

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 334 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 BELAY and by Generis. They've got some things that are going to help you through this crisis, and also by my new free course called How to Lead Through Crisis. I'm so glad you're joining us.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're going to love the guest today. If you don't know him, get ready cause you're going to enjoy it. And if you do, I know a lot of you follow Mark Sayers, and he is one of the favorite voices that I have discovered in the last 12 months. We tell the story at the beginning of the interview of how I met him last year in London, England in May. Hadn't really accessed his stuff and it led to the biggest non conversation that could have been.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Anyway, we try to make up for it today. So this one goes a long and deep, and Mark is one of the most profound thinkers, I think, alive today. He is an amazing cultural commentator, has a broad understanding of history and also of what's happening in the world, a very global perspective as well. And so we talk about the current pandemic, the conditions that led into it, how it's changing the culture, how it threatens the secular salvation schema that he and John Mark Comer talk about, and what's going to change in the future, in the church, what the new normal might look like. It's absolutely fascinating. And as we start thinking about what will happen post-pandemic, well, I think you're going to want a notebook. Also remember we do offer transcripts, so there are transcripts at the show notes and we also have show notes. So if you want to go back and study this one, which I suspect you might, well, we can help with that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So really glad you joined us, and hey, I hope you had a great first digital Easter with your family. I know things are really different right now, and I can imagine that some of you are really feeling the weight as well. So I just want you to know we're trying to come alongside you. We are talking about the current situation on this podcast for most of the episodes now and, well, if you're brand new, welcome. We have a lot of new listeners and you can subscribe. You'll get everything automatically for free.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So about a month ago, guess what? You started leading a remote team, right? Everybody did. In business, in church world, and I've done it for a while, but you know who's done it for a long time is BELAY. For over a decade now. And I know all of the top leaders there, they have had a 100% remote workforce of five-star virtual assistants, of virtual bookkeeping services for churches, nonprofits and businesses alike.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And as everybody flexes with staff, they can come alongside you. So they have a special offer for you in light of the current crisis. BELAY is offering their free download of 13 Ways to Build a High Performing Remote Team, to keep your remote team performing as if they're all in the office together. Listen, that is an art and this is absolutely free, so if you'd like that, their free download of 13 Ways to Build a High Performing Remote Team. Just text CAREY, C-A-R-E-Y, to 31996. That's CAREY to 31996. You can do that. Get that automatically for free. I know the CEO, I know the founders. I have learned so much about leading a remote team from BELAY. So just send CAREY, text CAREY to 31996. You'll get yourself that free PDF download.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then another problem that a lot of you are trying to negotiate right now is giving. According to the data that David Kinnaman and I work on at ChurchPulse Weekly, the majority of churches, vast majority of churches have not seen a growth in giving. They've seen a decline. So if you haven't created a culture of generosity before the COVID crisis, you're probably feeling the effects in a big way right now.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, Generis would love to come alongside you and help, because building a culture of generosity isn't really about short-term tactics that create a big burst of giving. It requires patience, persistence, and a focus on discipleship. So they've got a super practical online course called Fund the Vision. This can start to get you ready for what happens after the pandemic as well. So you can start now building a solid foundation that will increase giving in your church.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The principal for Generis Group, Jim Sheppard, walks you through the implementation of six key principles that will help you weather this storm and thrive when it passes. So check out their free video, Fund the Vision, and in it you'll learn the philosophy of how to build a thriving culture and a culture of generosity that lasts. So you can head to [Generis.com/Carey](https://Generis.com/Carey), that's Generis, G-E-N-E-R-I-S.com/Carey, and access the free video, Fund the Vision, so just some resources to come alongside you and really try to help you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

By the way, just real quick, if you haven't yet checked out How to Lead Through Crisis, that's my course, my absolutely free course, on, well, guess what? How to Lead Through Crisis. Join over 5,000 leaders who have accessed that course for free in the last week or so. You can text the word CRISIS to 33777.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I just love how organizations like BELAY and Generis are coming alongside leaders, and we will get through this together. We honestly, honestly will. In the What I'm Thinking About segment, I'm going to talk about online engagement. How do you measure online? What are you shooting for, the difference between views and engagements and so on. So hopefully that'll help. That's at the very end of the podcast.

Carey Nieuwhof:

In the meantime, I am so thrilled to bring you a fascinating conversation with Mark Sayers. He is one of the top thinkers and commentators today and the author of several books. He is the pastor of Red Church in Melbourne, Australia, and he co-hosts This Cultural Moment, that podcast with John Mark

Comer, and the Rebuilders podcast, which he is doing about this crisis. So without further ado, my conversation with Mark Sayers.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mark, welcome to the podcast.

Mark Sayers:

Wonderful to be here.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I just want to start by saying thank you for all your work. I was saying before we started recording, the first time we met in person, it was kind of awkward. We were in London together and we were staying I think at the same hotel. You were there with your family and I knew who you were and I had heard all about you, but hadn't read your books at that point or yet discovered This Cultural Moment. And so it was kind of one of those empty conversations where I had no good questions and I went home and binged it and have since met John Mark Comer. We've connected in a couple of different ways. So it's just a thrill and I want to thank you on behalf of all leaders for the tremendous contribution you've made to the conversation.

Mark Sayers:

Ah, thank you very much.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. So one of the things I think you are particularly gifted at is you have the ability to spot what I would call meta trends or just the whole idea behind This Cultural Moment. You have an amazing ability to see what's going on, to name it, to call it, and to communicate it in a way that's clear. So we're here in the middle of the crisis, we were supposed to do this interview face to face a few days ago. My Australia trip wisely was canceled, and you're in Melbourne and I'm here in Toronto. But what mega trends have been at play, three weeks into this global crisis? I heard you in your own podcast, The Rebuilders, sort of touch on that and I'd love you just to bring some of your thoughts into this moment.

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, well I had the sense that, a lot of my work, for the last few years has been looking at post-Christian dynamic, particularly in the west. And I think there was a sense around church leaders, cultural leaders, business leaders, coming from a faith background, that there was this post-Christian dynamic that was at play, that it sort of caught up with us very quickly. So a lot of my work's been around that, but I think probably a year ago, six months ago, I realized that I had this sense that post-Christianity and the west was about to be disrupted by globalization. This sense that as the world became more connected, it became more diverse and what does it look like when we're intimately connected to China? What does it look like when India rises, over a billion people rising.

Mark Sayers:

And what does it look like when we move sort of beyond what's been the American century into more of a true globalized century? And so I was just saying to posture, what would that look like? Part of the beginning of this latest season of This Cultural Moment, which we've paused because in a sense it's

jumped ahead of where we were, my bet that post-Christianity was about to get severely disrupted just at the moment we were starting to just really grapple with it. And so I see this virus, which has come out of Wuhan as evidence of the lack of resilience that this global connected ideology, really, in a sense, that we thought if we just connect everything in the world, things will get better. And indeed they have. There's been a big uptake in people moving out of poverty in places like China and India.

Mark Sayers:

But in the midst of it as well, there was this tremendous weakness. All it takes is one virus to shut everything down, and we're now living in the consequences of that. I think that this is a profound switch. We've been at a moment where we've never ever had the entire world focused on one issue. We've become a one issue world at the moment. So I just see this is an incredible once in a century moment, to be honest. And I think this is going to profoundly change the world. Not everything will stop, there'll be things that carry on as per normal, but I think this is a definite inflection point for the world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think it was a surprise and I mean you can see the movie *Outbreak* or *Pandemic* or things like that, and people always have this dystopian future. But I do think this caught everybody off guard. Before the whole Coronavirus emerged as a story, where were you thinking it would go and how did you suspect we might get disrupted? I'd just be curious as to where you imagined it might go.

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, so I think particularly the American century has been defined by the American story and the United States has been the preeminent global power since the end of World War Two, and probably somewhere took over really from the United Kingdom and Europe. A lot of that story was an inward story. The story in the world was defined by increasingly a political polarization between left and right, which followed, I guess the American pattern of politics. And I felt like what does it look like with the China rising? I began to study China more and more.

Mark Sayers:

You had a China which was coming out of what it saw of a century of humiliation and wanted to be a global player in the world. It had a grand project under the premiership of Xi Jinping, which is called the belt and road project, which was to connect the world, to reinvigorate the silk roads, which had given it power when it was the middle kingdom of the world. And I thought, this is going to disrupt the west. What does it look like when... I think we'd almost bought this myth in many western countries that there was this person out there is unchurched and they're all super progressive. They all think of something similar. They're all very postmodern and very secular. And that's the new...

Carey Nieuwhof:

So they live in Portland basically with John Mark, right?

