

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 321 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Today's episode is brought to you by Pro Media Fire and BELAY.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And we got a brand new segment called, What I'm Thinking About. And actually, what I'll do is I'll offer a few more thoughts on what Brad Lomenick and I talked about at the end of today's interview and talk about the middle disappearing from culture. So that's what I'm thinking about these days. I think it's fascinating and we got this little segment now at the end of the show.

Carey Nieuwhof:

My guest today are Chris Hodges and Brad Lomenick. Chris is the founder of Church of the Highlands in Alabama. They have 22 locations, and an average attendance of 55,000 to 65,000 people a weekend. Yeah, insane. And he tells the story of how he got the vision for Church of the Highlands and also about some difficult passages in his life and burning out, and what that was like, and getting depressed, and then launching a church, and also about what's changing in the culture.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And this is the annual ReThink Roundtable episode that I do. We get together every year in Atlanta. We'll tell you more about that to do ReThink Leadership. And Chris Hodges is going to be there along with Simon Sinek and Brad Lomenick, and myself and Gordon MacDonald, and many others. So we'll tell you a little bit more about that later in the show, but I think you're going to be really glad that you tuned in.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And how have you been doing with your New Year's resolutions? We are about five weeks into things, six weeks into this and some of you thought, "You know what, this is the year I'm going to get more productive." Now, you're realizing, "I need help."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, I would encourage you to check out my friends at BELAY. They're an incredible organization that has helped others revolutionize their productivity. Here's how they do it. They give you virtual assistants and bookkeeping services and they do it for businesses, churches, not-for-profits.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I have used them so many times over the last three or four years to help equip and staff my team, and so have thousands of other leaders. So right now, they're offering a free download of Productivity for

the Win: Your Personal Guide to a Productive Work Week. And that's a gift for all podcast listeners to claim your download for free.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Just text my name, Carey, C-A-R-E-Y to 31996. That's C-A-R-E-Y to 31996 and you'll get a free copy of Productivity for the Win: Your Personal Guide to a Productive Week, and that's from our friends at BELAY and that will get you closer to actually fulfilling your New Year's resolution.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, media needs for 2020, what are you doing in that department? There's a growing church that had a huge problem. Their in-house team was completely overwhelmed with the demands of media requests and graphics and videos. And you know how that goes. It's like this campus wants this and this ministry wants that. And so they couldn't get it all done despite the fact that they were staffed.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what they did was they turned to Pro Media Fire to get a media bundle. And they knew that hiring Pro Media Fire would get them a media team to handle the extra work for a fraction of the price of hiring additional staff.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So we've used Pro Media Fire too for some of the projects that we have inside my company. And whether you have a for-profit business, a large church, a mid-sized church, if you're a little bit overwhelmed with the media needs of your organization, or frankly you just don't have anybody, reach out to ProMediaFire.com. Go to ProMediaFire.com/Carey and you will get 10% off of plans for life. So, head on over to ProMediaFire.com/Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well guys, really excited to bring you this year's round table. We are gathering in Atlanta for an event called ReThink Leadership. It's happening April 29th and 30th. And you can bring your senior leaders, your executive team, basically your campus pastors, and also business leaders are welcome. Simon Sinek is there. Danielle Strickland, Dharius Daniels, Jon Acuff, myself, Brad Lomenick, Chris Hodges, Gordon MacDonald, Andy Stanley, and so many more.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And it's no hype. No music at ReThink Leadership, just leadership intensive for a couple of days. And I think it's paradigm shifting. We give you a little sample of what it's like here with this conversation with Chris Hodges and Brad Lomenick. Chris Hodges, Brad Lomenick, welcome to the podcast.

Chris Hodges:

Thanks so much. It's going to be a good time together.

Brad Lomenick:

Absolutely. This will be fun, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Dr. Lomenick, it's good to have you back. We do our annual ReThink Leadership roundtable. And this year, we've got Chris Hodges coming to the party, which is going to be a lot of fun.

Brad Lomenick:

Listen, he's forgotten so much more than I'll ever know. So, I'll yield my time most of the time to the Senator from Alabama, because he's passionate. The Church of the Highlands, if you don't know, obviously one of the most influential churches in America, largest, and Chris is obviously the pastor behind the scenes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Tell us a little bit, Chris. I'm sure most of our listeners will know exactly who you are and your story, but just give us a little bit of the trajectory of your leadership in Church of the Highlands.

Chris Hodges:

Well, the trimmed down version is I was born and raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Always the number two guy in the world and never aspired, not even for a moment, to be the senior pastor of a church. Went through a bout of depression in 1999 that now I looking back I can see it was God.

Chris Hodges:

I don't think he created it, but he used it to get me out of a very comfortable nest. Got me praying and fasting and trying to figure out what my life was supposed to be all about at 38 years old and fell in love with church planting in 2000.

Chris Hodges:

I feel like I got a vision to plant a church back when really there wasn't any church planting anything. There wasn't any movement, books, podcasts. I don't think there were even podcasts, but there was nothing. And so we just kind of blindly moved to Birmingham. That's another long story of how God really led us to this city, but I didn't know a soul.

Chris Hodges:

We had six weeks of preparation for the launch, which is not nearly enough time, and pretty much raised all my own money for it. And anyway, February 4, 2001, we planted Church of the Highlands with 34 people. We had 400 in the first service, 200 came back. So in any way, and then just little by little this thing kept growing and, guys, nobody is more amazed than me.

Chris Hodges:

Here we are. We just celebrated this past Sunday, at the time of this recording, our 19th anniversary as a church. Yeah. Now, we have 22 campuses and we're in 20 of Alabama's prisons every Sunday and doing a lot to help other churches with ARC, and Grow, and now a college. I still shake my head. I still can't believe this is my life.

Chris Hodges:

Surely, about half the time I pull up on our properties, tears come to my eyes. I've never lost the wonder of what the Lord has done, so I'm very, very grateful.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How many people now would be at Church of the Highlands on the weekend, Chris?

Chris Hodges:

On a normal weekend, we will have about 55,000 to 65,000 people. And then we have some spikes of on the big days and the Christmases and the Easters and we do a series called At the Movies every year that attracts another 20,000 people or so to that. But yeah, it's amazing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's just unbelievable really to see the story. Go ahead, Chris. Go ahead.

Chris Hodges:

Oh, if you know me, it's even more unbelievable.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you don't mind, and the story of leaders who went through a dark night of the soul, like some kind of bout of depression. Can you walk us back a little bit to the late '90s? Because I'll bet you that there are a lot of leaders who are right around that stage who are in exactly that place right now and maybe are wondering if it's over.

Chris Hodges:

Well, I do think there is a clinical depression that needs to be treated clinically or medically or counseling, but I do think a lot of depression is assignment related in life, and you're really not living out your transcendent, redemptive calling that God has for all of us. That's what creates a darkness of the soul.

Chris Hodges:

I think the spirit and the spirit assignment that God has for us is connected to our souls. And I do think that a lot of times when we're in the wrong place, not a bad place, just the wrong place, it could actually be a good place that's a wrong place. There's this unfulfilled, you know something is missing. And I think when those don't line up, I think we have to find out ...

Chris Hodges:

When Elijah had his bout of depression, he wanted to take his own life. The angel of the Lord encouraged him to get physically healthy, time to sleep and eat. But then he gave him an assignment, he's like, "Here, I want you to go do these things. I want you to go talk to this person. Go give this message to this person."

