

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 338 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 Generis and Pro Media Fire. My guest is Sean Morgan. Sean is not only somebody who flies military jets, he is the Vice President of Leadership Capital for CDF. He is the host of the podcast Leaders in Living Rooms, which you may have heard me talk about before. I subscribe to that podcast. It's incredible. And Sean's someone I've gotten to get to know over the last few years. Not only is he a former executive pastor, but he just has an incredible understanding of leadership and also crisis leadership and to some extent, wartime conditions, military conditions.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I wanted to pick his brain as we all go through these very unusual times that we're in and try to find our way to normal, whatever that happens to look like, and I think you're going to find Sean's advice on leading through unpredictability, leadership lessons from the military and how to prepare for the new normal, so, so helpful. Hey, I just want to let you know we have seen a huge spike in traffic over the last month as people, new people tune in. If you're one of them, thank you so much for tuning in. If you've shared episodes, thank you for doing that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, if you enjoy today's episode, make sure you share it on social media, tag myself and tag Sean and a couple of other things just to let you know, we have show notes. Yeah, we do those for every episode. You can find show notes with everything we talk about, links and quotes and insights at CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode338. We also try to bring you the very best in navigating these times in leadership over at CareyNieuwhof.com. I write a blog, and we provide a lot of free resources for you. If you haven't yet checked out my How to Lead Through Crisis course, we are pushing 10,000 leaders who have gone through that in the last 30 days and you can actually find that at HowToLeadThroughCrisis.com or text the word CRISIS to 33777.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We're doing our best to get behind you 100%, and so is Generis. They just have a new free ebook called, Your 2020 Budget Just Blew Up...Now What? What a great title. Despite what many church leaders believe, the economy is not the main driver of your financial health. Economic cycles simply reveal what was already happening below the surface and if you want to change what's happening below the surface, go to Generis.com/Carey2020 and download the free ebook today. They've also got a complimentary support hotline, if you need any in the moment assistance.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you just want to pick somebody's brain, they will do that for you. You will see that option at Generis.com/Carey2020 as well. That's Generis.com/Carey2020 and you can download all that for free. Get all the support. Your 2020 budget did just blow up, and if you want to know how to create some financial health moving into the future, they will help you with that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also, things are moving lightning fast and we're walking into the new normal, but what if you had a digital coach to help you successfully navigate this unknown space? I think one thing we've all learned in the last two months is, digital kind of matters, and Pro Media Fire has realized that for a while. They're providing digital coaching and out of the box creativity sessions to help you reach more people. Not only in this moment, but beyond. And creative coaching is what drives their most successful program. It's called the Church Growth Program. Here's what that includes: custom website, digital marketing, social media management, custom graphics and videos. And right now for a very limited time, you get 40% off the regular price.

Carey Nieuwhof:

To apply, you have to apply for this and book a digital strategy session with Pro Media Fire, go to ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth. That's ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth. Well, I'm so excited to bring you my conversation with Sean Morgan. Why don't we just get started? Here it is. Sean, welcome to the podcast.

Sean Morgan:

Carey, what a joy to be on here. Thank you for having me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you've had me on yours and it's a great show. I love it. Leaders in Living Rooms and love the concept behind it and you have the most wonderful, strange resume, I would say, of any leader I think I've met. The first time we talked, you were flying a military jet over either the Middle East or Afghanistan or something like that. Tell us how you got to this point in life.

Sean Morgan:

Yeah, well, it wasn't by design. It really wasn't. I didn't have intentions of getting in ministry. As a young kid, I was fascinated with aviation and I liked the military. There was some wanderlust there, but I ended up not because I had great grades and stuff. I'm a good example of a B+ student who made it into the Air Force Academy. But I went to the prep school at the Air Force Academy. It took me about five years to do what everybody else does in four but graduated there with honors. The thing about the military is it's sort of a young person's business.

