control. You know what I mean? When you're a pastor in particular you can start a program and you feel like I'm in control of this program. You're not actually in control of people though, and so when you do more people driven ministry, and I'm not against programs, but when you do people driven ministry it's a blow to your ego because you're not in control. Even if you do all the right things people have free will and they will... It's Jesus parable to sower. Even if you do ministry at the right thing the right way, you're still going to have all sorts of people that just nah, shrug it off, or are really into it and then the soil is shallow, or something comes to take it away.

John Mark Comer: I keep sitting with Jesus parable of the sower to realize I am so not in control of the outcomes of people, and my job is... That doesn't mean I don't have responsibility, but that responsibility is more... A mentor said to me recently on parenting, it was actually John Ortberg who I know we have a mutual affection for. He said, "You know there comes a moment as a parent where you're no longer responsible for, you're responsible to." Meaning when you have a two year old you're responsible for your two year old. If you abandon them they will die. When you have a 22 year old you're responsible to them. You still have a responsibility to show up, to speak truth, to be there for them, to love them, to stay faithful to them, but you're not responsible for whether or not they study for their final exam or for how they spend their money or for whether or not they buy a car that they shouldn't buy and get a car payment or go into debt. You know what I mean? You're responsible to them but not for them.

John Mark Comer: There comes that point in the life of a pastor and I thought I was more responsible for people than I actually was. It's more of a responsibility to. I have responsibility to show up, to speak truth, to offer spiritual direction, to attempt to model the way of Jesus. You know what I mean? To guard the church, but I can't control these people nor should I, that's not the way of Jesus is not coercion and control. That's a very long way of saying it's... Sorry for that tangent. Feel free to edit that out of the interview.

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

John Mark Comer: I think the new metrics of success are Christ likeness at a big picture, which is harder to measure. There are some things you can measure like the right side of numbers is baptism. We want to be a church where people that are not followers of Jesus and didn't grow up in the church and are from a secular city are coming to faith in Jesus. We want to measure how many people are at Alpha each quarter and how many of those people come to faith and are baptized. How many of those people then end up in a community is another thing we measure. We take really meticulous records of how many people are in our home communities, which for us is as important or more important than our Sunday gatherings.

John Mark Comer: Tithing isn't the only marker but generosity is a key part of the way of Jesus. We want to measure are we becoming more generous as people and as a community? Some of these numeric things aren't bad to measure, it's what you do with them and how you interpret the data and how you hold that at an internal psychological level and spiritual level.

Carey Nieuwhof: How is your life radically different when you look at... Because you go into quite a bit of detail in the book about how you treat technology. You even hinted at it earlier, you sold your car, you're trying to walk places. Do you want to walk us through what the rhythm in your life looks like now as opposed to how it used to be?

John Mark Comer: Yeah I'm happy to. I don't want to idealize it. I mean I'm human and life is hard and I have three kids and I live in a city and have a demanding job. I'm actively doing everything I possibly know how to do to mitigate against hurry and digital distraction and external metrics of success and ego, but I'm a human being in a human culture. It's not my life before was terrible and now I sit around and I'm the second coming of Dallas Willard or Richard Foster and I live with perpetual joy and I never get angry or stressed or overworked. That's not remotely true.

John Mark Comer: I mean yeah, my life is radically different. I work way less hours, so I probably work 40, 45 hours a week when I used to work insane hours. My mornings are radically different. I don't let myself touch my phone most days, if everything goes well, until 9:30 in the morning. Every morning I have several hours to pray, to sit in the quiet, to read for an hour, and to do some deep work. That's been a radical... When I was at the height of that busyness I didn't have time to read, I barely had any time to pray, my mornings were hurried and stressed. I have some leeway in how I craft my schedule that a lot of people don't have. I have margin in my life now, I have time to read a lot and think and to pray. I'm leading a team now that's very different for me. I always had a team. You talk about team, it's so funny. Everybody wants to have a team, not everybody wants to be on a team and those are two different things.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's good.

John Mark Comer: You know what I mean?

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah.