Mark Sayers:

Yes. Yes. But I just began to notice this didn't tally with what I experienced on the street. I would talk to someone, it could be an Iranian refugee who's come to Melbourne, who's wrestling with what's happened to their country and Islam and questioning at all. Or it could be someone who'd grown up with a Catholic background and how do they... You know, am I religious? Am I not? There was just so much more diversity than what the big story was telling us. So I felt that diversity was going to

undermine, I think, this sort of polarity where the church had been stuck in this political question between left and right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, isn't that interesting? Yeah. The other perspective you have, cause I have visited Australia three times before this trip was shut down and we plan to do it again in 2021 now God willing, but you pay much more attention to Asia than we do in North America. I mean if you think about it, your vacation is in Bali, or you head to Malaysia or something like that. And I think here in our part of the western world, we just don't think in those terms. It seems very distant. And so you would see much more of a global culture perhaps then, and probably a different slice of it than you would in New York or Toronto.

Mark Sayers:

Yes. I think the change is like, traditionally, when Australia had migration, people would come here and we've had people come all over the world. In a sense, you're leaving your old world behind. But the connectivity of this moment is fascinating. So I live in an area which is heavily influenced by people from mainland China. And what's interesting is starting to see the influence of the politics of mainland China come here, even in my local neighborhood, we had the Chinese flag flying over our police station and there was this moment where there was the rainbow flag, was flying on lots of civic buildings around the world. And so we then had that at the police station. But then it was interesting. So you had representatives say, we want our culture represented as well.

Mark Sayers:

So all of a sudden during the Hong Kong protest at our local police station here in Box Hill in Australia, you had the Chinese flag flying and you had it over at town hall. And then you had people who were backing the Hong Kong protest in this area saying, "Hang on, what's going on?" And I saw that and I thought, this is a disruption. And so I think here in Australia we've been more attuned to the fact of seeing the rising power of Asia. And it's not just China, it's India, it's Singapore, it's Japan, it's South Korea.

Mark Sayers:

My daughter, it's just normal for her to listen to pop music from South Korea. I grew up listening to-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Isn't that interesting?

Mark Sayers:

Yeah. It's just like, she doesn't see it as world's music or anything. It's just like, what was listening to American music, all the bands she listens to are from South Korea or they're from Norway and it's this increasingly diverse world and I think that's going to come to America increasingly. I think America's still thinking about this as, what does it look like to have a multicultural internal, national debate? But what does it look like when you're just one player in a vast chessboard of different pieces playing a game on the global stage?

Carey Nieuwhof:

So when you're 300 million people out of seven point something billion people, how does that change the equation?

Mark Sayers:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then suddenly nobody would have predicted this. Nobody in January would have said all the borders will be shut down, international travel will grind to a halt, the economy will collapse, et cetera, et cetera. And so now, people are talking about de-globalization, which perhaps we can come back to toward the end. Probably my favorite episode, and perhaps the favorite thing that I listened to in 2019 last year was the episode on This Cultural Moment where you unpacked secular salvation, the secular salvation schema. So John has done this, John Mark has done this on this podcast a couple of months ago. He said he was trying to channel you, paraphrase you. I would love for you to unpack that for us. Give us the five minute version of secular salvation because I think it has disrupted that paradigm as well and would love to explore that with you.

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, I mean one of my theories is that when we speak about post-Christian culture, a lot of people initially spoke about it as, I would return to this ground zero, that the slate has been wiped clean and we're back in the first century, where no one's ever heard the story of Jesus, but really, post-Christian culture is advancing some of the elements of Christian culture, but minus the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I say it's the kingdom without the King. And that plays out in multiple different ways. But one way I realized that it plays out is in particularly this individual life plan or trajectory, which we expect, which actually has contours of the Christian story over it, but it's actually secularized. So if you think about the Christian story, the Christian gospel is that humans are fallen and we've rebelled against God, are cast out of the garden, always wandering East of Eden.

Mark Sayers:

And then we have Jesus who comes into the world, incarnates, dies on the cross and when we bow to him and follow him, accept him into our lives, he then offers us salvation. So there's this secularized version of that and it sort of looks like there's some kind of broken, and there's almost multiple versions of the secular story. But let's give you the most probably popular one. Here is this particular guy and he's grown up in really tough circumstances and it's been really difficult. But then, despite everyone else in his community struggling, he looked and he saw something inside of him, and it was a self-belief and there was a talent linked to that. Maybe he's a musician, maybe he's a basketball player, maybe he's an incredible architect or an IT entrepreneur.

Mark Sayers:

And so cutting out the voices around him, he then commits to this discipline and he cherishes his thing. And he has these breaks cause he believes in himself. And then eventually he is gloried as he reaches this point of achievement, and gains fame and ascends to this position of sainthood and glorification, as he's recognized for the incredible person that he really is, gains the adulation of his peers, and then he appears on Oprah's couch and tells this story, and all clap and smile and cry as he's followed the secular salvation story. So there's this sense where there's a redemptive... There was a book called The Redemptive Self, which said that what the United States has done is taken this Christian story, but then

it's applied it to lives and there's a secular running of that which yet mirrors the Christian story of redemption. So the fall is often obscurity.

Mark Sayers:

The fall in this version may be headedness, it may be brokenness, it may be addiction, it may be poverty, but the salvation is not outside of ourselves. It's actually truly believing in who you are. It's truly loving yourself and it's gaining some sort of... Often it's talent and achievement and then achieving that and then becoming almost a saint, a secular saint in your field. Sainthood is celebrity when you're recognized by your peers.

Mark Sayers:

There's another one I'll just quickly share as well, which is almost another story where it almost subverts the Christian one, which is the person who grew up perhaps in a religious family which was strict, and maybe they grew up in a fundamentalist Christian or Hasidic Jewish or Islamic and then they slowly stripped themselves of those things, which is like sin, and then they discovered who they really are, and running away from those strictures of culture. They then walked into this experience and are able to taste all the fruit of the garden for themselves and now they live in this happiness and live in this kingdom of God on heaven. Heaven has come down to earth and they travel and they experience everything that the world has to offer. There's some versions of the of secular salvation schema.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What is the reward in secular salvation, where you've removed God, you've got the kingdom, but you've got no King? What would a typical reward be?

Mark Sayers:

I would say adulation or celebrity. Another one would be pleasure. Living a life which is continually pleasurable. I would say they're two main ones, and the other one would be knowledge.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Lifestyle, entrepreneurship thing is an expression of that.

Mark Sayers:

Absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Mark Sayers:

And perhaps glory, power and knowledge.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. Correct me, this may not have been you, but I'm pretty sure I heard you at one point say it's freedom as well. The freedom to do what you want, when you want, where you want, how you want. And one of the reasons I thought that was so salient now is what have we lost over the last 30 days? We've lost our freedom, we've lost autonomy, we've lost mobility, we've lost predictability. Not only

seeing net worth drop or income drop or unemployment rise, but that whole idea that I am the master of my own fate, seems to have been just snatched from us overnight. I'd love to hear you first of all comment on that, and secondly, expand on that or correct that if I'm taking it in the wrong direction.

Mark Sayers:

No, absolutely. I realize that what western culture was doing primarily, and increasingly non-western culture, was offering us more freedom. So to be a human, you actually do need some level of freedom. So for example, someone who is currently living in North Korea, they need more freedom. Someone who's in prison for their political beliefs with a dictatorship needs more freedom. But there's a point where freedom goes into beyond where there's an appropriate level into almost a tyranny of freedom. So humans need freedom, but we also need community and a social fabric in which to live, to find ourselves in other people, and to be loved and be known by them. But also we need meaning. So what the west has done is delivered thus a lopsided version of those needs where we have increasing freedom.

Mark Sayers:

We can download what we want on Netflix, we can actually travel where we want. We can take a cheap flight to Bali, we can reinvent ourselves in any way we want. We can have incredible freedom, unseen like before in human history. But at the same time, the increasing household across the west, the dominant household is moving from, it went from extended family to nuclear family. Now it's becoming one person. And that's not a slam on people who find themselves living by themselves, cause many I know who don't want to do that. But the trajectory that this leads to, and even in places like Japan and South Korea, which are less Western, per se, but still follow this trajectory, they now talk about loner culture.

Mark Sayers:

But then what we're missing is meaning. I think one of the reasons that, perhaps before the COVID-19 moment, we saw this reconnection with politics, was that a lot of our religious impulses we were pushing into politics, cause we're actually looking for meaning, or we're looking for it in tribalism. So we were hungry for community, we had too much freedom. And when you've got too much freedom, you become dizzy.

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:23:04]

Mark Sayers:

So the way I say this is, if you wanted to buy dish washing detergent and you go to the store and if there's just one... Just say you live in Bulgaria during the communist period and it's just one and sometimes it's not there, you're going to be more happier when you got a choice of three, all right? So, that's good, but then when there is 1700 in front of you on that supermarket shelf, you're standing there going, "Which one do I buy?" And actually you get what Schwartz called choice anxiety, so a lot of the, what I call, ambient anxiety in our culture that people were struggling with actually was because we had too much freedom, too many options, and we were constantly in our heads trying to work out how navigate this without any one offering a way forward.

Mark Sayers:



You're 100% right. I think this is been profoundly disrupted in this moment, and that world was a world where it was shaped by consumerism and even hyper consumerism, which was all about wants, so not only did it offer you ways to fulfill your wants, it expanded your wants. I studied advertising. Part of advertising was to help people realize there's a product that they never knew they wanted. We're going to make you want it and we're going to do that by actually offering you... It's going to make you more glorious. It's going to make you more powerful. It's going to make you more sexually attractive. It's going to make you more secure.