Sean Morgan:

When you get commissioned as an officer, your first job, you have people working for you that have way more experience and understanding. You're thrust into leadership and you learn quickly a lot about the difference between being in charge and experience and influence and the different dynamics that those present. There's a great story I could tell you about a commander's call that I was at, where the boss, the general came in the room and there's 30 or maybe even 50 people in this room. And I was a young lieutenant, right? And that's military code for the guy in charge that doesn't actually know what they're doing, the lieutenant terminology.

Sean Morgan:

And I remember, this might've been my first week on the job, and I remember the boss ran the meeting. And after the meeting, there are some leathery old, chief master Sergeant kind of guys, the guys that

run the Air Force, hardworking guys. And I remember two or three of these people, a lot of stripes on their sleeves. I didn't know them at the time, but they congregated after the meeting and followed a civilian guy down the hallway to his office.

Sean Morgan:

And I started asking questions. Who's the civilian guy? And it turns out he is a guy who had been there for 20 years and was just a staple of wisdom. And it wasn't dysfunctional in any way. It wasn't the meeting after the meeting, but it was that he was the guy that was mentoring and coaching and bringing wisdom into making the machine happen behind the scenes. And that was my first clue of, yeah, you have the meeting and there's authority and direction and you just start learning things at a young age in military.

Sean Morgan:

The ministry side of me, I basically grew up in a church plant. When you're a kid you don't know, it's a church plant, it's just church. And ultimately the Air Force moved me to the San Francisco Bay area and I got involved with another church plant and got called into ministry as the executive pastor there. A guy named Thom Rainer-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah?

Sean Morgan:

Who used to be the CEO at LifeWay, wrote a book that featured some stuff about that church called Breakout Churches. And because of that, people began asking us for some coaching advice and things like that. And that turned into what I do now. And every step of the way has been, I don't know what's next, I'm just trying to answer what God's asking me to do right now.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's so interesting because I joke with you when we're together that you're the best connected church leader that church leaders have never heard of. And I think that's really true. There's almost nobody that you don't have on your contact list on your phone and you have this amazing convening power. Like when Sean calls, people listen and it's interesting. Anything else you learned about position and influence in the military or other lessons from the military that have informed your leadership? Because I must say I'm pretty ... I really admire how you lead and I really haven't seen anyone who, like you, doesn't have a position, a title that would say, oh everybody picks up this guy's phone call. Yeah, you're a vice president or director with a major corporation that is in the para-church space. But there's lots of people with that job title, but very few people with your influence. I'm just curious if the military taught you anything else on that.

Sean Morgan:

I don't know if it's the military directly. Certainly in much of me overall, just top to bottom is influenced by the military. But I think there's a sense of stewardship. I would say respect and honor. There's a sense of stewardship, like I get, I have the opportunity to do something today that's going to influence others. And when you're doing that in the local church space or the ministry space, there's such an incredible kingdom potential that I think I consciously don't breathe in or breathe out without just a sense of every door that was opened is an opportunity.

Sean Morgan:

And then because of the military, here's where the military comes in. I think there's this opportunity mindset, and we probably don't talk about it enough in the ministry space, but the aspect of warfare and the truth is if you're in charge, if you're placed in charge, you're stewarding that, right? The Roman Centurion in Matthew eight says, "I know what authority is because I'm under authority and then I have authority that passes through me to my troops."

Sean Morgan:

And he's talking about realizing that Jesus has God the Father's authority. But if you're in those positions, you have this, okay, opportunity is a great word to use. But from a warrior's perspective, you almost have a responsibility. If you put somebody in charge and you train and develop them and you give them a weapon and it's war time, they don't just have an opportunity to go do something, they almost have a responsibility. And I think without being overly dysfunctional, I think I do have a sense of responsibility and stewardship and honor that blends to some things there. And then honestly, I just take so much joy in being around pure hearted leaders that are influencing others that it just actually is really fun. Being extroverted a little bit I think helps there too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You really like people. I can tell that.