Chris Hodges:

And it was the assignment, Carey. I remember the day that it happened that I saw a vision and an open vision of me leading a church. How hope jumped back into my soul within a matter of hours. I had purpose again, because I had a clear God assignment. And so I think it's very important.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Isn't that interesting? I was interviewing another leader. Her name is Cathy Heller, and she'll be on the show this year. And she said the opposite of depression isn't happiness, its purpose. And I think there's something to that.

Chris Hodges:

I 100% agree.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What were you doing at the time at 38 before you had this vision and before you started Church of the Highlands?

Chris Hodges:

I've done music my whole life. Of course, every young pastor does youth and students as well. So, I was 18 years in as an associate pastor at a very successful large church in my hometown of Baton Rouge and very happy. I was living in a home I built out in the country. I mean, I was paid better than I would have paid myself. I mean, there was nothing on paper to be unhappy about. I was just miserable. Just completely miserable. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Was that a gradual slide? Or did it hit you all at once?

Chris Hodges:

It was somewhat gradual and then some circumstances, some unfortunate circumstances and family I think added to the pile. And again, I don't think God is the author of anything. My theology is I don't think he is the author of anything bad. Only every good and perfect gift comes from our God, but I do think he uses it. And he certainly used ...

Chris Hodges:

They say when an eagle is trying to get the eaglets out of a very comfortable eagle's nest, the mother eagle will just pull out all the comfortable stuffing so that all they feel is the sticks poking at them. And that's kind of how it felt. I felt like the stuffing was coming out of my comfortable nest.

Chris Hodges:

And all I could feel were the barbs of these sticks saying, "Hey, it's time for you to go to look for something else." And, of course, I did it through my pastor. I didn't just jump ship. I prayed and fasted and got counseling from my own pastor. He's actually the one who affirms. He said, "Chris, it's time for you to lead your own church."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. I'm playing a little Gordon MacDonald here. That's being like way too generous. But Brad, how old were you when you hit your dark night of the soul?

Brad Lomenick:

I was around that late 30s, early 40s. I think I was actually 40. I just turned 41. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I was 41. I was 41 when I hit mine back in '06. And isn't that interesting? Because Gordon MacDonald, he's been on this podcast, and he has a theory that right around 38-ish to 42, you go through a major metamorphosis. And I have seen in my own friends, my own colleagues so often, and I know that there are thousands of people right in that bubble right now listening to this podcast.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So no, that's good to know. And it's good to know there's hope. I mean, you're leading an incredibly productive life, Brad. I'm trying to overhear it. It's amazing to see that there's a comeback after that. And that's good to know.

Brad Lomenick:

Can I jump in and ask Chris a question?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Of course.

Brad Lomenick:

Because I'm curious. You thought you would always be number two for sort of your season of career. What was that transition like? Because there's a lot of people out there who probably would say, as a leader, they feel that connection to a position, but obviously, that wasn't the only thing for you. So how did you navigate through that process?

Chris Hodges:

Well, the two fortunate things that I had already in my arsenal was I've done music my whole life. And boy, if you can do music and speak, it's an unfair advantage. Because you can really flow a service. And I had that ability because I've been doing music since I was seven years old, so I had that.

Chris Hodges:

And then as a youth pastor, I was already speaking every week. I had been for 18 years, albeit to a bunch of teenagers. But still, I had the reps and I think that it made me a little bit uniquely equipped where a lot of the guys that now we work with ARC and others that are wanting to plant churches. Sometimes, they come with that, and sometimes they don't. I do think it's important.

Chris Hodges:

So honestly, Brad, it was an easy transition. What I didn't know how to do was the money, the leadership. I'd never had a board before. I didn't know how to build church government. I didn't know how to do elders. Those were the learning curve areas that I really had to figure out pretty quickly. Never bought buildings before and never paid a light bill for a church before.

Chris Hodges:

So I had to figure out some of the business side of it and that was the part that was ... I was glad that it grew somewhat incrementally, not all the time. So, we were portable for seven years. And we had the offices in the basement of my house. So, it was a slow grow at the beginning and it kind of exploded really around year six or seven is when we kind of really saw when we actually moved into our first permanent facility.

Brad Lomenick:

The first time I met you, Chris, was with John Maxwell. And it was at some kind of roundtable, a small gathering in Atlanta at the office, because I was working with John's organization. And one of the things that you've done so well is you connect to people who have influence, and they want to bring you along with them.

Brad Lomenick:

And I saw that at that point, that was 2001 or 2002. It was John bringing you in and we're like, "Who's this guy?" You just have that ability to connect to people and then allow for them to mentor you, to pour into you.

Brad Lomenick:

And I think that's another thing for leaders that they need to be very aware of is the who you get around. Many times will help you navigate some of those things you don't know how to do.

Chris Hodges:

But that's exactly how I did it and I was kind of anticipating your question as well, Carey, that you said, "How did you do it?" Well, I just forced my way into people to mentor me. John wasn't looking for me, I went looking for him. And honestly, he didn't give me the time of day at first, so I just found out what he was interested in and started serving it.

Chris Hodges:

He was interested in training leaders overseas, I said, "Okay, well, I'll just jump into that because I need him in my life." And if I have any quality, it's I do have an insatiable appetite to learn and to grow. I could take you through our church and show you and tell you which church we learned that from.

Chris Hodges:

And I'm not talking about total imitations. I'm just talking about learning. I call it learning from proven models, and then work your own DNA, and your own values and your own vision into those. But in many cases, we just didn't reinvent the wheel.

Chris Hodges:

Same thing with Craig Groeschel. I called Craig and said, "Can I just have a one hour of your time? I'll pay you for it." And he didn't know me from Adam. I flew in to Oklahoma City. And then that one hour conversation turned into ... I ended up staying for three days. We kind of became fast friends. Yeah.

Chris Hodges:

And I saw all these campuses took a lot of notes. And then next thing I know, he invited me to come serve a five-year term on his board at Life Church, and now I'm learning how they multiplied their campuses. Again, if I've done anything, I'm ....

Chris Hodges:

Right now, I'm learning from churches. I always think there's a church that knows something that I don't know. And I always say that every church does something better than we do it for now. I'm going to learn it and they're going to be learning from me next year. That's the fun part of my job. I still enjoy doing that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Brad, what are some of the things you've seen Church of the Highlands and Chris do really well from the seat where ... What do you think some of the secret sauce is that you would observe as a third-party?

Brad Lomenick:

Yeah. Well, I think the curiosity and willingness to learn is a huge part of the success story of Church of the Highlands. And everybody on staff there that I've met from Chris all the way down to some intern, they have a posture of walking in with the moleskin. And they don't act like even though they could at this point, they could act like they know more, but they still walk in with that posture, which I think is both God honoring as well as it's endearing to people.

Brad Lomenick:

There's just a sense that you want to be around people who have a culture like that. I would say the commitment ... And Chris can talk more about this, because I know this is his legacy play, but the commitment to the next generation perhaps might be the thing that Highlands is most known for.

Brad Lomenick:

They've got thousands of students showing up to conferences. They've got a college that is continuing to explode in both impact and influence and attendance. So I would say that has driven a lot of the things that I've seen that feel like their success stories.