John Mark Comer: I have a team means I'm the boss and I have minions that I can send out and make myself feel like I'm on a team, we're a team based leadership. I'm like okay but do you have a team or are you on a team? I'm on a team and that has been radically... I've lost a lot of control due to that and I've gained a soul through it. Because with control comes responsibility and stress and anxiety. When you push everything up to one person's shoulder as in a business or in a church or in a whatever, it becomes this crippling level of responsibility that is an emotional drain. When you share that load with God and with community, a community of leaders, that's made all the difference for me. That's enabled me more and more... Our church is large enough, this is a luxury many churches don't have, so I say this with great humility, but it's enabled me more and more to really attempt to give the bulk of my time to what I'm best at, which happens to be the thing that is least draining for me emotionally too and most life giving.

John Mark Comer: Again, this is not silver bullet. I still have to do all sorts of stuff I don't want to do and answer email that I loathe. You know what I mean? All the things, but I do need to do some of these kind of things. I'm a lot less addicted to my phone, I work a lot less hours, I sleep a lot more, I Sabbath every single week, I have more time for prayer, I'm leading more in team. Life is still hard and messy and it's not utopia, so don't interpret it that way.

Carey Nieuwhof: Talk about the shift from leading a team to being on a team, having a team, being on a team. How is that different for you?

John Mark Comer: Well when I went on sabbatical I almost didn't come back. One of the most important things you do on sabbatical, if you ever are graced with that opportunity is you set everything on the table. I'm not good at that. I know Millennials get so much fire for being so flakey and this is a generational wide problem. I tend to have the opposite problem just by personality, not by virtue, where I'm dutiful to a fault. I'll often stay in relationships or stay in things longer than is healthy because I have... It sounds more virtuous then it really is, some of it's my deep anxiety about being bad or something. It's not necessarily virtue. I'm sure there's some virtue in there but a lot of it's my personality, my wiring.

John Mark Comer: I think for me I stayed in it for a long time, I was really dutiful and one of the beauties of sabbatical is you take that hat off, you take the duty hat off, and you put everything on the table and say, "What is God..." I thought about this this morning. I'm constantly doing things that are draining me and killing me that God has not asked me to do, they don't have his calling, his favor, and his blessing on. But they're on the schedule and I said I would do it. That's still an open question in my mind. What do I do when I feel God is saying, "You're not to teach this weekend. I want you to rest," but I'm on the teaching schedule. What do I do? That's an open question in my eye. I don't have an answer for that, but that's an open question that I'm wondering if I'm missing it on.

John Mark Comer: All that to say when I was on sabbatical I almost didn't come back because at the time I felt like a gross failure as a leader. I felt like I am the worst leader of all time, I'm a failure as a leader, I couldn't hack it emotionally, I had made a ton of mistakes in leadership. There wasn't some church split or blowout, but there were a bunch of people mad at me, a bunch of staff that had been hurt by me. I was such an emotionally unhealthy person. I did not have the maturity to lead a church that size at that age. I felt like a total failure and I almost didn't come back.

John Mark Comer: Two things happened. One is my therapist said to me some of the best advice I'd ever had. He said, "If you quit now you will always feel like a failure and you will always lead from your wound." He said, "Sabbatical will not heal you. It will give you rest, it will give you a chance to come..." He said, "The only way you will actually heal from burnout and wounding and the sense of failure is by doing the same thing you used to do differently and in a healthy way with healthy people." It was a turning point, some of the best advice anybody had ever given me. Because now we're in the process of basically demoting me again to just teaching elder and I have another sabbatical coming up. It's been six years now so I have another sabbatical coming up in a year. I'm going to go on a nice long break, and when I come back I'm not going to lead our church anymore. That's the current plan.

John Mark Comer: I'm not leaving our church. I'll still be there. I'll still be doing most of the things I do best now, but I'm basically demoting myself again seven years later. Now if I had done that seven years ago where I almost said, "I'm going to quit and go get a job as a teaching pastor somewhere." I would have felt like a failure for the rest of my life. I would have led out of wounding and brokenness and failure. Now I feel all of the healing that needs to happen has happened. I feel whole, I feel healthy. I still think I'm a B minus leader at best, but you know what? I've done the best I know how to do. I feel at peace and if I change my role in a year, as is the current plan, I feel it's not out of angst or failure or melancholy, it's out of actually a confidence and desire to make my unique contribution to the world in humility saying, "You know what? I can't do all these things. Other people can do these things better than me. Let me do what I feel I can do best."