Sean Morgan:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Sean Morgan:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to come back to influence a little bit later, but before we leave the military entirely, this is the first week of May. We normally do not timestamp these episodes, but hey-

Sean Morgan:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The world's upside down.

Sean Morgan:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

My guess is, even though we're recording this a few weeks in advance, that-

Sean Morgan:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Perhaps there is some gradual reopening of America, in Europe by this point, and if not, it's probably on the horizon or maybe things have gone horribly wrong. Who knows?

Sean Morgan:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't know. But I want to talk to you about what you learned about crisis leadership from the military. We've had Bobby Herrera on, Ken Costa, some others on. Bobby had military experience too. They've talked about VUCA on this podcast, which was ... I'd heard about it, but I'm like, oh yeah, that's what it is. What did you learn? What did the military teach you or leadership so far teach you about crisis leadership?

Sean Morgan:

Yeah, in aviation as a pilot, every flight you're sort of cheating death in some ways. And I think there's always that aspect of leadership and if you do aviation long enough, you will have some crisis leadership in aviation, things will go wrong. And then you also have the aspect of combat. I've done four tours in Iraq, Afghanistan and in Syria most recently in about 2017, and every day is an opportunity in combat dealing with crisis.

Sean Morgan:

And there's a sense that ... There's a phrase in the military, you may have heard that says, "No battle plan ever survives contact with the enemy." And it doesn't mean that a battle plan isn't a wonderful thing and it actually serves as a fantastic true North. But I think one of the things that you have to do in crisis is you have to understand that your perspective is a limited perspective and there's always a higher command authority perspective. And you have to blend what you're seeing and acting on in the moment with what the true intent of the battle plan was.

Sean Morgan:

Because what you get swept up into, actually, I even say the phrase, oftentimes we don't even have the gear in the well meaning we're on takeoff roll and we're raising the gear and flying out of the base. We don't even have the gear in the well yet and the plan is already changing and we could still be hours from a combat environment. And I think you have to have that perspective that what you're seeing is important to be, excuse me, flexible and adaptable with in those types of things. But at the very same time you always have to have the respect that there's a different vantage point of things going on. And ultimately flexibility.

Sean Morgan:

The plan acts as a great true North, but in crisis, flexibility is key. You have to be able to go what is the most important objective we are after today? And all these moving parts need to be aligned and pointing toward that. But things are changing for everybody. A great example, without getting into

tactics and details was, I remember a mission in 2017 and there was a couple of tankers in the area. We also were dealing with weather and springtime thunderstorm weather around that part of the world. The thunderstorms are as big as I've seen anywhere. Thunderstorms, where the clouds are up well above 40,000 feet, massive thunderstorms. And the objective for basically every day in the Air Force is almost true entirely would be supporting the troops on the ground.

Sean Morgan:

Those are our customers. We always have to be oriented to that. And the weather was affecting a lot of what was happening with the airplanes, but it was not affecting where our customers were at and what they needed to do. And I just remember some things that happened that some other aircraft and some other tankers began to move, change position, and move out of areas that were being affected by weather. And I realized, some of this was just experience, that some of the other aircraft that we needed to support, as a tanker, were going to have to cancel their mission if we moved more than just a few miles from where we were and those types of things.

Sean Morgan:

And just being flexible to say, hey, what other things can we do to avoid that weather, to get in position, to serve the attack aircraft and those types of things that need the fuel that the tankers provide to the fight? And the other aspect to that, I think in crisis leadership, step one is realize that there's always a higher perspective, a more global perspective and to pull back. And I think that really we can get into that with the church. I think that really is happening now and we're beginning to see some real God stories happen through all of this.