Mark Sayers:

So, Western culture has been generating wants, and I've come to the realization, and I've been... Before this happened, I had this moment of self criticism where I began to just ask the question in last three years, "Mark, what if you're being a chaplain to the kingdom of wants, and what if you're doing Christianity for people who want to move to Melbourne and be cool and have all their wants, but they still want to have some meaning? They still want some Jesus, but you're putting a Jesus varnish, and we're offering ways to try and spiritually form them, but the ones that are forming them are not powerful enough to actually undo the much more powerful cultural forming of the kingdom of wants?"

Mark Sayers:

Where we have flipped to in the last 30 days, is we have now moved from a want world to a need world. Matt Stoller, who's an economist, he wrote this tweet and it was something like... It was more looking at economics and he said he was early onto predicting what would happen with Covid-19, and he said, "We're about to head into shortages on the supermarket shelf."

Mark Sayers:

I'm looking at this guy and I think he's being a bit alarmist. I remember the moment going to the supermarket only a couple of weeks ago with my daughter who's 12 and us walking in, it was panic in the supermarket. There's a guy from our church who is the manager of that particular store, and we're talking to him. He's ripping open boxes with a box cutter. He's putting up stuff. He's like, "This is intense."

Mark Sayers:

This guy walks up to us, this American guy, he's like, "Man, this is like Moscow in 1954 when they ran out of food." And I'm standing there having this conversation, I'm like, "My daughter is seeing something I've never seen in my life." Which is shortage on the shelves. I never have known a moment where the shelves aren't full. There's more stuff available, and I realized my daughter's going to grow up understanding shortage. Now my grandfather, who lived through The Great Depression, he knew shortage. He lived differently.

Mark Sayers:

The lady across the road, who lives across from us, who's Latvian and lived under the Communists and the Soviets who recycles everything, not because she's a hipster, because that's how she learned to live. She understands need. Many of us don't understand need, so the pivot for many leaders is so much of our ministry was based around providing services, sometimes religious services, and I'm self critiquing as much as I'm being [inaudible 00:26:33] here, is what does it now look like to pivot to people who need. Who spiritually need, who don't have a job, who don't know how to provide, who are like, "I'm running myself ragged here doing Zoom meetings with clients to keep my job going, while homeschooling my

kids, while trying to put a lasagna in the oven all at the same time." That's a huge fundamental change which is undermining the secular salvation scheme. People are realizing their mortality and their fragility, and that the system is fragile.

Mark Sayers:

If I could just add one thing. There was a moment just before this happened, we had the Australian Bush fires.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Mark Sayers:

So, we had the Bush fires, so we had people wearing masks because of the Australian Bush fires, which is huge, and our generations Pastor Sue... We had a number of people at church who went on their summer vacations to the beach and then had to be evacuated and there were people stuck in some towns, and Sue was telling me she was near a town. She had to leave and the town above her, and this is Australia, where we've got nationalized healthcare. We've got a very good government. We have everything provided for us. We didn't even go into recession during the GFC, because their government managed it so well. The town that was about where she was at, they ran out of food. In 48 hours, there was looting, and I was talking about this.

Mark Sayers:

We just don't think about this with Australia, and there's a sense where so much of the questioning and spirit... I believe that post Christianity is able to survive when it has a number of social things keeping it in place. When you believe that Amazon's still going to get that parcel to you. When you can go to that cafe. You can move to Paris if you want to because the borders are still open. A number of those supporting structures have now starting to collapse or look fragile and that's going to open up a massive spiritual hunger.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is so rich, Mark. Are there other ways in which our predominant worldview for the last 40, 50 years is being dismantled before our eyes? Are there other threats? Other... Because I think you're right. I think of people who are lifestyle entrepreneurs on Instagram or on the internet, and I'm like, "Wow, that's a tough message right now, man." Because the whole thing was based on do what you want, when you want, how you want, with who you want, and I'm like, "All of a sudden, overnight, that world collapsed. How else is this challenging..."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And even, I think you're right. Most of us... I mean, I became a Christian in Canadian culture. You became a Christian in Australian culture. Most of our audience is American. They became Christians in American culture and it's very difficult to disentangle your worldview from your faith view, but that is being done right now in real time, so any other ways in which some of the core beliefs we may have even thought were Christianity turned out to be cultural.

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, so many. I mean, I try and think of a few. I think what this is doing is, it's proof... I think there was a fear that when this first happened, like everyone is going to go live streaming and this is just going to be a boon to cultural Christians who just want to sit on their couches with a packet of chips and a beer in their track pants and just... Because this is the future. I realized those people, they're not going to watch.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Bingo.

Mark Sayers:

They're gone, and I've had to be adaptive. I wasn't a huge fan. I'm a big embodied person like that, but I'm like, "Man, you got to adapt." This is a wartime situation, you're thinking peace time situation, and I actually think those people are disappearing. What I'm seeing is, if you're going to join our live stream, you actually have to proactively do that, because there's a lot of other things on that channel that you can flick across to.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I can leave without you ever knowing I was there. Yep, you're right.

Mark Sayers:

Exactly. Exactly. So, I think what's happened is... Churches had these three layers. Up at the top is leadership. Most of the people listening to this are leaders and we lead by an example. We cast the vision, we communicate, but then we had this middle rung of services and large gatherings where we could get people. You can see who's in the room, you get a sense of what's going on and you can communicate. I'm realizing, in Zoom meetings I can't do a staff meeting like I can do when they're in the room because I can... I mean, I'm a big visual person. I pick up people's emotions and stuff like that. I read the context, so it's hard for me. I'm looking at screens and I'm like, "Is that person... They're looking away." So, we didn't realize how much leverage we had in large gatherings and services.

Mark Sayers:

Then down the bottom was households. This is where people live their every days, when they leave your big service. When they've had that moment at the end of the service, that transcendent thing. The worship's pumping, there's been a great message. Maybe there's a response. Maybe people are buzzing and talking in the shared spaces afterwards, but then they go back to their homes. Now what the research has been telling us is, that's the hardest place to actually get people to follow Jesus in the ordinariness of their lives, and if you look at say Dave Kinnaman's research around faith in exiles and we both know Dave. What that's saying just with the emerging generations, but I think this is true outside the Millennials, is that a large percentage of people sitting in your services are habitual Christians who come, and they're sitting in your big gatherings and then maybe at your men's conference, maybe they're in your worship service.

Mark Sayers:

Maybe they're sitting in that seminar, but actually their lives are not reflecting biblical truth. They don't even believe all the things that we would say are really stack standard, just basic Christian stuff, so we could have been getting a false feedback loop. Where actually we're like, "Oh man, this service is packed. Brilliant. All these people are coming to my conference. Awesome." But then what's happening

in their homes when their doors are shut? Who are they when no one's looking at them? How are they talking to each other in their marriages? What are they downloading? What are they doing? How that its discipling their kids. That middle rung, that leverage point is gone, and we're in a sense flying in the dark, and I know that...

Mark Sayers:

I had this early warning moment when I was in Malaysia just as this was all hitting, and there was a guy at this conference and I didn't speak to him directly, but I heard this second hand and he was from Mongolia, and Mongolia shut down a lot of churches, and this Mongolian pastor was like, "I don't know where my people have gone. We're doing live stream, but I don't know where my people are." And that scared me. As a pastor, I'm like, "Man, that's real."

Mark Sayers:

So, a lot of pastors listening to this are probably like, "Where are my people? I'm seeing the stats on YouTube live or Facebook live, but who are these people and where's that guy gone and where's that family gone?" And I realized that what we're actually doing this moment, is we're handing across leadership to them. I have lost a bunch of leadership at this point in time. We all have. In that leadership happens in that space where I can every week, I got them in a room, I can talk to them. That's gone, and there's a commissioning moment and I believe God maybe... I don't believe God's called this pandemic, but God... Romans tells us, "God uses things for good."

Mark Sayers:

I believe that God's going to do a judo move on the work of the enemy here, and that actually part of this could be strengthening those households, because now I've got people saying, "Okay, how do I disciple my kids? How do I do this?" Okay, we're now praying, because we assumed our jobs were safe, they're not anymore, so I believe that God is doing this moment in this time to strengthen those things. So, I believe this could be an acceleration which actually subverts cultural Christianity. That's not going to go away, but it could subvert or let's actually say subvert habitual Christianity.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm(affirmative). The whole consumer thing that this is a product I consume versus something I actually have committed to.

Mark Sayers:

Totally. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mark, I listened to a million things like you have over the last month, and this may have been you, it may not have been, but one of the sources said that the nations who responded best to the crisis so far in terms of being able to eliminate the risks of the virus are often the Asian nations and for a few reasons, not all of them great.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One, authoritarian government. Number two, a high sense of honor. Number three, a deep sense of loyalty to community, and so the government locks you down and you stay in and you don't rebel, and

the nations that have had the hardest time with this are the westernized nations. The nations that prize individual freedom because they're like, "Well, you can't make me stay in." Or, "I'm the exception to the rule."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And it's been very interesting to see that play out over the last few weeks in the infection rate and the death rate, and even what I see on social. Casually, I would say that that's not completely unreasonable. Do you have any thoughts or comments on that as it relates to our ethic and how we think of ourselves?