Brad Lomenick:

And then the third thing would be a commitment. And, Chris, you can talk about this too. Like the system side of Highlands is so dialed in, but yet there's room for the spirit to move. And I think that the idea that the systems can drive what is happening, and they can be incredibly focused on the building. Not the building itself, but the building of the ministry, while also giving room for the spirit.

Brad Lomenick:

This is where a lot of churches are trying to get to, and Church of the Highlands, I think, has been doing that from the beginning. Because Chris, you're a systems expert. Like people show up at your feet now to understand like, "How did you guys build this?" At the same time, you're not ... That's not all you do. In some ways, that became what you were known for, but those would be three that stand out to me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you comment on that, Chris? Because that is really a unique combination. First of all, for somebody who's artistic and musical to really have an understanding and appreciation for systems. I'm not saying that it never happens, it's just not a normal pairing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And for somebody who really understands systems structure, I mean, that's the word on the street from all the leaders I know. It's like, "Yeah, systems? Nobody is better at systems in Church of the Highlands among other things." How did that pairing show up?

Chris Hodges:

Well, it honestly comes from my background. I had the home church that I'm a part of had a very strong prayer and fasting and worship culture. And then in my home, my dad was the most brilliant financial mind that I've ever known. He was teaching me money at eight years old. We'd go on a trip and he would put our spending money in envelopes and just teaching us budgeting and saying, "For all of doing it, I'll pay for it. But for not all of doing it, you can spend it all at the first gas station we come to. Here's your money."

Chris Hodges:

And he was teaching me these systems with budgeting and finance as well as with schedule. My dad was a meticulous, a kind of accountant type personality. I'm just very, very grateful for it. Then I kind of have a business acumen anyway just naturally. I've always actually been very, very good with money, just naturally.

Chris Hodges:

And I just love leadership, and I love systems. I was very greatly impacted by The E Myth by Michael Gerber, because basically the thesis of the book ... The E myth is, is that if you have a good product, you'll have a great company and you won't. It's only the delivery of the product that determines the success of the company.

Chris Hodges:

And that's why inferior products like a McDonald's hamburger can be the largest hamburger franchise. Because the genius wasn't the quality of the burger, the genius was the delivery of the burger. It was how quickly they could get it to you. The Happy Meal, the playground, the drive through. They were creating systems of delivery that make them successful.

Chris Hodges:

God is not a product, of course, but churches had great vision. I think the Bible gives us very clear vision, but a lot of times we haven't created systems that are ever going to deliver it. What I think makes a great system and according to The E Myth book, what makes a great system is can everybody do it?

Chris Hodges:

Because if it's personality dependent, in other words, if only Church of the Highlands could do our system, then it's really not a great system, because it's going to die the day I die. It's personality driven, but if its systems dependent, the McDonald's hamburger would taste the same in Moscow as it does here in the United States, and it does.

Chris Hodges:

So I kind of bought into that concept. And even today, we make decisions about what we're going to do and by asking ourselves, "Could other churches do it?" And if the church of 500 couldn't do what we're doing because we feel called to help other churches, we don't do it. We only could create systems that are both scalable and transferable.

Chris Hodges:

So anybody can do it anywhere, and I don't know, so we've just been committed to that for a long time because of the call we have to help other churches.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What are some of the systems that have been the most helpful to you and the most helpful to others through ARC or through Grow or some of the other work you do in resourcing other leaders?

Chris Hodges:

Well, it all begins with a very clear vision. I'm not sure that churches ... Most churches don't know really what they're calling the touchdown line. So I'll go in when I consult, I'll say, "Okay. Now, what is your scoreboard? What are you measuring?"

Chris Hodges:

And I'll have the lead team that I'm consulting all right down what they think the answer to that question is and, guys, 100% of the time, there's never been an exception yet, I get great answers and different answers. So everybody has a good answer, but they all are running a play toward a different touchdown line and that's why there's not a lot of really unity or vision.

Chris Hodges:

So it all begins with what are you going to measure? And for us, we're measuring people getting saved, people getting pastored and cared for, and healed. Finding their calling and their spiritual gift and then be immobilized. We're only measuring four things, get them saved, get them healed, get them train, get them mobilized, and those are all quantifiable, measurable visions.

Chris Hodges:

Now, a system, it just delivers it. And I always say we're not doing it the right way. The right way is the way that works, and that's the right system. It's very simple. The right system is one that works. If you have a goal for people to be saved, and nobody's getting saved, you're doing it wrong. So we get real pragmatic and say ...

Chris Hodges:

And that's a classic example. Most churches have a vision to reach lost people, but they haven't created anything that lost people are attracted to, so they have a bad system. What happens, guys, is we fall in love with our system more than the vision. We like how we do it more than what it's supposed to produce. Really, the job is to get them to fall out of love with their systems, and get more pragmatic and stay in love with the vision.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean, large organization, over 50,000 in attendance, 22 locations. How do you keep your systems nimble? I'm sure some stuff that was working five years ago probably is showing diminishing returns. How do you keep that kind of agility and flexibility at Church of the Highlands now?

Chris Hodges:

Yeah, just continually measuring it. That's how. We never stop looking at the dashboard. The same thing with a car, when you first buy it, everything runs perfectly, but after about 100,000 miles, the needles are moving in bad ... But you won't know. You don't want to end up on the side of the road broken, you want to get an indicator before it happens. So you have to create some dashboards and then check them regularly. And we teach churches how to do that as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you share some key metrics that you're really ... I know the big four, but what would be an example of some warning signs where you're like, "I'm not sure this is going to work anymore?"

Chris Hodges:

For a small group, attendance is huge. Because I do believe that you cannot get away from ... I think the church has to get bigger, because lost people matter, but it has to get smaller because individuals matter. So the church family matters.

Chris Hodges:

So in the words of Rick Warren, it has to get larger and smaller at the same time, and I believe that. So, we're very committed to that. It really is an unseen backbone of the church is the relational connection. So, if the church ever grows beyond what it can touch, it will be malnourished, just like a human body would be now malnourished if it doesn't receive physical touch.

Chris Hodges:

So even in the age of digital, and we're delivering everything through these media platforms. One of these things I say to those that are watching online is I'm glad you're there, but there's nothing like being in the room. And I looked at the big group with what we call the church and say, "You don't have

to tell everybody what's going on in your life, but you better tell somebody and take the mask off in front of someone and find some healing."

Chris Hodges:

I think those are some major indicators for us. Finances are one that I think that are critical. When you get larger, you can do more. And just because you can, doesn't mean you should.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Chris Hodges:

And so those can get out of whack real easy, either in salaries or buildings. One of those two usually go beyond. We even create ceilings on those two areas financially. Even though we could do it, we don't do it just to keep a discipline in the margins that we can stay healthy. So there's a lot of different indicators, but those are some of the main ones.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Chris, can you talk about financial margin? Because so many churches, so many businesses actually struggle with cash flow and margin. And you guys have innovated in that area to the point that's rippling across a lot of churches in the United States and around the world now. So can you share the basic premise behind that?

Chris Hodges:

Two things are the basic premise. One is you got to be generous. Our whole system if you will, is based off of people's generosity and their tithing and their giving of offerings. And it's ridiculous if you're going to be dependent upon a system and then not engage your own self in that system. I think the church needs to learn how to be generous and find strategic places to invest outside of their church to help others.