Sean Morgan:

The second thing is be flexible. Be willing to adapt. That also played to churches. We saw some churches that adapted early and well to this and some churches that that didn't. And the last thing is this idea of risk and I would say appropriate risk is when the weather moves in, metaphorically, what risks can you take to still focus on the mission? The great commission for a church? And those types of things I think really, for me coming in from combat environment and aviation leadership, is you've got to have that mental clarity to remember those key principles. And I think it allows you to be a more predictable leader, which is highly important, especially the larger the crowd around you, the more predictable. And a steady leader, which is really important not to be a leader that provokes panic and fear even when there's good cause for panic and fear, like Coronavirus, like combat.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You said something that really intrigued me and I hadn't thought about that. I've never been in battle, I've never been in the military, but respect those who are and who have. But this idea that no battle plan ever survives contact with the enemy.

Sean Morgan:

Right. Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's go into that because I think that is an actual factor that's happening right now in crisis management and we don't have a battle plan. We're living without one right now-

Sean Morgan:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because everyone's trying to figure this out. But there is probably even more so by the time this podcast airs an emerging consensus about what the new normal might look like or what wise action is. On the one hand you have your order so to speak, this guidance that you should follow, on the other hand, you're flying the plane and going, "Wow, that thunderstorm is big and it's developing in real time". How do you balance, as a leader, because I think this has been a problem for all of us in this crisis, your gut on the field with the orders that you got from above or the wisdom, whatever that looks like? Hey, prevailing consensus right now is that you should do X, but my gut on the ground says I'm not so sure. Any principles or insights into that because I think there's a real tension of crisis leadership?

Sean Morgan:

Yeah, there are so many great stories in the combat environment where I think experience really plays into that is if you've seen things play out over other attack plans and other days and hours. We really, in an aviation, measure combat in hours. Experience really helps. But I do think you have to go back and say what's the intent of the original order, right? And sometimes in order to be carried out well has detail in it that becomes irrelevant, but the intent of the order doesn't become irrelevant. And maybe in church we start teasing out this idea, and I don't know who said it, but this idea of being married to the mission and dating the methods.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yep.

Sean Morgan:

And what methods have become so critical to us that we're focused on that and we're losing sight of the mission? And in an environment that's changing, can we go what's the real intent of that method? We know what the method is. I had a call yesterday with one of the most wise ministry leaders and amazing men and pastors on the planet, Larry Osborne. And he said, "Many times we focus too much on the watering schedule and we forget about the fruit that we're after."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Sean Morgan:

And I think sometimes that's a great metaphor and Larry's so able to condense down these thoughts and phrases. And I think that's certainly an element for the church is to go back. One of the things that I would say with this is here's the deal, we have a 2,000 year track record of growing the church amidst many pandemics, many global things that change the world, like world wars and beyond. And the church has come out on the other side stronger and healthier and probably has grown. And I think you have to begin to put yourself in that mindset of we don't know what that looks like six, 12, 24 months from now, but I think we can be confident that the church will not just survive, but will thrive and then begin to center ourselves, how do we think creatively, how do we think like pioneers, on staying mission-focused

and being willing to drop, cancel, postpone, realign, restructure, teams, budgets and methods in order to see that happen?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's go there.

Sean Morgan:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

As we record this, we're about a month, five weeks, into the crisis right now.

Sean Morgan:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't think that the dust is settling, but it's not the chaos of week one or week two.

Sean Morgan:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you are hyper-connected largely with, and we'll get into this a little bit later in the podcast, but for those leaders who don't know you, and I think this has application to the business space and in the church space, but you basically work with successors of large churches and to some extent their predecessors. What I did with Jeff Brodie, he's one of your co-horts right now, people my age hand the church off to the next generation. You spent a little bit of time with people like me, a lot of time with the successors who are mostly at this point Millennials or very young Gen-Xers taking over from Boomer and older Gen-Xers, leaders. And they tend to be larger churches that you are working with.

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:22:04]

Carey Nieuwhof:

As you've watched the first four or five weeks of crisis leadership, what are some patterns you are seeing in churches that you think are responding well to the crisis so far?