Mark Sayers:

Yeah. So, just keep a bit of nuance behind that, so what we're seeing is there's a cultural memory with SARS that Hong Kong, Singapore, China had. So, in a sense, what we're seeing is the response to that, and I want to, I guess, nuance it that there's a variety of countries in Asia. Cambodia, for example, is not dealing with this well because their authoritarian government links to China was denying that it was happening, but what we're seeing is, I would say countries with a higher level of radical individualism, where, "Hey man, I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's well said.

Mark Sayers:

Now how you behave is no longer this thing of you. There's that whole saying, "You do you. You live your life how you want to." I do not want people in my neighborhood, you doing you. I mean, there was a party about three weeks ago before... Australia's quite shut down now, and there was a large party I could hear several houses away.

Mark Sayers:

Normally I would be like, "Ah, whatever. They're having a few beers. Playing music loud. Hopefully they shut it off by 11." I'm on my back porch and I'm like, "Man, these people need to stop." I'm like, "Do I ring the police?" Not because of the noise. This is dangerous now, so what this is doing is that the myth of radical individualism, where we can just pursue our own wills, has now been exposed. That we live in an interconnected world. For me it's not even the question of globalization versus anti-globalization, it's the fact as humans we're intimately connected to the rest of the world.

Mark Sayers:

Our lives connected to others, and this is showing us how that is true, so I would say that nations which have a better value on that, who are willing to for the sake of the team take a hit, but that's not a message that many in parts of the West. The other thing I would say too is, I wonder whether this is going to subvert the West in that we now have Western countries on very different trajectories.

Mark Sayers:

I did a Danish podcast yesterday, and Denmark and Australia are actually doing okay because we have a very different political system and we've talked about the West as this broad category, but now, so Sweden and Denmark are going in completely different paths. Sweden is like, "Let's go herd immunity."

Let's open everything up." Denmark shut everything down, and Denmark and Sweden, which looked very similar to each other, could look very different in three years.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you peel down on that a little bit more?

Mark Sayers:

Yes. So, for example, Denmark, the prime minister there, she shut everything down quite early. Sweden decided to just, let's just keep going.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I read that about Sweden. Basically, you can shop, the kids are going to school, and they're going to try to immunize everyone by spreading the disease, right?

Mark Sayers:

Yes. So, basically, what that means-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Which is surprising for Sweden.

Mark Sayers:

Yes, but this is even showing that... We look at, "Ah, Scandinavia, they're all the same." Scandinavia is quite different. When you look at the Danes versus the Swedes, there's actually differences there, and we still don't know that, but what this is doing, this is showing the great differences in actual cultures and political systems.

Mark Sayers:

So, we would say, "Oh the West." I would be on podcasts, always talking about the West. There is significant trajectories that different countries will go on. The United Kingdom early on went for herd immunity, then they realized the modeling showed that they're going to lose half a million people, they pulled back, but now the United Kingdom is in a really difficult position with the amount of deaths they're having. The United States took a very different tack to this than what other countries did because of political culture. Canada's taking a different track and even within countries. Quebec is, I think, closing some of its borders to other provinces and you're seeing this really interesting thing where the decisions of your local government now are life and death for you.

Mark Sayers:

So, all of a sudden, I'm watching press conferences with our premier, that's a version of our governor, I'm watching that. I watched a press conference with the Premier of Tasmania. I would never watch that in a million years before, but I'm like, "He's going to shut down. That's the state below us, what are they going to do?" So, all of a sudden what this means is we've become very local. At the same time, we're having this weird internet conversation and if you track this out, like Australia, we're keeping our new infections quite low because we've responded a particular way. Country's health care, country's social welfare. There's a bunch of Western countries which are paying people now almost the universal basic income who have lost their jobs. There's other Western countries that haven't, so the trajectories

forward of those two different paths mean that the West is going to look very diverse as this plays out in the next few years.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I think it's interesting. I've been tracking the numbers multiple times a day and I spent a lot of time on both sides of the border. I'm a Canadian who spent about a third of my life, sometimes it felt like half, in the U.S. just working with leaders, and I have a green card for the U.S. as well, which is not very actionable right now but those are other stories, but I look at us and we have half the infection rate per capita and a quarter of the death rate, and I think part of that is the Canadian government acted about a week sooner and Canadians kind of went, "Okay, we'll go inside." Whereas if I'm using social media as a measure and the stories I'm reading as a measure in the U.S. it was like, "Ah, we're going to go to the beach."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now we still have some of that here, but it's really, really interesting to track, and one of the other comments I saw is there was no global response, there was a local response. There were supposed to be a global response, but the world leaders did not call each other. They all acted to protect their tribe and whatever they saw best, and even in the U.S., there's 50 different responses. In Canada, there's 10, plus three territories, right?

Mark Sayers:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you have all of your States, which are different, and cities which are different. Melbourne would be different than Sydney, different state as well, so it's really interesting that we've gone very, very hyper local, which a year ago I would've said was irrelevant at this point. We are a unit culture.

Mark Sayers:

Yes, absolutely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, extrapolate a couple of years, what are the implications?

Mark Sayers:

Yes. So, I saw one thing postulated on Twitter with travel, so for example, if you look this out, what happens if Singapore and New Zealand get down to zero with testing or five cases, and then all of a sudden they go, "We're going to open flights between us." But then they're going to fly over countries, which are red zones? What happens if Canada and Australia actually get okay on this and I can jump back on an Air Canada flight and come and visit you, but I can't stop in Mexico, the United States, because they still got huge infection rates.

Mark Sayers:

So, you could actually have two levels of countries here, and to take it even further, what happens say in the United States where California has had a shelter in place a little longer, but then you've got other

states which are not doing that at all, and you could have regional areas where maybe you could go down to California but you can't go to Mississippi, so that's going to provide this really weird thing.

Mark Sayers:

The world's gone to that before. If you look at the late antiquity of the dark ages, it went very, very local, but we're going to have this weird moment where it's super local. You might not be able to travel. I mean, I've read some predictions from people. I started going to airline people who predicted, there's some predictions that we might not see international travel for two to three years come back like it was.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I'm actually preparing for my next two to three years as though it's going to be a fraction of what it has been in the past.

Mark Sayers:

Totally, and you think about what that means for missions organizations, the NGOs. That's just an absolute game changer. What that means for hub cities as well is going to be a change or so. For example, we've had hub cities, London, New York, Paris, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Singapore have done well in globalization and the regions haven't done as well, because manufacturing then went into the supply chain, but hub cities now...

Mark Sayers:

Someone put up a tweet the other day saying that no one's meeting in the New York Times building, basically, but the quality of the paper hasn't changed, so is there a point where their board of directors go, "Hang on, we just saved how many millions on this big flagship building when we could just do this remotely." Or you look at companies going, "Hey, we're still doing stuff and no one's flying around. We saved \$2 million on flights."

Mark Sayers:

So, you could see a move away from hub cities and a more localized thing, but then where we're connecting, like you and I are, still with the world. So, super local, but then... Someone said it's land and the Cloud.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a great metaphor, so you're in Box Hill, which by the way has great dumplings. I remember from the last time I was there.

Mark Sayers:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Rohan Dredge took me there, and I'm in North of Toronto and you're right, we're hyper-connected. I want to get into some predictions and I know these are early days, but when you're looking at trends, it is smart I think to look ahead as much as you can, but I want to ask you a couple of questions. This one, what's the danger no one's talking about right now? There's got to be some stuff that just is not getting enough daylight that is on your mind or heart. What do you think the danger is no one's talking about?



Mark Sayers:

I mean, it's getting a little coverage if you look beneath the surface, but my concern is that we're seeing a profound reshaping of the global order. I see China has done this incredible thing where... There was that series Chernobyl, and six, seven weeks ago, everyone was saying, "Is this Xi Jinping's Chernobyl moment?" Now people are saying, "Is this the Chernobyl moment for Britain or the United States?" And China is opening things up again, and China is like, "We can start the supply chain again. Who wants to join into us?"

Mark Sayers:

And there's a moment where... You look, I think it's two aircraft carriers that are incapacitated in the United States military with Coronavirus outbreaks. There's people looking at this stuff. You're seeing a profound Saudi-Russian oil war happening at the moment. Turkey is repositioning. There is an element there. Some authoritarian states can reposition in this moment, and some of the... That is going with that is that there is a moment where we're going to move to increased surveillance in the world.

Mark Sayers:

So, one of the ways that we can deal with this is actually through testing, and it could be that, "Hey, you can come to Australia in 2021 because all of a sudden we come up with a test which says that you're clear, but then your genetic data is on your passport." There's talk of this. Okay. Great, but then how is that then used in the future going forward, so if you look at say...