Chris Hodges:

So the first 10% of what we receive, we give away strategically local, national and international missions. I think it's very important. The second is the principle margin. Proverbs 21:20 says, "In the house of a wise person, there are stores of choice food and oil, the fool spends all that he has." So you never lift your limit.

Chris Hodges:

The definition of margin is the distance between yourself and your limits. And you want to have a gap there so that you're not ... I never wanted to be behind the pulpit needing that Sunday's offering, because you'll preach differently, you'll lead differently. So we actually wrote it into the bylaws of our church that a budget would be 90% of the previous year's income.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Not previous year's budget. I want to make sure people don't miss that. Previous year's income.

Chris Hodges:

This year's budget is based off of 90% of last year's income. So we're going into the year with 10% margin, and then you add on the growth whatever there is and the margins grow. And margins, not savings, margin is just space so that you actually can say yes to a lot of things.

Chris Hodges:

When the tragedy happens, you don't have to take an offering. You'd be generous that same day of the tragedy happen. If you have a building come available, then you have margins. And now, we've lived that way for this number of years and it's probably one of the greatest principles that we ever adopted.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I see more and more churches trying to flip to that and toggle to that. Do you have any advice to churches who are like, "Yeah, well we get 100%, we spend 101. Or we get 100%, we spend 100." Is there an easy way to get started, just bite the bullet and drop that to 90? Or can you baby step in? What advice would you have to leaders on that?

Chris Hodges:

Pretty much the baby step in, but it's no different than your personal finance. If you're fixing an upside down budget in your personal finance, there's only two ways to do it. You can either increase income or decrease spending. So both really need to happen, but what we know we can control is the decrease of spending.

Chris Hodges:

So every church should go through the exercise and say, "What is not necessary? What are we spending money on that's not producing or contributing to the vision whatsoever?" So it begins with creating margins by just decreasing unnecessary spending. And all of us. We have it personally and we all have it in our churches.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Same issue.

Chris Hodges:

Yeah. Huge margins now and we still do this exercise. So we still take a look at the whole and say, "What can we do to create just more efficiency in our spending?" But then, just do it 1% at a time. I've not known any church that's been able to do 10% all at once.

Chris Hodges:

And then immediately start being generous though. Immediately find strategic missions to invest in, because God supplies seed to sowers, 2 Corinthians say. So he's got more, but he's not given his more to everybody.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is a very biblical principle. It's so true.

Chris Hodges:

He supplies seeds to people who know where to put it in the ground. I mean, who would you give the seed to? You would give it to the farmer who knows how to farm. Yeah. So, God is no different. He has more and he's not giving it to everybody. He gives it to those who know what the more is for.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Brad, anything you want to add to that or anything you want to ask Chris before we switch gears and we go in a new direction? It's so good.

Brad Lomenick:

Listen, I'm taking notes over here. You guys keep going. I'm taking notes. I mean, I love the margin conversation, because margin is true in personal friendships, in personal leadership. If you have margin in relationships, you have opportunities to create memories. Like the margin in your schedule allows you to... I would just ask Chris. How does that feed over into your own leadership? When you say margin ...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Good question.

Brad Lomenick:

... I'm guessing there's some margin that happens within the context of the way you lead, the way you calendar things, the way the leadership team is actually setting up, because that's equally as much a part of what I think effective healthy cultures are built on is that we got margin to do a lot of things.

Chris Hodges:

Yeah. And it begins with your time honestly. So, money margin is important, but time margin can change your life. So, if you can create ... I call it the mastery of the morning. If you can really master your morning ritual or your morning routine, and whatever starts right, usually ends right.

Chris Hodges:

And a lot of us lose our margins and lose our lives by our morning routine. So for years, I've been very disciplined and I just don't give that time away. I use it for planning and thinking and praying and spending time with God and not being rushed but being more living a focused life.

Chris Hodges:

Actually, use tools that I've gotten from friends like Michael Hyatt and others were I just ... If you can master that morning time. And I think there's some genius to that, honestly, that a lot of people can incorporate. Same is true on a weekly basis with the Sabbath. It's astonishing to me the number of pastors who would never think about murder or adultery, but they break the Sabbath almost every week. They don't really have a weekly margin that God instituted that was for you. It's going to make your life better. When I think about margin, they really play into my own life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Chris, I'd love to drill down on that. I'm so glad we went there in the conversation. This is a recurring theme on the podcast where I will break down people's morning routines and it is counterintuitive. There you are leading one of the largest churches in the country, involved with the biggest church planting network on the scene right now, plus some others initiatives and you're like, "No, I don't give away my mornings and I take a Sabbath."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So can you walk us? Because there are people leading a fraction of what you lead who are just like, "I don't even have time to like change my socks." Right? And so I would love for you to just walk us through what a morning looks like. Can you break it down for us? And then I'd love to talk about your Sabbath.

Chris Hodges:

Well, nothing starts from me before 10:00. My mind actually works best in the morning, so I don't get that time away. I'm usually up around 6:00, 6:30, so that's that crazy early, but I just don't give away those first three hours. I just don't give them away. For me, I mean, if you really want to know, it starts with ...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I do. Let's get ready.

Chris Hodges:

I drink a big glass of water to rehydrate, the first thing I do. Second thing I do is to get coffee. The third thing I do is I go straight to God's word and let my mind, let my heart just wake up and I journal for just three minutes.

Chris Hodges:

I have a 10 year journal where you just need to write three little sentences and I can say the same thing on that date over 10 years. Which is a lot of fun for me.

Chris Hodges:

I spend time in prayer and then actually use Michael Hyatt's Full Focus Planner, and I write out the three big tasks that I want to accomplish today. I don't get up from the chair until I've kind of reduced my whole day down to this day will be successful if I can have these three tasks accomplished.

Chris Hodges:

And I get those in my head and then usually go straight to my computer and put some thoughts that I either got in prayer or these things while my brain is still strong and just kind of ... I'm real fresh in the morning. I'm a morning person. And then I get a quick little workout, get a shower, and I'm at the office by 10:00. So that's my morning routine, and I never change it.

Chris Hodges:

You can't get a breakfast appointment with me. It's just not going to happen. And so no meeting starts before 10:00. It's had to look different ways, obviously. My kids were at different stages now. My home is empty, and so it's a little different now. When my kids were younger, I had to step in and help my wife to get some things moving in the house. But by and large, that's what it's looked like all these years.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Why do you think? I mean, Michael Hyatt would say the same thing that there's something really special about mornings. I would agree and I was a relatively late convert probably in my 30s to mornings. And do you think there's something special to mornings? Because we've got night owls listening who would say, "Well, that's kind of my 11:00 PM or whatever." I've never been there. I'm asleep at 11:00 PM. I can't even think. I just love your take on that. Do you think there's something special to mornings?

Chris Hodges:

Well, not to over spiritualize it, but let me spiritualize it. I believe in the principle of first. I think everything you do first matters. I think the first year matters. That's why we have 21 days of prayer to start the year. I think the tithe matters. I think the fact that we go to church on the first day of the week matters.

Chris Hodges:

Even if you didn't enjoy, you were saying, "God you're first. I'm going to attend this event on the first day of the week." To say, "I'm going to start my week off spiritually versus all around me." I believe in first. So I do think the first thoughts of the day matter, the first things you read matters.