Sean Morgan:

Going back to the idea of flexibility that the first thing I saw and I was actually with a co-hort, it was just a God thing, and a gift. I was with a co-hort that I'd been with for a number of years, very close with these guys, and we're actually in Vegas the week of the 9th, of March, 9th. Monday, March 9th.

Carey Nieuwhof:

When it all fell apart, that week.

Sean Morgan:

Yeah, the week that it all fell apart. And so we were with the team at Central, Jud Wilhite and then some amazing leaders in churches, young leaders that are all in succession positions. And so we had the gift, I thought you could feel it happening that week, like you didn't know what was going on and where things were going to be changing, but you knew this was a week where things were going to start snowballing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

When the NBA cancels it's season, and the NHL does, Major League Baseball, that's off.

Sean Morgan:

Yep.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Borders are closing, like "Whoa, what's going on?" Yeah, that week.

Sean Morgan:

Exactly. So we had the opportunity to be together, and to think through that, and I thought, "Oh, we're all going to have to race home. It's going to be a horrible week to be together." But it turned out to be just an amazing gift. So the leaders, even in that group, there were just lots of conversations as people oriented their minds around, "We're going to make a decision now for Sunday, March 15th, versus other leaders who say we're going to wait as long as we can." And of course by the time Sunday, March 15th rolled around, the restrictions on gatherings were so severe that most churches didn't meet.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Sean Morgan:

And the ones that did couldn't really meet with any real size. And so one of the first things I realized was there was amount of preparedness that certain churches had and didn't have, where they teed up well to do this and what I mean by that is not necessarily streaming something online, or recording something and posting it online. I think a lot of it actually had to do with being set up well for communication. Could they communicate with their church? And the leaders that could do that and made decisions, I'm going to say like Wednesday of that week, I think it was the 11th, they had the highest attendance on March 15th, in terms of engagement, because they were able to communicate well, pivot and be flexible saying "We don't know where this is going, but we're going to make a decision and begin to communicate clearly."

Sean Morgan:

And I think that's a principle in this is flexibility's important, communication's important, and when you communicate in a time of uncertainty, you have to be careful that you don't communicate certainty that you don't control, but you can communicate clarity. And so they were clear about certain things, and amidst all the other changes that was going on in most businesses at this point I would say have been hit harder than churches have.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Sean Morgan:

Those churches were set up well by being flexible and adapting quickly. I think those things were were really, really critical.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can I ask, just to drill down a little bit more, you mentioned communication, which is actually as soon as you said it, I'm like, "Well of course." And then I thought, "Yeah, but that is not intuitive, and it's a surprise, it's an outlying kind of indicator of success." Was that via social, email or what were their channels of communication? I'd love to get granular on that.

Sean Morgan:

I think in today's day and age, critical is email, for sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Sean Morgan:

Still. But it's some of everything.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Sean Morgan:

It really is some of everything.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But they had built their email list. They had built a social media following, the infrastructure was there. They didn't try to create it in the moment.

Sean Morgan:

They didn't have to create it in the moment. And I think there's even another layer deeper in this, this is a little bit of conjecture, but from my experience, I would say one of the things that was critical in something like social media following, let's not talk about numbers, let's just say you got two churches with a couple thousand emails and a couple thousand people on their social following. Have you trained your people to listen when you email them? Right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm going to applaud. That's brilliant.

Sean Morgan:

Right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yep.

Sean Morgan:

And and so a thousand member list that nobody pays attention to anymore or when they see it, they'll go, "I'll read that next week when I have time." That's totally different than a church who sends something out and they go, "Oh, that's from my pastor, or that's from my church and I'm going to read that now," or, "I'm going to read that at break time," or something like that. Those are different things and I think that, honestly, I think that takes years. And so when I say there were set up well it wasn't just they had some tech, and they could produce something, but they had the numbers from a communication standpoint and the culture of people who paid attention.