John Mark Comer: That was a huge thing for me. Coming back from sabbatical I knew that if I was going to come back and try to lead differently in a different way I could no longer be one stop shopping lead pastor. We took that title off of me and I instantly began... We were a much smaller church at that time. We've grown a little bit since then, so at the time our staff was tiny and we started sharing it. It was me and Gerald, and then it was me, Gerald, and Bethany. We began sharing the load. Worked out nicely where I had some skillsets that other people didn't have, so I would offer those skillsets. I would do most of the teaching and I would do a lot of the strategic thinking. Then other people would handle this and then Bethany would handle the pastoral acumen. It's not perfect and there are things that our church really doesn't do well because I'm not going to try to do everything and be everyone.

John Mark Comer: I think for me it's been a slow, relearning. I mean I grew up in a very CEO culture of church leadership, so this has been a very different experience for me. But again, I think I'm a B minus leader at best. I would never start a leadership podcast, that's not me. That's not my authority in life. I figured, "Man, all right maybe I'm not going to be the best leader of leaders and I'm not an apostle in Biblical language, but you know what? If I can try to be a Christ like person who's thoughtful and wise, who leads with humility and community, and when I am with people be as present in love as I can. Maybe God will graciously bless us." The last five or six years now has been the healthiest, most enjoyable and fruitful leadership team and leadership season I've ever been on in my entire life. It's the best team I've ever worked with. There's no ego in the room, there's no ambition, there's love, humility, community. I've never had a better leadership experience then the last six years and I take no credit for that, I'm so grateful.

Carey Nieuwhof: Is it hard for you John Mark to take that demotion, as you call it, to reassign yourself? Or has that been easier then most people would think it would be?

John Mark Comer: The first time was really hard, but it was a death blow to my ego, so it was hard. You know what I mean? It dregs up all of your inner insecurities. I think people assume that leaders are way more confident and secure then they actually are.

Carey Nieuwhof: True.

John Mark Comer: We forget that often bravado and self-promotion, nine times out of ten are actually most masking insecurity and shame and low self-worth, not the arrogance that we think it often comes off as. Especially when you're in that position, you get such praise but you also face such withering criticism and you feel like a wobble head. You know what I mean? Whipped back and forth between you're the best, you're the worst. You know what I mean? It's devil Messiah. I say that with no self-pity, that's the reality of it. I do the same thing. We objectify people in leadership. The more in leadership somebody is or the more well known somebody is, the more we objectify them. We say things about Kanye West that we would never say about some worship leader in our church.

Carey Nieuwhof: 100%.

John Mark Comer: Because we objectify them. It's almost like they're not people, they're an icon, they're an idea. I'm not saying I'm a celebrity at all, I'm saying there is something with leadership in general where I think that comes in. It was really hard, it was such a death to my ego, and it exposed all the inner... Robert Mulholland who's dead now, but his little book Invitation to a Journey is one of my favorite spiritual formation books. He writes about the levels of sin and the final level down in our spiritual formation or our transformation is what he calls trust structures, which are... Thomas Keating called them our emotional programs for

happiness. They're the things that we look to to feel safe and happy and at peace that don't go by the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

John Mark Comer: What leadership exposes is your trust structures. What is it that you look to? That's where the thing that... Leadership is still really hard for me. One of the things I'm great... I remember saying this to Ortberg once. I was saying, "Man I just want to be a teaching pastor, how do I get out of all this leadership stuff? I want to write books and do a podcast with Mark and offer spiritual direction. I don't want to lead." We were laughing. He had come to Menlo Park and was supposed to be the teaching guy, but then the guy that was going to lead it left and he ended up leading this megachurch again. He said, "I don't really like leadership that much either." He's introverted like more and more bookish.

John Mark Comer: He said, "You know what I really like is growth." He said, "Nothing will expose all of your need for growth like leadership." I will throw all of-

Carey Nieuwhof: The good word.

John Mark Comer: It really will. It's similar to marriage and to family in that... Those three things, more than anything that I've ever had in my life is parenting, marriage, and leadership have been that brutal mirror to my soul, to expose all of my junk, and throw all of my trust structures in my face, and show where my flesh and new testament language comes out. Which is then an invitation to meet all of that with Jesus.

Carey Nieuwhof: That'll preach. You know what? My whole life just flashed before my eyes. You're right, it's marriage, parenting, and leadership. That's where I'm like-

John Mark Comer: How many kids?

Carey Nieuwhof: I just have two.

John Mark Comer: They're younger?