Mark Sayers:

I read Shoshana Zuboff's book on all the digital stuff and how the surveillance is happening now, and how so much of our lives are being bought and sold, and she makes the point that a lot of that happened because there was all these restrictions in place about our digital privacy, but then what changed them was 9/11. When all of a sudden government's were like, "Hang on, we've got this war on terrorists, so we need to change the rules a bit here." And if you look at how the world changed for 9/11, how that changed travel.

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:46:04]

Mark Sayers:

You look at TSA in the United States, you look at, you look at biometric passports. We started putting our fingers down when we got to a customs desk. That will now move to biology.

Mark Sayers:

Now the interesting thing as well is that, NT Wright said something really interesting the other day. He said, "What Christians in the West who are experiencing this don't realize these pandemics are a normal part of human history." And I was on a podcast with Justin Breely and there's an expert on there around virology and she was speaking about, like we've had... this is SARS 2.0. So basically the Spanish Flu 2.0 is coming. This will not be the first one. This is coming. And someone put up on Twitter the other day, there was a 2017 Time Magazine about the next pandemic. There's the Bill Gates TED Talk about, "Hey, this is coming." There's that term of black swan which is an event that no one predicts. And Nicolas Nassim Taleb who coined the term black swan actually said, "This is not a black swan because we knew this was coming. The experts were telling us, we just didn't prepare. It's only a black swan if you don't see it coming."

Mark Sayers:

So, I think you'll see biosecurity as an increasing part of life, but biosecurity with increased surveillance. I was reading that China is getting some of its... they have these free enterprise spots or these zones of trade in some of the countries like Cambodia and so on. They were now sort of saying to the workers in those places, "Hey, we want to get you to sign a form that is saying that you're not going to gather in religious gatherings because religious gatherings are transmitters of this thing. Can you please sign this form?"

Mark Sayers:

There was an op-ed here in Australia which was basically saying... because the outbreaks, the outbreak in New York State was from a synagogue. The outbreak in Iran was from a religious city of Qom. There was in France and Switzerland, it came from a charismatic, mega-church conference. There is a case that I've heard some people in an op-ed making like, "Hang on, we've got to now regulate how people gather." So I'm concerned that some of the pushback we could see from particular authoritarian regimes who are now looking to influence things beyond their borders in an international world, that that could grow. That's one thing I'm concerned about.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I was thinking we may be at the stage at some point, and I don't know why these thoughts pop into your head, but next time you get on a plane you get your temperature taken before you're allowed to board. Things like that, that they do the little forehead scan and away you go.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, we could talk at the meta level all night, all day. I want to switch because you're also leading a church and your Rebuilders podcast is a beautiful oscillation between the hyper-theoretical and the hyper-practical and you've got a lot of church leaders, a lot of business leaders listening who are trying to figure out, "Yeah, I am working from home. My kids are hanging off me. I'm trying to run a remote organization. Nothing prepared us for this." You've got a few pillars that you're using at your church to help guide you through this. Can you just share what those are briefly for leaders?

Mark Sayers:

So we just sort of came out that I felt like we need... There's so much information that we just need a few pillars to gather around. And so I just came up with four, which was... the first one was adapt. When you hit a crisis you often double down on what you were doing before. And I realized this was a profound change moment. I think I've studied culture enough to know this is a big, watershed moment. So we have to adapt. And there's adapting in terms of lots of people having to go completely online. But then there's a sort of adapting in your thinking as well. Who's going to be making the decisions? If you look, Australia currently has effectively what is like a wartime cabinet. The government in parliament is not meeting as usual. They enacted a new type of leading. So we need to adapt how we lead. We need to adapt. The game of adapting must flow from you, adapting how you're mentally responding to this reality. And strategy flows from that.

Mark Sayers:

The second thing we realized is that there's a tremendous Kingdom of God moment to protect. That the next thing we had was protect. How do we protect people? The decisions that you make of chancing it of like, "Oh, we'll see how that goes." There was one moment where I've got one staff member who is

just on a day a week and the rest of the time he works in a hospital. And we had this conversation in the car park and he essentially was saying to me, "Mark, I realized I went back to probably get dragged into this front line battle in ICU." Like in a sense, "Will you release me into that?" And it was quite emotional... he was sort of for our front line medical people, you know?

Mark Sayers:

And I was just asking him questions and he said there was some question where had like, "Oh, this person's coming in. Is it okay?" This was early days, if they're not feeling well, is that okay? And he said, "Mark, in the medical world, we don't presume there's a maybe. It's either this person definitely doesn't have something or we're going to do everything to protect you that you probably do have it." And that flipped my thinking. Free pandemic thinking is like, "Oh, maybe. Let's give it a week. Let's think about it. Let's be cautious." This is like go hard and go early. So you've got to go hard and go early to protect your people. So protection now becomes this key pillar. I think the church is called to protect the vulnerable and we're so used to doing that in an embodied sense, but what if the biggest gift of the Kingdom of God is actually to not go out your front door at the moment. It's so bizarre but to protect people from infection.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you drill down a little more on that? Because there was that one weekend in March where for a lot of leaders listening it was discretionary. You could open, you could not open. And there was still a lot of denial like, "This is overblown. More people die of the flu. They're not going to die from COVID. Come on. What is this? You can't do my liberty." We decided to close physical locations and go digital. I believe you made this same decision. Can you explain why in your view it's important for leaders to go first in the name of protecting and actually be more cautious?

Mark Sayers:

Yes, I think the first thing is I... To be honest, it was in a phone call with my dad. So we were like, "Maybe we could go ahead. This is coming." I thought I had seen it earlier because I'd been in Singapore, sorry, in Malaysia, and they were doing the testing on heads when you go into to certain buildings, the temperature that we're doing, these sort of... is it HEPA, I think? Or like these infrared cleansing of things. So I'd had an early sense of where this was going to go. But we were like a man, "Maybe we meet next week." And I just realized how much as leaders you don't want to be reactive and impulsive.

Mark Sayers:

And I had this conversation with my dad where... My parents are in their seventies. Both my parents have had some health issues and my dad rang me and... He comes to our church. He said, "Look, Mark, I just want to let you know, we've made the personal decision. We've been wrestling with this all week. We know you probably will meet this Sunday, but we've decided we can't meet. Because we've just got to protect our thing." And for me that was when it was real. It went from like, "Hang on, you've been wrestling this all week." And then I began to hear the stories of younger people who may have asthma or people with heart conditions who are wrestling. And I just thought, "I can't do this." Like there are people looking at me as a leader. Like, "I'll come, Mark, if you think this is okay." And at that moment it wasn't just like, "Oh, let's just see how this plays out."

Mark Sayers:

I had to err on the side of hyper-caution and I thought about it. I thought I'd go a week early and you know what? Some people think I'm reactive. So what? We do one service where we're online, we're on YouTube. What do I lose? Someone thinks I'm... I had people online like, "Oh, you're overreacting. This is crazy." But imagine there was a church in Sydney which met that week and there was an outbreak, and imagine if you lost people at your church, this is different. So I realized there was a different strategic decision-making and, I think we said it off-air before, there was that Nicholas Nassim... I think it was Nicolas Nassim Taleb quote where he said, "In a crisis, it's better to panic a little early than panicking when you realize that you didn't panic early enough." And I just thought... I read that, I thought, "Okay, well, that's it. Let's not meet this week, guys."

Carey Nieuwhof:

100%. And I'm always... It was so paradigm shifting for me is, I'm the guy who never cancels. I'm the guy who, if the roads are open, we're open. I've never... I'm talking to Australia going, "Guy, name's Phil super leader." I never cancel. I've never canceled anything. And he was there the day later. It was just the time zone difference between our countries. And that was so bizarre for me to be pulling out and to think I'm being unfaithful. Like I just don't have enough faith. But it's a big flip in a crisis that none of us had been through before. Okay, so that's number two, protect. Number three?

Mark Sayers:

Yeah. So, the next one was respond. How do we respond at this point of time? So how do we respond in this moment? How do we be the hands and feet of Jesus? So in a sense the landscape has changed and how we were responding six months ago is not how we respond now. All of a sudden we've got people who are going to lose jobs. We've got people who are going to be isolated. How do we as a church respond? We've adapted but how do we respond to the new need that's going to be in our midst?

Mark Sayers:

The last one was lead. I realized that wartime leadership is completely different to peace time leadership. Winston Churchill for all his faults and, you could write books on it. And I'm not saying he's the ultimate leader to look to. But what was interesting is Churchill was a wartime leader who basically lost the job once Britain went into peace. There were certain types of people who... You know, strange times often create strange leaders. And so I realized that I had to lead differently. I had to lead my team differently than more now, is about spiritual authority. The messages that people wanted to hear were different.

Mark Sayers:

I just noticed that podcasts... I saw some stats that podcasts are radically dropping because people are not multitasking at the moment in listenership. But what's gone up is any podcast which helps you deal with Coronavirus is going up. And I realized that it's... So there's an element we had to refit our delivery mechanisms around just being online. But then I also had to, not just change the delivery content, I did change the content. And it was a totally different form of communication that needed to happen. So how do we then lead and lead with spiritual authority in this moment within... There's messages now that look trite from yesterday, you know?