Carey Nieuwhof:

See that's so good because you know there were memes and jokes that first week or two from every organization you ever subscribed to via email. who like what we're doing about COVID-19 and it's like, "I haven't heard from you in three years. I didn't even know I was on your list, and now you're telling me what the CEO is doing about COVID-19? Dude, I don't care." Like we haven't heard about you forever. But I think that's a really good point that the systems that you use on a regular basis are set up to serve you when there's a crisis. That's a really good ongoing, so you know churches that got caught, leaders that got caught, frankly business leaders that got caught. "Oh yeah, we have this email list. Oh yeah, we have the social media account. Who knows the password?" They're in much worse shape when a crisis hits than those that are regularly communicating with their customers, with their audience, with their congregation. So good. What else are you seeing in terms of best practices in these first five weeks from top leaders?

Sean Morgan:

Let's see. Some other best practices. I'll tell you, let me start with some things that are not best practices.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, sure.

Sean Morgan:

So kind of like, you know when-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's not that hard. So let's go there.

Sean Morgan:

When Jesus says love is, love is, and then he also says, love isn't. When I think about best practices, certainly one of the best practices very quickly becomes financial margin. And the quickest way to deal with financial margin is almost 100% of the time is to manage your expenses. And so I think leaders that did some best practices versus some worst practices, one of the worst would be leaders who panicked and sent out emails to everybody that said something attuned to "Church is canceled, but we need your help." And both of those are wrong, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Sean Morgan:

Both of those are the wrong things to do because church isn't canceled, church is moved, and we need your help is basically what the people who probably do have resources, the first thing that makes them think is, "I don't know if you're the type of leader who's going to be using these resources wisely, like if you're already in panic mode." And so I think churches who right off the bat said, "Before we even communicate about income and giving, let's manage expenses in a way where we can respond quickly, like we're going to cancel travel, and a lot of optional things like that in our budget. So it's usually not huge numbers, but it begins to make a difference pretty quickly, 5%, 10%. We're going to look at contracts we have in place that don't have a penalty that we can cancel. We might be able to do without some things right now." And so I think those leaders responded well. I think there are also leaders that have, did a call with Joel Manby. You were on that call a few weeks ago.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, Joel'll be on the podcast soon. I think I'm interviewing him tomorrow.

Sean Morgan:

Are you? Awesome. Well, he's going to be fantastic. He was really, really amazing with this group of leaders and he's led through massive economic downturn, and just an exceptional guy. But one of the things that he said is, "Take the pain equally." Like don't dish it out here and there. And so I've had some churches that have responded really well to that, where they're saying senior leadership is going to take a 10% cut, middle leadership's going to take 5%, and everybody else is going to take 3%, and then we are going to eliminate some jobs that we can eliminate.

Sean Morgan:

And it's allowed them to create margin and stay nimble and more focused on what they need to do week in and week out. And actually the feedback that I'm getting from those leaders is because they did things early, because they communicated clearly, because they showed, like Joel's book, Love Works, The Seven Principles of Love from Corinthians, is that they were in it with their teams, the feet, everything actually has gone up, in terms of culture and morale, because now what people may have been worried about is, "Am I going to lose my job? Am I going to get cut 50%?" Now they're going, "Oh, well no, you only got a 3% cut. And the church is doing this in a way that is creating more financial margin and we're able to focus exactly on what we need to do to do the mission week to week. All these other things have been paused and people have been realigned."

Sean Morgan:

That's actually like a blanket of comfort for a lot of people because now they have increased trust in their leadership. They're seeing leaders adapt. So from a giving perspective, like a congregational member, they're seeing that responding and going, "Wow, the church is staying focused on the mission. They're getting results, they're staying financially healthy. They're not getting into an emergent state." And from the staff team and whatnot, you have clarity on things. So it was just such an across the board win. But like you say, there's always a dark side to everything. From a leader's perspective, most leaders feel the weight of that, like there's some personal shame. "I failed my team." Right? Those types of things that leaders carry.