Carey Nieuwhof: They're in their 20s. Yeah they're in their 20s. Yeah, we've been through the whole thing and yeah, I've never felt more weak, I've never felt more happy, I've never felt more frustrated. It's all the emotions, it's all of the weaknesses, it's like wow, yeah I really don't have it all together do I? You realize that in all three fields.

John Mark Comer: Become more aware of that as you get older and become more self-aware. You actually are more mature but you don't feel more mature.

Carey Nieuwhof: No, I feel like I really don't know what I'm doing. Yeah, which is true.

John Mark Comer: Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: Go ahead John Mark. What were you going to say?

John Mark Comer: No, nothing to add to that other than deep agreement that I think I thought that by 40 I'd have it all figured out, and actually what you figure out is the great mystery of life. There's that... Nevermind, I'm not even going to say it. I'll mess it up. Keep going.

Carey Nieuwhof: No, well I was going to say. Listen, from 54 where I'm sitting, I would say if there's one thing it's that I'm much more comfortable with what I don't know and what I'm not good at.

John Mark Comer: Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof: That's okay. I think I have a clearer understanding of what I don't know, and probably will never know, and things I'll never be good at. Maybe that's okay.

John Mark Comer: I'm behind you in both age and maturity, but I think if we can come to a place of peace and acceptance and integration and stop fighting that. That's where, for me, somewhat due to personality, somewhat due to autobiography, and then somewhat due to stage of life as I'm nearing the second half of life. Everything's turning over for me to the spiritual discipline of acceptance. How do I accept what is and not roll over and play dead, but what Ignatius called indifference or freedom, the French mystics called detachment. How do I come to that place where I'm blessed and I'm happy because I'm living in the kingdom with Jesus and I'm at peace with my own body and my own story and I've integrated into my personhood, and more importantly, into who God says I am and who God is in me and who God is? Making peace to that and coming to a deep place of acceptance.

John Mark Comer: That feels to be the great spiritual challenge to the second half of life. So freeing, and so that's where I say nearing this second sabbatical and likely second demotion is profoundly, emotionally different. The first one felt like death to self, this next one feels like I'm counting the day, I can't wait. I'm so excited. I have such peace and freedom and confidence. Those will be moments when my ego will crop up and I'll have this moment of crisis of like, "What am I doing today?" Going to rewind. Most of the time I feel this deep freedom and confidence that man, there's no better place to be than humbly serving God as best I know how.

Carey Nieuwhof: You know who seems to have that persona, that understanding that you described is John Ortberg. Did you ever meet Dallas Willard? Did you ever meet Dallas? I never did.

John Mark Comer: No, I'm so sad. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof: John, I mean you cannot have a 10 minute conversation with John Ortberg without Dallas Willard coming up. He was so profoundly shaped by him, but you

and I get to know John who is one of the finest human beings I've met. Talk about your friendship with John.

John Mark Comer: That would be my assertion too. Yeah, I mean there's not a ton to report. I'd idolized him from a distance through his writings, and he was mentored by Willard for 20 years. Willard has had a greater impact on my world view than any other teacher or thinker outside of the Bible that I can put fingers on. Willard's writings have had a profound impact on the way that I view the world and specifically the way that I have my head around what I think it means to follow Jesus and how it is that we become more like Jesus. Willard naturally led me to Ortberg, and what Ortberg is doing is, and I mean this in a positive sense, is popularizing a lot of Willard's framework, and I mean that in a positive sense because that's what I'm trying to do too.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well he would say the same thing. John would say the same thing.

John Mark Comer: Yes, he would say the same thing. I think he'd say, "I'm Willard for dummies or whatever," which is nonsense. I mean John has a PhD and is blisteringly smart, far more than I am. I'm basically attempting... He made popularizes too. Trite of a word, trying to simplify and synthesize a lot of Willard's concepts and all that he represents to Millennials and post-Christian context because he was working with another generation in a very different cultural context.

John Mark Comer: I'd long idolized Ortberg because he does that and he's such a great writer and seemed like a lovely human being, and so yeah I had a relational connection. My best friend lives in San Francisco and I said, "Man, do you ever hang out with John Ortberg?" He's like, "No, does he live around here or something?" I'm like, "You don't know that John Ortberg lives 30 minutes south of you?"

Carey Nieuwhof: Menlo Park.