Chris Hodges:

So even if you get up at the crack of noon, that's fine. But what did you read first? What did you think first? What did you say first? So was it Instagram? Or was it the one year Bible? I think that matters. So it doesn't really matter. It doesn't have to be early for people that are listening to say, "Well, I'm not a morning person." Well, then fine, but I do think you ought to monitor what you allow in your mind first.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And for you, that's God's word? Same thing for me.

Chris Hodges:

Absolutely. Absolutely. I rather him talk to me than me talk to him. My morning time mostly is him speaking into my life through his word and even me speaking to him through what's ... That part is there, but I love spending time in God's word.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Are you a one year Bible person?

Chris Hodges:

I have been for almost 30 years. I still read. And I read other things as well, but that's just my baseline.

Carey Nieuwhof:

22 years for me. Yeah, since 1998. I skipped at one year and did something else, but man, that's really interesting. Can you walk us through your Sabbath? When you take it, what that looks like, your day off.

Chris Hodges:

And I wish I could say this has always been a part of my life. Actually had a little burnout in 2011 when I buried my own dad who was my best man in my wedding and buried Tammy's dad, my wife's dad who was my best friend in the world, Billy Hornsby, and just was burnout. The church was 10 years old. We were pedal to the metal for 10 years. And I just had a burnout moment and I had not been faithful to a Sabbath.

Chris Hodges:

I am pleased to say for the last nine years, I am incredibly faithful to a Sabbath. And Sabbath doesn't mean rest. I mean, cease from labors, so you can't produce. Just don't produce. That's really the biggest concept is just don't produce. Don't do anything that produces.

Chris Hodges:

So I'd have to even be careful how much Bible I'll read, because I'll turn it into a message. I'm serious. I have to really careful even in my devotional time on my Sabbath. That sounds so funny because I'll turn it into work in a second and enjoy it, but to not produce.

Chris Hodges:

And honestly, Carey, the only thing I really got to have to make ... Well, it's really two things I have to make sure I do to make it successful is don't go digital. I don't go digital the whole day. So the phone stays off. You've got to find me the old school way. You got to come find me if you want me.

Chris Hodges:

And then secondly, I have to be outside. Outdoors replenishes me. So if it's gardening or golfing, it doesn't matter, I have to do something outside. And honestly, for the past ... Really, I've been married 34 years this year. I've always included either a date lunch or a date night with my wife on the Sabbath. And so that was it.

Chris Hodges:

In the Jewish tradition, the Sabbath was the day where you have your biggest meals, you took long walks. It included some sleep, rest, but it really wasn't around that. It was around all the things that replenish your soul, and I just think it's important.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What difference does that make to you since you look at Chris Hodges' nine years with Sabbath and many years without? How are you different because of that rhythm and that discipline?

Chris Hodges:

When the Jewish people will teach it, they say you don't rest because you're tired. You got tired, you rest so you don't get tired. In the week with the Sabbath. So it's not the recouping of all the hard work. You start the week with Sabbath. You rest well enough so you have a full tank to go in of the week, and that's what I've noticed, Carey is that now I go into the week just with a full tank in my body, in my soul, into my spirit. I don't feel like I'm catching up all the time in my mind and in my heart.

Carey Nieuwhof:

When is your Sabbath? What actual day of the week do you take?

Chris Hodges:

It's Monday. Yeah, it's Monday for me. I am the most tired after a weekend, obviously. I know some guys do it later in the week. To me, the biggest thing of the week for me is a weekend and that kind of ends my week for me. That Sunday ends my week and now I start fresh with a rest on a Monday and then start on my meetings and things that I do in the office on Tuesday.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That was gold by the way. Just so helpful. I want to flip to next gen trends. Because both of you spend a lot of time building in to next generation. Brad, every time I talk to you, you've got some gathering in London, England or Colorado or wherever of just young leaders that you're building into.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And Chris, I mean anybody who follows you on Instagram knows that, that's a huge part of your life. You're building in the leaders 15, 20, 25 years younger than you, and sort of the next generation of large church leaders and other leaders as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to ask you both what is resonating with the next generation and what isn't resonating with the next generation? We live in a pretty rapidly changing culture, and church is changing, culture is changing. The way we express ourselves is changing. So what do you see as some of the trends among the next generation?

Brad Lomenick:

Good question. I'll jump in. And by the way, the reason this podcast and this medium is so helpful is because I'm sitting here taking notes while you guys are talking. There's thousands of other listeners who are doing the same thing, so I love this medium.

Brad Lomenick:

A couple things stand out for me. One is that younger leaders, they want access up close, compared to they want content from a distance. So the lesson there for me as a transition leader, as somebody in the middle sort of trying to help older leaders and young leaders connect is as much as you can, find ways to create environments where you're going to be in person and in the room together.

Brad Lomenick:

And this is one of the things Chris does well. Like you see a lot of times he's gathering 10 or 12, 15, 20 somethings or 30 somethings and they're sitting in a circle, and they're hanging out asking him questions. Carey, you do the same thing. I think that's what you have leaders are starving for is they don't ...

Brad Lomenick:

I mean, it's not that they're anti-conference. They'll still show up to gatherings, but what they really desire and hunger is that chance to actually engage and interact. And I think a lot of that is because they're starving for mentors. There's a dearth there, a vacuum of sort of spiritual fathers that have been able to walk alongside them. That's one that stands out for me. I'll let Chris jump in, and I'll maybe think of another one or two.

Chris Hodges:

No, I totally agree. And I know Carey, you've written on this extensively that we're in a content and information overload and I 100% agree. I think it's true by the way in how we deliver church as a whole that people want more experiential environments than just informational environments. I totally agree.

Chris Hodges:

Yeah, 1 Corinthians 4 says that we have plenty of teachers, so let's just update that verse to 2020 and say we have plenty of websites. We have plenty of conferences, but you have very few fathers. That's what it is what they're looking for.

Chris Hodges:

And when I say fathers, that's not gender specific. That means mentoring any gender. People are looking for that. And I am around a lot of the younger guys that are just starting out in ministry and some of the ones that are young and kind of blowing things up. I get three, four texts a week on, "How do you do this? What do I do with this? How do I answer this?"

Chris Hodges:

And they're longing for just personal coaching. I'm 56 now. That didn't even happen in me to be in that role till I kind of turned about 50 years old, but I love it, I believe in it. And in some ways, I even find more joy seeing them succeed than anything that I do. And I think it's what the Lord always intended. I think that's how I think that's how Jesus modeled his life. He didn't preach that many sermons. He spent a lot of time with his disciples, and I think that's very important.

Brad Lomenick:

And I would add this too that a lot of the things that we sometimes think are important or institutions or hierarchies that we felt like are needed, the Next Generation leader not just doesn't even ... That's not even on their radar, but they dislike that.

Brad Lomenick:

So as an example, here would be one, is denominations or the network. Nobody is asking anymore who's in their 20s or 30s and seems to have some influence. "Hey, what are you connected to? Are you baptist? Are you charismatic? Are you nondenominational? Are you ARC? Are you Hillsong?"

Brad Lomenick:

They actually just want things that are working and that are biblical. So it's not that those things don't matter anymore, but it's not important. Where it used to be really important to us, we would say, as an older leader, "Hey, if you're not part of my thing or connected to who I'm connected to, then I really can't hang out with you." Just the opposite now.