Mark Sayers:

Yeah. And there was one moment where I saw, it was a moment where everyone was realizing... like half the world had realized and half the world hadn't. And this is honestly not a slam on this person, but

I was looking at my Instagram, it has the little stories of different people and there were leaders speaking into it and there was this leader who was just doing some sort of funny thing or something. And I just saw this and I just thought, "Man, that is the past era." And that's not to say fun will go away, but as you're being bombed in the blitz, there's certain messages that you don't give, then people want to hear the leader, we'll fight them on the beaches speech at that point in time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think that was a really good framework and I think what... One of the things I appreciate about your voice is it's beautifully theoretical and yet hyper-practical because you've got a real church. You're leading.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to ask you about weekend services. So, in many ways we're programmed to broadcast and we have this weekend event. How do you think weekend services or our digital ministry is going to be different from simply live streaming what used to happen in room on Sunday? That's fluid as we speak. So we're recording this just to timestamp this interview at the beginning of April. So by the time it comes out in a couple of weeks, we pivoted our whole podcast to just deal with the crisis leadership. Because you're right, that's what people want to hear about. So, appreciate you making yourself available. So as of April 2nd when we're recording this, how are you pivoting your services or have you done that or what have you seen that makes you think, "Huh, this could be the future?"

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, I think it's interesting. One theory I've had is that it's so weird because we've gone hyper-local, so the global travel network is now hyper-local. But then we've also got this internet network, and the great Canadian Marshall McLuhan spoke about this new stage that will come where basically we'll be communicating across countries and essentially he called it the global village. So it's weird. We're in our village, but then we've got the global village. And we've also got this church global village. And what I saw fascinating happening over the first weeks of this was, there was the panic. But then often necessity is the mother of intervention and I saw people learning from each other. I'm texting, "What'd you guys do? Are you pre-recording sermons? Are you doing them live? Hang on, we're doing this prayer thing? Are we using Zoom in this way?"

Mark Sayers:

And what I saw was this crowdsourcing moment, and I came up with this line. I said, "The next renewal was going to be crowdsourced," Because we're all going to be watching and learning together as we're scrambling, which creates an urgency and importance. So many great inventions actually come in wartime because people just have to take these risks.

Mark Sayers:

So I believe that, I don't know exactly where it's going to go, but I do notice that there is a greater need for leadership. People are wanting to be led. Just, "I'll see you on Sunday and then I'll get along with my life and catch you next Sunday." That's changing. I was talking to a friend in Europe and he was saying he's shocked because he was doing the Sunday service, and then he's doing this midweek thing, which is literally him in a lounge chair with a glass of wine teaching from scriptures and praying for people and he's like, "That's getting heaps more hits than the Sunday service. How do I process this?" You know?

Mark Sayers:

So it's interesting when John and Charles Wesley's Wesley and Renewal happened, a lot of that began when they switched to this new reality that people had been stuck in this parish system where they stayed in place and they had the service almost always Anglican in that context in Britain and they had the Sunday sermon. And then they discovered that the tumult of the industrial revolution where people were moved and social life was disrupted, that they were actually looking for something midweek. So the beginnings of the Methodist renewal happened when they actually started these midweek societies. And they would preach, but then people would get into small groups and pray and keep each other to accounts. So that was actually driven by this adaptation that happened because of this new social environment. So I predict that prayer is coming to the forefront in new ways.

Mark Sayers:

I'm seeing churches doing online prayer in ways I've never seen before. Because that's what... for the wants, prayer goes from an option to a need. So I think we're actually going to see almost a more whole.

Mark Sayers:

I was for 10 years with The Salvation Army. The Salvation Army had a whole variety of events that would happen during the week for people who were trying to find a new social fabric because they're coming out of addiction or they're coming out of extreme poverty in 19th century Britain. I just think, I don't know exactly what it's going to look like, but I think you're right. That we're going to see a really different landscape of what we're offering people from, "Hey, if we can get you for an hour on Sunday and get you to your kid's football game, we've done well," to now all that's stopped. So there's this moment of attention. I do think there is an end point to this. There is a moment when the vaccine will arrive and life will come back to normal. So I think there's a purpose, but I think there's a deepening that will happen this time. But it's, yeah, it's fascinating watching it all happen.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Do you think we have been too Sunday-focused in our model in the past?

Mark Sayers:

Yes. Long or short? Yes. I mean the biblical imagination of life is a whole of life. The Jewish tradition speaks of the family home as a temple. The New Testament language of us being living temples, that your individual life is a temple where you can meet with the presence of God, that your home is meant to be a temple, that these families on mission with God are temples. And I do believe, I still am a... I can't wait to be back in a gathered group with a bunch of people. I love that. But I think that what we did is we neglected those other spaces where the New Testament says that the glory of God can dwell just as it dwelt once in the temple. There's a moment here where I think that perhaps we've lost our platforms to get the presence back in those places.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Ooh, that's a strong word. That's a powerful word and a convicting word. It's amazing how everything just ground to such a screeching halt. And the conversation this week is, I don't know what to do with my staff. Like there was a facilities person. How are you grappling with that right now at your church? When you think about how you used to mobilize people, volunteers and staff versus perhaps what we're looking at over the next few months before things get back to some new normal?

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, it was really helpful talking to my friend who ... he lived in Beijing during SARS when it first came and I said, so I was like, "Hey, what was it like?" And he said it was six weeks of panic and fear. And then it was just this ongoing drudgery and boredom. So I thought this is going to be interesting. It's going to be a period where we're all scrambling. People are buying toilet paper in bulk, you know? And I realized that's going to happen with my team. So I thought what I need to be careful is don't let the first six weeks then define you. So in a sense I was just like, let's get meeting, let's just see how things are. But then we need to prepare for that next long... I think it will be a long season. It could be up to 18 months where perhaps we're sort of in shelter in place and then going out a bit and coming back.

Mark Sayers:

So I didn't want to set my staff team and reposition them for the panic period. I knew I needed to set them for what this will look like in the longterm. So I did notice a division between content production and response. So I realized that as a leader, because I don't have the people in the room, there's a really important thing for me to lead and almost... I began to see it in this really interesting way.

Mark Sayers:

It's almost like, it was funny. I was watching... I thought I'm sick of the Coronavirus. I'm just going to watch something that's different. And look, I like politics. There's the dramatized, I think it's BBC, production of Brexit The Uncivil War with Benedict Cumberbatch. And I'm watching this to distract myself. And then they talk about, how do you campaign? How do you reach voters? There's this definite day of election day when a decision is going to be made. And as I'm watching this, I'm like, "Hang on, I almost feel like this now." It's like I don't know who the voters are out there. Do I trust the polling? Who's watching our live stream, those stats? But do I trust the polling? What's happening out there? I felt more like a campaign manager than I felt like a pastor. And I'm watching this and I thought there'll be a point where when on that first Sunday back that when that night breaks, I think when the spiritual night, dawn will come. How do I want my people to come back? I want them to come back stronger.

Mark Sayers:

So as a leader, I'm almost now like a politician going, "Here's the campaign platform. At this moment of night, go deeper." This is a moment where we've lost the service. We're commissioning you to build stronger households. So my sort of slogan I'm saying is if we're in a campaign, what's my slogan? My slogan is, when the dawn and finally breaks and the pandemic is broken and we gather in that room, come back stronger. Come back as stronger in love with Jesus. Come back with a stronger household where maybe your family didn't take faith that seriously. Where you are now praying with your kids. Where you're praying in your marriage. Maybe you live by yourself and actually instead of seeing that as loneliness, you see that as an invitation into dwelling with God and actually solitude. How do we actually come back stronger where we have a greater heart for the world? We're actually... the non-Christians who are jumping onto live streams now. They actually join us on that first Sunday back.

Mark Sayers:

So I realized with my team I need to have a response. We were out there praying with people where we're providing a bag of rice for someone who's in isolation, where we're dealing with the anxiety that people have lost the job. There's response. But then there's how do we then almost have a campaign team to get that message out that here's what we want you to build in this time. Here's our policy

statements. But we're trusting you, the voters, that set up on election day and to step into the invitation to actually come back strong.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is a fascinating metaphor and it really resonates. Mark, as we wind down, I want to ask you, and these are very early days and I realize everything can change in a heartbeat. But as you're looking at the meta trends, as you're looking at the disruption that this crisis has caused, when you think about getting to the other side, what are you seeing and what should leaders be watching for?

Mark Sayers:

I think there's three things. I think number one, there's going to be profound change in the world. I think as we said, there's been diverged in different countries. We are not just in a pandemic, we're also in a profound economic challenge. The world was already in a significantly economic trouble that, that we were at almost negative interest rates around the world. The global economy was not growing and really economists don't know what to do about that. We had created demand in these areas like travel and cafes and almost this creative class that Richard Florida took that that's gone now. Entertainment, sports, gone. So we're going to, face possibly a hard recession or a global depression, which could last longer than the pandemic and that's going to change things. I think that the countries... Once you've been infected, there's an element where the borders won't open up necessarily once the pandemic stops. There's going to be a lot of fear out there and I don't know what that looks like. So we're going to be profoundly changed world. Technology I think will change things.