Sean Morgan:

And so that's why I think we're where a lot of my work comes in is getting leaders together to be able to just, it's not necessarily going to go away, but to be able to talk about that going, "Yeah, I did this thing and I feel confident that this was right, and yet I feel horrible about it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't know that there's an answer to this question, but you've really got me thinking because you know, we travel in the same circles. I know a lot of the leaders in that room, and I remember getting that document, you, Sean, just some shop talk here, out of that week, you with those leaders set apart three scenarios. You know what happens if, we didn't even know we were going to lose access to our building when you wrote that.

Sean Morgan:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But like what if attendance drops 10%, 30%, 50%, 100%. What are these financial scenarios? But what I'm noticing, and I just want to float this by you.

Sean Morgan:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is that most of the leaders who responded well to this crisis, the new template, as uncertain as everything was, was it in place within a couple of weeks? It's like they acted early. They rebooted early, they stabilized as much as they could, usually within seven to 14 days. There was some kind of clear like, "We've no idea what's happening in the world, but this is our plan." Was that a characteristic or is that an oversimplification, that most of those leaders by the second week had a plan together, an interim plan together that would guide them through the next 30 days?

Sean Morgan:

I would say that's pretty close.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Sean Morgan:

By the second week, I would say they had clarity on a plan, but they needed to communicate that, get the elder buy-in and things like that. So it was probably after the second week where it began being implemented. But somewhere right around that 14 day mark, I think they probably had clarity on it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Yeah. Because that's something I saw too. So here's the question, I don't know whether you can answer, but I'm just curious.

Sean Morgan:

Let's do it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What is that? What is that? Why? Because none of us, I mean, I think anybody who says, "This is exactly what's going to happen, and this is what it's going to look like." I mean, I don't, I don't know. I had no idea this was all going to happen. I don't know anybody who would say that they did. So what is that, that within two or three weeks you got a plan together, it's not normal yet, but you've got some stability, some clarity and an action plan, and your team is actually mobilized and ready to go. What is that?

Sean Morgan:

Well, I think it's good leadership. It's calm amidst the storm. But I do like this idea of a three tiered plan, and I would even say as churches are thinking about what the future looks like, we can get there at some point in the conversation.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, that's a good idea.

Sean Morgan:

Of saying, "Okay, well, let's talk like the far extreme, one direction, the far extreme, another direction, and then some sort of middle ground. And then let's talk about, let's put labels on those. Let's try to put quantitative analysis into those. What are the numbers around those look like?" And so you could say like, one's a conservative approach, a moderate approach and a really like extreme approach to what could happen. For instance, let's say the extreme approach right now might be something along the lines of that there are no large gatherings, period for 18 months until there's a vaccine.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Sean Morgan:

Right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Which is being talked about.

Sean Morgan:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean that's not like crazy talk.

Sean Morgan:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is some kind of possibility.

Sean Morgan:

Absolutely. And I think you could get there even if, let's say authorities allowed gatherings, but we know right now, I think there was a survey from Seton Hall about NFL fans, who was comfortable going to an NFL game, and 72% of the respondents said they would not go to an NFL game until there's a vaccine. Like there was no data for that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Isn't that interesting. Yeah, who wants the middle seat on an airplane, right? There's the legal lifting, but then there's the psychological permission, and we're all going to shop differently. We're all going to feel differently for, I don't know how long, when that guy next to us at the grocery store sneezes, right? Or coughs. It's going to be like, "Oh, I don't know what that is." Whereas before it'd be like, "Dude, stay home." But yeah, you're right. So, okay, keep playing with that. So let's say it's 18 months or two years until large gatherings repopulate.