Brad Lomenick:

Like we're actually more interested in hanging out with somebody who might think differently than we do theologically or have different backgrounds. And so that's a huge one is if you're still stuck as a leader, and I'm only hanging out with people who think and act and see the world like I do, it might be time for you to rethink that because the young leader, that's not something that's even on their radar.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is such a good point, and it's very, very true. I had a conversation yesterday with a next gen leader who's like ... Actually, he flew all the way across the country and he said, "I actually need to be with people who I disagree with or don't think like me, or they're from a different tribe." Do you see that too, Chris?

Chris Hodges:

Oh, sure. Yeah. And it's actually fun to be in the discussion because no one is defending their positions. We're all learning from each other. And I think that's what it should look like.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I know we've just got a few more minutes with Chris and I want to really honor your time, and you're going to be with us in Atlanta for ReThink Leadership. And we'll be able to pick your brain on stage but also through affinity sessions and table conversations. And that's how we organize things.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But I want to ask you just about model shifts, and maybe we can wrap that up. And then Brad, you and I can hang on and and wrap this conversation up when we let Chris go. But love to ask you about model conversations, because Church of the Highlands has a model and approach to church, but you're also mentoring leaders who have a different approach to church. So what do you see changing and what do you see staying the same?

Chris Hodges:

The conversation I want to have is be pragmatic. So let's fall in love with our models or systems if they're not working. And I just don't let leaders defend something that's not working, because at the end of the day, we have an assignment we called the Great Commission.

Chris Hodges:

I wear a sport coat. If you wear jeans with a hole in the knee, that's fine. I don't debate that if it's working. You think it's just bring people back to the conversation of let's get back in love with the vision

that God's given us to get lost people saved, saved people pastor, pastor people disciplined, disciplined people mobilized. That's our assignment.

Chris Hodges:

Say how you want to say it, but that is our assignment. And it matters. The assignment matters. That's what we're on the Earth to do. The Bible says that in 1 Corinthians 3 that one day our work will be shown for the quality of work that it was, and you'll still be in heaven. It says you'll still be saved but you don't want your life's work to be burned up.

Chris Hodges:

I want to live my life making that assignment count. And then so the models are there. To me, those are the systems that I don't think we have the luxury of having a personal preference on, "Well, I like this." Well, it kind of didn't matter what you like if it's not working. I just like having that conversation. That's where I want to go with it, so I love all the models.

Chris Hodges:

I enjoy all of the different ways that it does work. And again, like I already said, I think there's almost every church can teach us something of how we can be better what we do. But at the end of the day, it's for a purpose. And I think that we need to talk about that more honestly.

Chris Hodges:

I don't think the models and the trends ... I think they're helpful, but I think at the end of the day that the assignment is not going to change. That lost people need Jesus. There still is only one name given under heaven by which men must be saved. And so I'll do anything short of sin. I don't care what the model is as long as people are finding Jesus. I don't know if that's helpful or not, but that's how I think through it all.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really helpful. Chris, I want to thank you so much for being with us.

Brad Lomenick:

Let me jump in. Sorry. I do want Chris to talk before he jumps off about Highlands College. I mentioned it earlier. Because this to me is such a distinct about church, the Highlands, but it's also something that they've seen as a way to impact the next generation. So just jump in and talk about that a little bit, Chris, because I want people to hear what you all are doing.

Chris Hodges:

Well, simply put, I do think that the academic training of young leaders isn't incredibly important. But I think the best learning is not just in the academic setting. I think it's in the life skill, ministry skill setting. They have to have a living laboratory to do it in.

Chris Hodges:

You separate training from the local church, you won't get a fully trained person. All of us can look back at what we know about ministry, and most of it did not come from the schools we went to, it came from the people who've spoken our lives in the churches we served in up to this point.

Chris Hodges:

So if you can combine the two, the whole goal was to get the academic setting back into the local church setting so that the two can marry together. And the goal is really for Luke Chapter 10, Verse 2, the harvest is plentiful. There are people who would get saved today. There are people who will eat a meal today. There would be people who'd receive prayer today, if we had the workers to do it.

Chris Hodges:

It's never going to be a harvest problem. It's always going to be a worker problem. And so this is just a supply the Great Commission with the workers that are needed. Our goal, and we're not there yet, I need about another four to six years. We're building it in the academy model.

Chris Hodges:

I actually taught a religion class at the Air Force Academy and the academy model, they're a cadet if they're awake. If they're not in a classroom, they're jumping out of an airplane. It's nonstop training, so they invest heavily. The government pays for the whole thing, but 100% of the graduates go into their degree field.

Chris Hodges:

We're only taking students who 100% of them want to go into the ministry. So this is not for marketplace ministry. This is like you want to go to full time ministry and then we're going to train you and then we're building an endowment right now to supply the tuition that's needed, so that can happen, so they can 100% can graduate and go straight into that harvest field.

Chris Hodges:

So that's kind of where we are. We have 1,100 students now, but that is the vision is just to supply the Great Commission with the workers that are needed.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's awesome. Well, Chris Hodges, thank you so much. I so appreciate everything that you bring to the wider church, to your churches, and we can't wait to hang out in Atlanta.

Chris Hodges:

It's going to be a great time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It would be great.

Chris Hodges:

Love and respect. Thank you very much.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thank you, Chris. Brad, what is on tap right for us at the end of April in Atlanta?

Brad Lomenick:

Yeah, absolutely. April 29th and 30th and May 1st, ReThink Leadership. And Carey, I don't know about you, but man, I'm equally if not more excited about this year than I have been for the last, what, five now? Is this our fifth year?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, this is number five. I mean, Horst Schulze, Les McKeown, they kind of brought down the house in previous years. But you have Simon Sinek coming. So how do you know Simon? Is that from Catalyst days?

Brad Lomenick:

It is. Simon and I first met at a Charity:Water event in New York.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, with Scott Harrison.

Brad Lomenick:

Scott was putting on one of his gatherings for some of the folks involved and Simon and I ended up at the same table.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, that's kind of cool.

Brad Lomenick:

Yeah, we connected. And this was 2009 or 2010, and so we stayed in touch. And obviously, he's become a global name. I mean, at that time, people ...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Phenomenal. Yeah.

Brad Lomenick:

... people knew of him, but now everybody knows Simon. And so it's fun to have him there. I mean, Gordon MacDonald is going to be with us.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I was emailing Gordon. He's the coolest guy, because we have this email friendship, and I had heard rumors that he will start an email friendship with you. So we email a couple times a month, just about what's going on in our lives. And so he has this thing, I'm going to see if I can get him to talk about it, called the view from 80.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so if you listen back, we'll link to it in the show notes, and he sent me a copy in September when I met with him. And then on the weekend, he emailed me an updated list, and it's just like the way eight decades of life, this is what I'm seeing. He says, "Every few months, I just update it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, I'm going to see if we can drill down on some of those points at ReThink Leadership. And Gordon will be leading an affinity session as well, which means that you can get up close and personal with him.