Mark Sayers:

The second thing is that a lot won't change. We're already seeing there's a few weeks of panic and one of the politicians is just doubling down on their platforms already and just trying to work a list around it. And there's still polarization in certain places. My brother just sent me this really fascinating picture of two girls in Sydney, which is absolutely deserted at Opera House, which is normally... I was there earlier this year, packed with tourists, utterly deserted, but there's two teenage girls and one's posing and the other is taking a selfie of her.

Mark Sayers:

I thought, "Man, some of this stuff's just going to keep continuing." The radical individual is still going to be here. Post-Christianity, still going to be here. Political madness still going to be here. So there's some things that'll change radically. Other things that won't change. What might be called for is after we come out of a crisis, there's a sense in us to go back to normal. My big hope is that God was already preparing the people before. Renewal always springs from people who go through a personal crisis. There was a bunch of people who'd gotten to the end of themselves. Martin Lloyd Jones said, "Revival flows from men and women who've gotten to the end of themselves."

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:09:04]

Mark Sayers:

That was already happening with a bunch of people like, "Man, I'm doing this 21st century, radical, individual thing, and it just gives me no meaning and I'm now praying more than I've ever prayed before." I was meeting people around the world last few years, many who don't have a platform, who are in hidden places. I'm like, "God's preparing you for something." So God has been preparing, but that



is now just accelerated. And I believe there's going to be a remnant in the global church, who at this moment are actually going to learn the lesson, step into the invitation. And they're going to come back with a tenacity of faith, a spiritual resilience. They're going to learn things where they commune with God in the hidden places, where they dwell in his work, where they learn to pray, where they learn to sit in God's presence, listen to him, where they actually place their sufficiency in him.

Mark Sayers:

I believe that in places like Canada and Australia and Scandinavia where we've looked at this inevitable trajectory of post-Christianity, that actually God is going to renew his church. Post-Christianity will still be there, there'll be still strange things, but my hope is that when dawn breaks, that actually the church is going to come back stronger. That's what I'm going to be working with all my energy that I have in this moment, to not just make my church survive, but in the crisis actually the global church thrive.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can I ask you a question then about digital? Do you think it will go back to the way it was before this broke, or do you think it'll be this seamless stream between digital and physical gatherings or? Any thoughts on that, Mark?

Mark Sayers:

I think there'll be two things. I think we're going to see a normalization of certain elements of digital stuff. It could be that... I look at, "Hey, do I fly to the United Kingdom and have a bunch of meetings?" And then I go, "I can go free. I can do that on Zoom." So I think those questions are going to happen. I think a lot of churches will stay on livestream because what they're already discovering is, they've tripled in attendance.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Mark Sayers:

And I just heard from someone who was saying, "There's friends next door who never come to church, never ever, didn't want to come to church", and then they tell them, "I would just jump on your live stream. So we're going to discover that dynamic of, I think, a harvest that we're going to connect with. I do know too, that scarcity creates value.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). It does.

Mark Sayers:

I love football, I love soccer and it's really interesting, so I've been like, "Well what does it mean, there's no games?" I jump on, when I'm trying to distract myself or in free time I jump on sports forums and there's just guys in there just like, man, I didn't get to every game, but when the first games back I am there. I miss it. I miss being in a stadium, I miss church and after faith, I just want to be in a stadium with fans. And that experience, which I can still get on TV. Now, will I be at every game? Probably not. I'll watch some on the TV later and I can now have incredible streaming where I can download the English

premier league and watch it in high definition on my TV, on my day off on Monday after a preistal Sunday, I still love that. But I'm also going to be at games.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Mark Sayers:

Chanting and standing and cheering because I profoundly miss that. So I actually think what we're going to see is, we're going to see people realize that what community, the importance of it now that it's disappeared. I think the gathering will have a pro founded... There's an element, like I'm preaching to a camera, but I deeply miss that human feedback loop and that interaction-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Me too.

Mark Sayers:

That sense where you're feeling something in the room and the Holy Spirit's moving and so I think technology will continue to increase, but it's not going to be, everyone's just going to be watching TV on their couches.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Any sense of... I think of three categories of churches. Some will thrive, some will survive and crawl to the other side, and then some may not make up- make it, rather. Any sense of what the differentiators might be between those three categories or perhaps you have different categories, but I think some may not make it. Some will just limp to the new normal and then some will actually grow and expand and flourish.

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, I think the big key is adapt, adapt, adapt. Adapt to those features which are adaptive. Crisis seeds new things, crisis, it's a cliché but the classic thing of the Chinese character of crisis is also opportunity. I think real strategy is actually seeing what's happening. It's fascinating little thing, wrote a book about the transfer from a Western world to, he called it this Eurasian world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Mark Sayers:

And there's a bit where he's talking to these Chinese thinkers, he's Portuguese, European and the Chinese thinker says to him one day, "You guys think about in the West, strategy as, here's your goal, here's how do I get there?" And you plan it out. Then if something comes against that, you're like, "Oh man, my strategy is falling apart here because something happened which is stopping me getting to my idealized goal" and this guy says to him, "In China, what we do is we look at what's the field of play, what's happening and how do we take advantage of that?" And there's this element where I think, that's the kind of leadership which is going to now flourish.

Mark Sayers:

The people who look at this and go, "I'm not just going to try and do the same thing. Yes, I've still orientated to the kingdom of God, to preaching the gospel, to growing the global church, to responding to God, but I'm also adaptive", and I think the churches that adapt to this particular period but also use them to sow seeds of renewal for when we come out of this period, I think they're the churches which are going to thrive in this time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think I'm really going to hang on to that metaphor. Hadn't heard that. That's good. What is one question no one is asking that you think we should be asking?

Mark Sayers:

I feel at a moment like this, we as a global community have been... our eyes are on this. It's a one issue world. I have Reuters as an app on my phone as the news.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah.

Mark Sayers:

It just gives me the most... And it's just amazing. And what I love about it is, you normally have all these different stories, this is happening in Africa here, you look at it and just scroll down, Coronavirus, Coronavirus, Coronavirus. So we've got the world's attention, so our eyes are outwards. But I think the question not many leaders are asking is, what does God want to do inside of you at this time? One of my big mantras I've learned as a leader from my mentor, Terry Walling from Leadership Breakthru is, personal renewal proceeds corporate change. And oral scrambling, scrambling to change our churches and how we respond to COVID-19 and all of this stuff.

Mark Sayers:

But I look at leaders and as I read leaders biographies of the great men and women of God, there's always this crisis moment that's hit. I think of Ignatius Loyola who created the Jesuits, who was this Playboy. So much freedom, going out around Europe, enjoying life gets hit by a cannonball, ends up in a cave and has this cave experience. So in the midst of this, I feel like God's saying to me, "Mark, you can run around like a headless chicken here and respond, respond, respond, but I want to do something in you." And so I actually believe that there is this point where that leadership I lost, where I'm having to hand it across to other people. There's a space there and the question is, is yet there's a pandemic, there could be a global recession but leader, I feel God is saying, "I've got your attention for a while. There's a hidden place I want to invite you into."

Mark Sayers:

That space where David is anointed in the wilderness before he has the platform. And that hidden place is where the Psalms come from. That's where he beats the wild beast so he can actually be alive. I think God is actually touching a bunch of leaders back to the hidden place. Maybe they were there, many years ago, but how do I get back to that hidden place and reconnect with God in the midst of this global disruption?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mark, wow. Anything else? I mean this has been so rich. We covered so much.

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, I just would love to say to people, that there's this invitation in this moment. I feel like, a little bit foolish in that I was pressing into renewal and there was this moment where I was... Pete Greig, who's a friend, is the head of 24-7 Prayer in the UK, pastor of Emmaus Road and we were driving through the English countryside with my wife, Trudy and Pete and we're talking about renewal and he just made this comment, I don't even know if he remembers it, where he said, "Look, I promise. I've looked at renewals." We were talking about, could there be renewal in the West? Revival awakening? And he said, "The problem is, when I look at history, there's always some tragedy or crisis." And I was like, "Oh, maybe, maybe, maybe it's like individually-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Lets get there without it, right?