John Mark Comer: He didn't even know and I was like, "You're kidding me." I'm like, "All right, you need to mooch your Bay Area connections and see if you can get the two of us a lunch with him." He was gracious enough. We got ahold of his email and the two of us... I flew down to visit my best friend and the two of us drove down and had lunch with John. That's become any time I'm in the Bay Area my buddy and I will go down and he's gracious. I wouldn't call him a mentor, I wouldn't even call him a friend, I would say he's been incredibly gracious and present to us and spends time with us and was kind enough to write the forward for my last book. I mean he is so much better in real life than he comes off online. You know what I mean? Meaning he strikes me as incredibly integrated, kind, joyful, Christ loving man, so the chance to get to sit with him a couple times a year, whatever it is, is a great honor.

Carey Nieuwhof: Yeah it's interesting. John and I have spent some time together over the last few years and same thing. Loved him from a distance since I was probably your age or younger, and then had a chance to build a friendship with him over the last

few years. We were together last month sitting out after breakfast looking over the ocean and I asked him, "What do you want to do next? What's the next 20 years hold for you?" Thinking he was going to talk about books or teaching or whatever, and he says, "I really want to focus on who I'm becoming." Oh wow, how many people would you get that answer from? Maybe we can wrap up with this because the title from your book is Ruthless Elimination of Hurry. It's a story I think John has written about. He told me he told you, but it's such a powerful story. Do you want to let us know a little insight into the title behind your book?

John Mark Comer: Yeah, the title is based on a line from Willard that comes from a story that John has told me and many others where I think it was in the late 90s and John was on staff I think at Willow. He would have to explain the emotional moment, but my understanding is he was getting sucked into the busyness and exhaustion and all of that of church life, megachurch life, Western life. He would have to explain that better than me. He calls up Willard out in California and basically says, "What do I need to do?" John told me there was a long silence on the other end of the line because John said, "With Willard there was always a long silence." Meaning he was notorious for being incredibly unhurried and slow and present and thoughtful.

John Mark Comer: Long silence and then Willard said, "You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life." That's all he said. Was quiet again. John wrote it down and said, "Okay, what else?" Then Willard said, "There is nothing else. Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day." Then he repeated himself. "You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life." Yeah, when John told me that story and when I've since read it in several of his books, it struck this deep chord in my soul. My mind actually, my prefrontal cortex thought it was ridiculous. I live in this crazy progressive city and I don't know if you had asked me before hearing that, what's the greatest challenge you face in following Jesus or pastoring a church in Portland? I don't know what I would have said but not hurry. I would have said something about politics or progressive theology or money or income inequality or racism. I don't know what I would have said, but not hurry. It wasn't even on my list.

John Mark Comer: Then I had this equal opposite reaction where at a gut level it felt like... Best analogy I can think was a tuning fork. Have you ever used a tuning fork?

Carey Nieuwhof: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

John Mark Comer: For a guitar or something. You hit it and music theory is fascinating because middle C was created by God, not by people. It's literally woven into the fabric. There are eight notes in creation. It's woven in the fabric of reality. What a tuning fork does is you hit it and you feel your bones literally tremor as they come into contact with middle C, into contact with reality. At a gut level it felt like this tuning fork moment of oh my soul is now getting in contact with reality and I felt this almost soul tremor. I've sat with that thesis now for half a decade

and it has had a profound affect on my life, on my lifestyle, on my metrics for success, on my spiritual formation and whom I'm becoming, and realizing the depth at which hurry has sabotaged my spiritual formation into a person of love and joy and peace, and the degree at which it is epidemic in our culture and celebrated rather than fought against.

John Mark Comer: It's had a radical impact on me to the point that I wrote a book. Because I love David Brooks' line about how he wants to write his way into a better life. I'm probably the worst person in the world to write a book about hurry. I'm type A, chronically impatient, or at least I was. I don't know who I am right now, I'm in process. But man, it was a way for me to write my way into a better life in the kingdom.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh I'm going to remember that, David Brooks. Yeah, I think that's what I'm doing is writing my way into a better life. It's all the stuff you're working on.

John Mark Comer: Some would call it hypocrisy, others would say-

Carey Nieuwhof: No, I'm just trying to learn and grow. John Mark this has been amazing.

John Mark Comer: A pleasure to chat with you. Thank you for your time.

Carey Nieuwhof: It's a joy and we put up with terrible audio quality, thank you Skype. We survived.

John Mark Comer: It's great on my end. It's the best Skype with you on my end that I've had in months.