Brad Lomenick:

Right. Yeah. And obviously, Chris ... I mean, you just heard a snapshot of the wisdom that Chris Hodges brings to the table. And arguably, among younger friends of mine who are ... When you ask them sort of who do you want to go hang out with and really like a Q&A environment with, many of them will say Chris Hodges these days, because you can just tell from listening to that conversation. There's a lot there, both in terms of experience and wisdom, but also just in terms of the heartbeat of following Jesus and being a pastor who is actually pastoring pastors. It's going to be a great year and I'm excited, man, to get to be a fly on the wall.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're more than a fly on the wall. Yeah. We got opportunities for you guys to register. It's at [ReThinkLeadership.com](http://ReThinkLeadership.com). Brad and I will be there hosting the event. I think I'm doing a talk or two, and it will be a really, really good time. We got Andy Stanley, Danielle Strickland, the creator of Blue's Clues, correct? We have that.

Brad Lomenick:

Right. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Who else? We have Dharius Daniels. Who else is speaking?

Brad Lomenick:

Kara is going to be with us. Kara Powell. She's usually part of ReThink. Jon Acuff will be there. We've got a great list of folks who will be part. So, again, if you've never been to ReThink, part of the idea here is senior pastor, lead pastor, executive pastor, and it's a curated group. So 500 seats. It's kept. Everybody is sitting at tables. We want it to be conversational in nature. There's no fluff. I mean, no hype, no fluff, no music, no program. It is stripped down ...

Carey Nieuwhof:

Great leadership for two days.

Brad Lomenick:

You got it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And up close and personal. One of my favorite sessions. I think we'll do it again. You and I talk about trends. And it feels like we're in the round. It almost feels like we're on the floor of the Roman Colosseum in the room we do it in. And there's like 50, 60 leaders crowded in. And it's just like take shots. It's a lot of fun. So it's really up close and personal. It's access and insight, not just content.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And pretty much everyone is limited to like 18 to 25 minute talks. So you're not going to get some 40 minute keynote that went nowhere you were hoping it would go, right?

Brad Lomenick:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I love this phrase. You do this all the time. No sugar sticks. What's a sugar stick?

Brad Lomenick:

Yeah. That would be the talk you've done at every other conference out there. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Correct. Or the sermon. There's no sermons. You're not allowed to bring a sermon. Basically, it's actual ... Yeah.

Brad Lomenick:

We didn't get to hit on some of your trends for 2020 that I listened. If you haven't gone and read the blog post that Carey put up, you need to do yourself a favor and go dig into that and actually print it off or email it to your team and have a conversation about the six trends that you said, Carey, are the ones that you see as the leading disruptions for 2020 because there's so much wisdom in what you're talking about but also how do we respond to it as the church.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, we could have gone there with Chris, right? Like if you look at content based attendance will decline and movements, moments, and missions will grow. And maybe we'll explore that at ReThink Leadership, but that's a ... Even with longform podcasting, this could have been three hours.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, you're systems and you're musical. You're systems and experience. That's a rare combination, but I think it also paves the way to the future. It's a path to the future. And Louie Giglio and I talked about that on this show. We'll link to that as well, but growing churches will be led by younger leaders, right?

Brad Lomenick:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a weird thing and the succession crisis will become more of a crisis. And I love ... See, we could have spent time there, because what is Chris doing? He's got like a truly intergenerational team. Young leaders love being around him. It's not a whole bunch of guys in their mid 50s running church.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, there's some other trends as well, so we'll link to that in the show notes. My favorite of this year is just ... I don't know, Brad, maybe we can riff on this before we hang up today, but the middle is disappearing from culture. Like you look at the disappearance of the mall, the department store, and that whole idea of these are average prices with average goods for average people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And the bottom end is thriving, like Walmart is doing amazing. They actually are killing it, and discount stores and budget travel is doing just fine. And then so is the high end. You can buy \$150 yoga pants and like middle class people are doing that, right? Which is really weird.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, the \$38 yoga pant is not doing particularly well, but the \$150 yoga pant, the high end vacation, the curated dining experience with the weird pairings, like those are doing just great and exotic travel is doing great, but the middle is gone.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And what does that mean out of culture? Well, I don't know, because a lot of us shoot for the middle. And the middle is where mediocrity lives. Churches do that, businesses do that. So, I'm just paying attention to the middle disappearing from culture, trying to figure out what that means for those of us who lead.

Brad Lomenick:

And think about the middle as it relates to things like Blockbuster or the taxi industry, or anything that revolved around being a connector, sort of the customer and the end product. All of that middle has now gone too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're right Blockbuster was the middleman so to speak, right? Like you can't get to Hollywood without ... And now, it's Netflix or whatever, but the reality is, there's no physical barrier anymore. And I remember we did that because we live in the middle of nowhere, as you know. But when we moved a decade ago, 11 years ago into this new house, we got high speed internet, and all of a sudden I'm like, "Oh my gosh, my life has changed. This was incredible." Suddenly, just anything you want right there. It was cool.

Brad Lomenick:

Think about the travel agent. Remember the days of calling your travel agent?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah.

Brad Lomenick:

And actually have to book a flight for a trip through your travel agent. Now, you have so many options. Travel agents don't exist anymore.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's interesting though. Yes and no, because Adam Duckworth ... I just interviewed Adam and he'll be on this show. He's reinventing travel through digital company, Travelmation. And what's really interesting is that was another trend and another post I wrote on leadership trends, but DIY, which is one mode of travel is also now giving way to do it for me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you can call Adam at Travelmation and it's like book my Disney experience, and they're like, "Well, do you want, Animal Kingdom? Or do you want Star Wars Galaxy Edge? Or do you want this?" And then you don't even have to think. And they get paid by Disney and by other organizations, so it doesn't cost you more. So I think there's so much opportunity. Most of us, we're just living in a model that doesn't exist anymore.

Brad Lomenick:

What you said is true. The medium that represents mediocrity, or average is what's gone away. What Adam is creating is not ... It is a distribution channel, but it's a curated distribution channel that allows you to connect to something that you wouldn't necessarily do on your own.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's a higher end experience.

Brad Lomenick:

Yes, exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's a turnkey solution, right?

Brad Lomenick:

Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

For your family. Because if you're going to drop ... I think he said the average is 4,000 to 6,000 that a family will drop on a visit to Disney. That's a big ticket item, but we're going to treat you like a white glove service, which is different than the traditional travel agent where you get stuck eating breakfast cereal at some cheap hotel and you overpaid for it.

Brad Lomenick:

I think I heard Seth say this. The network hub, the idea that what used to be the network leader or the network hub was that you had information that other people didn't have. And therefore, because you had information, you were in power.

Brad Lomenick:

I mean, every youth pastor in America, right now, your students are not scarce on information. They're fact checking you as you're doing the sermon. So, no longer do you have power over them as a youth pastor, because you have more information than they do. They can get it faster, quicker, and actually more accurate than you can.

Brad Lomenick:

So what do you have that you can now trade as an asset as a youth pastor is you have relational equity. You're able to create things that are more analog in nature. I mean, David Kinnaman has spoken about this. You guys talked about it with your interview of him recently that all that's changing the way we approach how we lead and the curated leader is the one now who has the influence. The leader who's actually gathering people and giving them something they can't get anywhere else.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And the other thing you can get in that sea of information, because not everything you read on Reddit is accurate, believe it or not, did you know that? I did not know that.