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, I look back and I think that's actually what I was thinking. Here's this once in a probably century disruption, the biggest disruption since World War Two. You are living through it, as a leader. There was this one moment where, when we decided to go live stream and I was with my team who are mostly Millennials and it was the creative guys, that's the only guys going to be in the room and we had this moment and we prayed and we'd been rehearsing all Saturday. We went all Saturday to get ready for Sunday morning, well all Saturday. And then we were ready on Sunday morning and we were praying and there was this intensity in prayer I'd never seen them in, it was like, this is their battle. Finally, they have a course and we finished the rehearsal and this line came out of me. I say, "Okay, the rehearsal's done, but perhaps in more ways than one." What if everything up to now has been a rehearsal?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Mark Sayers:

What if everything that we've been living in our leadership journeys up to this moment is actually been preparing people for this moment? What if this is now the moment where God wants to do something? He's disrupted, he's got the world's attention, he's frozen people in place, and we have this incredible technological ability that apostle Paul would have killed for, to project our message to the world, to show Jesus' love, to seed and lead and speak vision. So my encouragement for leaders at this moment, feeling frightened, scared, loss of control, is step into this moment. What if this is actually, in the midst of the suffering and the pain and the economic dislocation and the medical pain. What if in the midst of this, in this dark cloud, Psalm 18 says, "God comes wrapped in dark clouds with lights, like the bolts of lightning, but the brightness of his presence is in that cloud." What if its, step into the cloud? See the brightness of God's presence. This is an incredible moment. God wants to do something. Step into it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mark, it's been so rich. You are writing and doing a lot of things right now that I know leaders are going to want to track with. So where's the easiest places to stay current with you right now?

Mark Sayers:

Oh probably just... yeah, just go to [MarkSayers.co](http://MarkSayers.co) and you can see it links to the podcasts.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And the podcast where you're podcasting the crisis is called Rebuilders?

Mark Sayers:

Yes. Yeah, Rebuilders.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And This Cultural Moment will return?

Mark Sayers:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mark, what a gift. I can't thank you enough.

Mark Sayers:

It's been such a pleasure. Thank you so much.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well that could have gone on for another hour and a half. It's just one of those leaders who I never get tired of hearing about. His books are great. His podcasts are great. And we got everything in the show notes for you so you can head on over to [CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode334](http://CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode334), we will have not only transcripts but also show notes with some key quotes and highlights and insights for you. Plus a link to everything we have talked about in this episode. So hang in there for the, What I'm Thinking About segment, it's coming up in a few minutes and I am going to talk about the difference between online views and engagement. But hey, before I preview the next episode, just a really quick shout out to my team. They have been working day and night, thanks to Erin Ward who manages this podcast and has pivoted a lot to get these episodes to you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

She also leads my other podcast, which is the ChurchPulse Weekly that I started a few weeks ago with David Kinnaman. So shout out to her, to Sarah Piercy, to Lauren Cardwell to Dillon Smith and to Sam Nieuwhof, all of whom work on my team. I'm so grateful for them. I promise you they have been working night and day to come alongside leaders. Just wanted to acknowledge them and also do you know that Toby Lyles has done all the production on every leadership podcast you've ever heard for five years now? And he has been... Well we had a lot of episodes recorded that we moved and just wanted to shout out. I mean, you hear my voice, but it really takes a team to build this and in the same way, I'm sure that you're grateful for your team. I am exceptionally grateful for mine in these days. So listen, we got some amazing episodes coming up.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We are going to bring you some long awaited ones. I know a lot of you've been waiting for Tim Keller and for Michael Todd. They're coming up next episode. I've got David Kinnaman and Scott Beck. David is the president of the Barna Group. Scott Beck is somebody who, well, he has one of the most fascinating stories I've ever heard. He scaled a lot of enterprises including Blockbuster Video and he leads a technology company now called Gloop. So we've got them coming up and for What I'm Thinking About, well I want to talk to you about online views and I want to talk to you about engagement. So this segment is brought to you by BELAY. They have a free guide on how to lead remote teams. You can simply text the word CAREY, my name C-A-R-E-Y to 31996 to get that. And if you want to work on generosity for your church and giving, make sure you check out the free video, Fund the Vision, from Generis, go to [Generis.com/Carey](http://Generis.com/Carey) to pick that up.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So let's talk a little bit about online views. So first of all, I just have to name this. I mean our church has been online for four years. Many of you have been online for a long time, but it's amazing to me how many people pushed back until about a month ago on well, online doesn't really count. Online's not really real. And I think we all changed our mind on that. It's like, "Oh wow."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you know what's really cool is, almost half of churches are growing now according to the data that we're collecting with Barna and Gloop over at [ChurchPulseWeekly.com](http://ChurchPulseWeekly.com). About 49% of churches at the time I'm recording this, are now experiencing growth compared to their physical attendance.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So suddenly people are like, "Oh wow, this thing actually works." Yes, it actually does work and it has worked for many years. So there's that. And online I think is also here to stay. If as you read the articles about what happens post pandemic, first of all, most people are projecting a very slow return to normal and even then, not a normal normal but a new normal with social distancing still in place and a worry or concern about a second wave of the virus or a new virus. I think we're moving into a new day and we've talked about this before. You can't just flip the switch back to, and now we just meet in person. I mean you can try but good luck with that. I'm not sure it's wise. Plus you're going to reach people online that you will never reach in person.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So we've got to develop some new metrics. I have watched over the last month as so many pastors are like, "Wow, we got 3,000 views" or we have no... Views are becoming the new attendance and online views matter because people matter. But views are less valuable than engagement. See, attendance growth is like crack to pastors. And in the digital era, the number of views are quickly becoming the new attendance. And I think you should count them. I think you should measure them, but you shouldn't be solely focused on just increasing your number of views. What? Because I could watch your show for 15 seconds, all of a sudden it's like, "Oh, we got this person." But the problem with views is they're anonymous. They're like the person who sits in the back row and never serves, never gives, never gets up, never does anything, just comes, consumes and goes home.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's what your views are like. And you can't really build the future on that. So I would encourage you to focus on engagers. Okay? Viewers watch, engagers participate. So what's an engager? And engager is

someone who takes a step, an engager is somebody who jumps into a chat room and says, "Hey, it's Carey listening from North of Toronto" or whatever, watching from North of Toronto. Or it's somebody who leaves a comment or it's somebody who likes, that would be a bare minimum engagement. So here's some ways that you can get a viewer to become an engager. So encourage them to use the comments in YouTube, Facebook, or your live stream chat rooms and tell them, "Hey, we want you to check in. Who's in the house? Who's there?" Identify themselves. Say where they're watching from. You can ask a question during your online events or services. So you can say, "I'd love for you to share what your favorite family movie is in the comments."

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean, maybe during the welcome or share something about their favorite thing about this week. So you just get people talking during the experience. Third, have your staff or volunteers, staff your channels to engage commenters, moderate discussion and get dialogue going. It's one thing to have someone who's watching, leave a comment. It's an entirely other thing to have someone from your team reply to them and you really want to have that kind of engagement. Hint; from everything I know about the algorithm, Facebook rewards that. If people are engaging with you but you're not engaging with them, Facebook doesn't give you the same kind of coverage that you do if you engage back. Ditto with Instagram. So the other thing you can do is to get them to engage, is you've got to figure out fairly quickly, and some of you have done this already, a quick digital equivalent of the welcome card.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you know how you fill out a card and give us your email and all that stuff. Well, you need a digital equivalent. So it could be a text in number like you've heard on this show, "text, New here, to 123456" or a really simple, easy form to fill out on your website. So it could be, go to XYZchurch.com/new and that'll help you follow up. And then afterwards you may even want to invite people to leave questions they've had about the message or the service in the comments. And then you can go after the event and answer them. So you see viewers may watch, but engaged people are far more likely to return. So now that we're a month into this online church, the question is, are you just tracking viewers or are you starting to form engagers? Because engaged people who engage with you online are far more likely to engage their faith and engagers participate and they're far more likely to return.

Carey Nieuwhof:

A final idea on that is, have a clear next step for your engagers. So "Tune in next week," I mean is sort of the equivalent of, "See you next week." And that's okay, but it doesn't really help people explore or engage or grow their faith. And I think the idea of watching a service over time will create consumers and critics rather than disciples and contributors. So have a clear next step. I know some leaders that I'm circling up within The Leaders Circle are doing a virtual Pizza with the Pastor event online via Zoom. You know how people are having virtual dinner parties? Well, you could do that and say, "Hey, normally we would host you, but we will when we can get back together again, but in the meantime, join me for a Zoom chat. We'll do pizza together." Others, you might move your orientation class, your next step forum to a Facebook group or to Zoom or something like that, but you want a clear, single next step.

Carey Nieuwhof:

All right, final, final point. Try to get their emails. Try to get their emails because emails never get crowded out by the algorithm. Okay. Those are some ideas on how to turn viewers into engaged people because engaged people return, engaged people are far more likely to take their faith, whether it's new

or re-established seriously. And then you build a connection with them, right? Because you can watch a lot of things, but when you engage with people, they're like, "Oh yeah, I like that church. I think they're my church now," so you see how that goes? So anyway, I hope that's helpful. Hey, I have a lot more over at my blog. You can go to [CareyNieuwhof.com](http://CareyNieuwhof.com), I'm writing fairly regularly these days, plus we have these podcasts. If you haven't yet subscribed to my other podcast, ChurchPulse Weekly, you can just search that wherever you get your podcasts, we'll link to it in the show notes as well. We bring you real time updates on what's happening in the church and then some strategies on how to move forward in this time of crisis and massive disruption. So thank you so much for listening, can't wait for the next episode. And in the meantime, I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before.

Radio voiceover:

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.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:30:04]