Carey Nieuwhof: Oh good, good, good. I don't know what we're doing over here. But anyway, I hope next time it's in person. I've benefited greatly from your podcasting, your work, your writing, and tell us a little bit about where people can find you online and then summarize the book again. Obviously they can get anywhere books are sold.

John Mark Comer: Yeah, you're so kind. The book is The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry. My name is John Mark Comer, C-O-M-E-R. I have a website that has all the stuff, Instagram for social media, whatever. Yeah, do the podcast with Mark. Then I'm at Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon, which is where most of my teaching is found online.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well that was scintillating and challenging and awesome and all of those things. I really like John Mark. His book is great too. It's called The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry. We have everything for you in the show notes. We have transcripts if you prefer to read. We've been doing that for over a year now. We also have some episodes on YouTube. This may or may not be there, I don't know whether this one is being uploaded, but we have a whole archive of them and you can find that by searching Carey Nieuwhof Leadership podcast on YouTube.

Carey Nieuwhof: I want to thank Pro Media Fire and also LifeWay with Ministry Grid for sponsoring this episode. They make sure that we bring you this for free every week. You can get 10% off for life by going to ProMediaFire.com/Carey. Get media support, web support for a fraction of the price of hiring your own team. You get my exclusive to MinistryGrid.com courses for another week for free, and if you do this in January their team will send you copy of my latest book, *Didn't See It Coming*, as a gift. Go to MinistryGrid.com/Carey for that.

Carey Nieuwhof: We got a lot coming up. I'm going to tell you about the winners of our 10 million download giveaway contest in just a moment. Also, a lot of you have been asking about the changing workplace. I've got a course called *The High Impact Workplace*. It is closed now for registration, but just so you know it opens on Monday. This is why I'm so excited about this course because 8:00 to 4:00 doesn't work anymore and for the next generation they don't want to show up and sit at a desk, chained to a desk 8:00 to 4:00. A lot of employers are really struggling, there's a talent war going on. You can actually get a free download right now by going to TheHighImpactWorkplace.com, TheHighImpactWorkplace.com, but Monday the course opens up for new registration. A lot of you have been asking about that.

Carey Nieuwhof: Coming up on the podcast we've got Jefferson Bethke. We talk about hustle and hurry. It's like a back to back theme on that. Not bad for January. Jennie Allen, Craig Groeschel here's an excerpt from my conversation with Jefferson Bethke.

Jefferson B: We realized that we were buying this bill of goods that you can call the American dream or you can call modernization, whatever, but we realized, "Man, this thing of get married at this age, get a house by this age, get a job that you love and that fulfills you." We actually, luckier than most people our age, had gotten those benchmarks. A lot of Millennials are disenchanted because they're not reaching those benchmarks. It's very different to maybe buy a house now or this or whatever. I was married young, 22. I think I was 22 when we got married. Had kids at 24, 25. We had a home and a job that fulfilled us by mid-20s. That's pretty rare. But yet, even then we were realizing every step of that benchmark actually made us more frantic and more busy and more hustled and more-

Carey Nieuwhof: Subscribers you get that absolutely for free and yeah, wherever you get your podcast. Make sure you subscribe. If you enjoyed this episode please share it. Please leave a rating and review. It really does help the show get noticed by others. Yeah, now to something I love to do. One of our company values is err on the side of generosity. Put our heads together and said, "Okay, we're going to hit 10 million downloads," this happened about a month or two ago. "What can we do to really honor listeners?" My goodness, I was blown away. We had I think almost 1,000 of you enter. It was an application for this grand prize.

Carey Nieuwhof: My team and I read through every application, narrowed it down to 25, and then we picked five winners. My goodness, some high capacity leaders listen to

this podcast. Here are the people who are going to spend a day with me in Nashville, probably this summer. We haven't scheduled it yet. We got to now align all these schedules but we're going to do that. Fly in absolutely free, we'll spend a day together, have some meals together, get to know each other, and build into each other as leaders. Congratulations to these listeners: Lisa Conlin, Elizabeth Moore, Tommy Kyllonen, Jamison Horton, and Brett Clubb. I'm so excited about hanging out with you guys in Nashville. Listeners, hey when we hit milestones we celebrate with you. Thank you so much for your generosity in getting the news about this show out and the fact that we get to do this week, after week, after week is because of you and for you. Really appreciate this. We've got a great guest list coming up and thanks so much for listening today. I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before.

Announcer:

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