Brad Lomenick:

Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I just learned that today. Not everything is accurate on the internet. Are you kidding me? But what you can bring, and this is one of the fun things about what I get to do these days is hopefully you can bring a little bit of insight and hopefully you can bring a little bit of meaning, because information is everywhere, but insight is still relatively rare.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And if you can guide teenagers, if you can lead teenagers, if you can help steer them in the right direction, and you have that access to them and that kind of relationship where it's like, "Well, what about this?" That is what is sorely missing from culture.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What I love about ReThink Leadership is it is an opportunity. I see it as a paradigm shifting event where we try to take the latest trends, the latest thoughts, and actually try to curate those conversations so that you get direction and guidance and insight that you're never going to get when you're just trying to get to Sunday, get to Sunday, or run ... And it's open to business leaders too, but to run your business.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So anyway, you guys can go to [ReThinkLeadership.com](https://ReThinkLeadership.com). Brad and I will be there. We do this Tuesday night reception. Everyone is invited if you fly in early, and we just kind of hang out, and we can chat and connect, and it's pretty casual vibe. True story.

Brad Lomenick:

I would say don't wait too long to register.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Brad Lomenick:

There is a price increase or a discount up until February 29th. You may be listening to this after that, so maybe we'll still be able to offer you something, but don't wait. Go ahead and get registered. It's going to sell out. It has every year, so we want you to have a seat.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, Brad, once again, it's always fun. Thanks my friend.

Brad Lomenick:

It is, man. Thanks for curating that conversation and I got a lot of notes here from you and Chris talking that I'm going to think about for a while, because that was ... I felt like a fly on the wall just getting to be a part of the conversation and listening to this.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you ask some great questions. You really did. And I love his morning stuff. And you know what, true confession, I'm four Sabbaths into a Sabbath rhythm, so that one only. He's nine years, I'm four.

Brad Lomenick:

All somewhere in our journey, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, we are. All right, Brad. Thanks so much, man. Well, guys, if you want to register for ReThink Leadership, head on over to [ReThinkLeadership.com](https://ReThinkLeadership.com) now you can get the best rates while you still can. It's going to be an awful lot of fun and I am so pumped to welcome you there. And yeah, it is intimate and interactive.

Carey Nieuwhof:

By the way, at the end of the podcast, I'm going to talk a little bit more about the disappearing middle from culture, and I've got some ideas about how to respond to that. In the meantime, I'd love to share with you what is next on the podcast. So when we come back, we've got Dr. James Emery White.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Jim White, created quite a few headlines in some circles last year when he decided to shut down all the locations of his church to merge back into one. And I talked to him about why he did that, the future of digital outreach and how to grow your church younger as a leader grows older. Here's an excerpt from next week's conversation.

James Emery White:

One of the things that I blogged about and written about is that the multi-site can explode or be on the scene in the 1990s, late '90s. The first book came out in like '03 or '04 and things of that nature. Our first site was 2003. The iPhone wasn't released till 2007.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

James Emery White:

I mean, the whole revolution happened after this began to be explored as a strategy. So in one sense, it sounds weird to say multi-site is dated, but from a technological standpoint in terms of how that's changed the game, yes, it's dated.

James Emery White:

Second, it's a physical approach in a digital world. The whole reason for the multi-site was that you were trying to remove physical barriers. For us, at least, it was all about making it easier for someone who attends that, to invite a friend, and to check things out.

James Emery White:

Now, the only way a friend who was invited to check things out was a physical visit back when we started. I mean it was a physical thing. So the multi-site was a physical reaction to a physical barrier.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, we'll have that for you on YouTube and also here on the audio stream on the podcast. Super excited for that episode. And subscribers, you get it automatically for free. So, if you haven't subscribed yet, please do so.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And want to thank BELAY, who's got a free resource for you called Productivity for the Win. Just text my name, Carey, C-A-R-E-Y to 31996 to get that. And if you want 10% off of your media needs for life, go to ProMediaFire.com/Carey and get a team of media experts helping you for a fraction of the cost of hiring it out yourself.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And now, it's time for What I'm Thinking About. So, I do really enjoy conversations like this when we're talking about what's changing, because I really think historians are going to look back on our time and era and go, "Wow, so much changed." So what's changing?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sometimes, when you're in the moment, it's hard to see. So, Brad referenced a blog post that I wrote called 5 Disruptive Leadership Trends That Will Rule 2020. And I kind of zeroed in on the fact that the middle is disappearing. We'll link to this in the show notes if you want more.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And what I meant by that, you already heard that in the podcast. Malls are disappearing. Department stores are disappearing. But what opportunities does that open up? Well, a couple of things. One, the middle is wide open.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't know what you'll do with it, because no one else is succeeding there, but hey, there's probably a great opportunity in retail. There's a great opportunity to kind of reclaim the middle. I think that's true politically, right? Wouldn't it be great to have a centrist candidate running somewhere? Wouldn't that be awesome? I think most people are kind of in the middle rather than to one extreme.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So there's an opportunity, but I want to think about what it means for those of us who, in the church world or in the retail world or in the business world, are trying to figure out, "Well, what do you do when the middle is disappearing?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, first of all, the middle is where mediocrity lives. So, you don't want to be there, and you can compete on price. So maybe you're like, "We're just going to discount everything. And we're just going to make it all cheaper."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Here's the challenge with that. The challenge with making everything cheaper is it's a race to the bottom. At a certain point, you're just making everything worse. And I mean, you can compete there. I just think it's really hard to win at scale. I mean, there's always going to be somebody who will undercut you and that's true of a major retailer. That's also true of somebody who's just starting up.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We had Jasmine Star on the podcast and she said, "When I'm starting up as an independent photographer, there's always somebody who'll do it for half the price. You're going to charge 100 bucks to shoot a wedding, you can find somebody who will do it for 50. Now, they may not do it well, but I think when you're competing on price, that's a real challenge."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, do you want to compete on the higher end of the market? And I think this is where all the low hanging fruit is. So that doesn't necessarily mean raising your prices. But what it does mean is producing a really quality personal experience.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So some independent bookstores are actually making a comeback. And they're doing it by being more human, and creating great environments for guests. So, I saw an article ... I don't know if it was the New York Times or Wall Street Journal or whatever, but just about some New York, Manhattan bookstores that are doing just fine by offering some great coffee, a curated experience.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And not everybody wants to buy their books off Amazon, right? Not everybody wants to just be a click away and have it dropped off on their doorstep. A lot of people just want to go out and browse. And if you have staff that are knowledgeable that don't just point and say, "Oh, you're interested in leadership. Well, if you love that book, have you thought about this?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

And rather than an algorithm doing it, having a human being doing it. If you have a guest services team at your church, actually make sure that they're in the guest services, they're not just filling a slot, or some kind of position and they're not on robot mode, where they're just doing what they were told to do. But actually, look people in the eye, greet them, smile, walk them over, don't point, walk with somebody.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean, those things, man, do you know how hungry our culture is for that kind of service? And it's just not that hard. You can train your guest services team, train your customer service people. You can train so many people into that and I would look at what you can do to make whatever you do more personal, more generous, more empathetic and more human.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And remember, if you decide to head to the bottom, even if you win the race to the bottom, all you get is the bottom. So those are few extra thoughts on the middle disappearing from culture. I hope you find them helpful. Thanks so much for listening today. Can't wait to be back with a fresh episode. And I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before.

Announcer:

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