Sean Morgan:

Yeah. So I think that's one extreme. And so then you say, "Okay, well let's say, what would our response be in that?" You don't have to spend weeks on that, but spend an hour with your team talking about that, and then put it together for a moderate approach that looks different. And then let's just say next week we start hearing that some things from re-openings in Europe and Asia that we're reading about start to come into low risk people and low risk communities in the United States. And that begins to tier out throughout the summer. So I think you can look at that, and then one of the beauties about this is, is the leader can sort of direct, "Here's how we're going to approach this." And then bring in the team and you know, people are going to own things that they're a part of, right? You know, if you want buy in, let people be in, is another great leadership quote from somebody that is probably somebody you know.

Sean Morgan:

And so now they're taking ownership in forming that plan. And then you go to your senior team, maybe a more limited number or your elders, and you begin to say, "Okay, which one do we believe we're going to position ourselves best for?" And I think in all those scenarios you have to begin to look at also the question of, I think you can kind of say, "Well, we're just going to buy time until we can reopen and do things that we've always done." Right? Just go back to business as usual. And so that's one type of conversation to have through that.

Sean Morgan:

Another type of conversation is to begin asking, hopefully when people are paying attention to your blog and they're seeing like, "Oh, we've gone to 49% of churches in the United States are growing right now?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Sean Morgan:

Like maybe there are some things like again, going back to that idea that over 2,000 years the church has survived all sorts of craziness, church will survive this craziness, and the church will be stronger on the other side. You're seeing parents leading their families in ways spiritually that they've never done. And the whole principle of Orange, of yellow and red come together in Orange, is the church and the family working together to disciple the children and the youth. You're seeing that happen in all sorts of ways. There are incredible stories. You don't have to go very far on social media to see some amazing things.

Sean Morgan:

So are we actually restructuring in ways now that even if we went back to normal, we would say we want these things to actually be a part of the fabric of the church? We want to think more about the other six days of the week and how we do ministry than just Sunday morning, and kind of going from, I like to use the metaphor like when you're painting, you have a canvas, and canvas has a vertical and horizontal weave in it, and we need to think about all ministry is being painted on a canvas that has a digital aspect and a physical aspect to it. And that encompasses children's, every day of the week, youth, every day of the week, all sorts of the discipleship. And there needs to be some really creative things that come out of this.

Sean Morgan:

I believe the church should lead the way in this. Our mission is too important not to be leading the way. I'll give you an example of something in the back of my mind as I think about, okay, so we're going to take this tiered approach and we're going to take an attitude of what sort of things are actually potentially healthier for the church to be doing on a continuum basis that we've learned because of this crisis? And if you have that spirit, the opportunity is endless, but my daughter is headed off to college in the fall, if they meet. And so there's a great metaphor on what's going on with her, is that she knows she's going to gather with a group of people, right? Your church, even the new people you are reaching, and the new salvations that you're having in your church, you know at some point you're very likely to gather with these people.

Sean Morgan:

And what's happening organically is these teens, these rising freshmen. There's all these apps out there that begin to allow them to get to know each other, and communicate with one another, build relationships before they gather the first time. And so there's this incredible thing where like you go onto these apps and you forward them your screenshot of your acceptance letter to a school. So then you get put into the freshmen, the incoming freshmen class for that school. And like when I went to college and I was actually enrolled in Penn State before I went to the Air Force Academy, I never went to Penn State, but I just signed up for a dorm room and I got a letter, "Hey, this is going to be your dorm, and you've been assigned a roommate," or that sort of thing.

Sean Morgan:

That's how it went then. But now they're connecting with one another, and they're putting in all these characteristics of what they like, in lifestyle. And so they're able to pair each other, like my daughter within a week of declaring what school she's going to has already, she started just by looking at what's the culture of this group of people that are coming into this school, and people begin to sort themselves by their intended major, and so you get smaller bubbles, people begin to sort themselves by what side of campus they want to live on. And then you begin to sort yourself like what sort of things do you like in

terms of activities? What are your study habits? Do you like other people in your room, like having a party every day, or do you want your room empty so you can study?

Sean Morgan:

And it's been this amazing thing for me to see organically what 18 year olds are doing right now as they prepare to gather and meet and be in community with one another at a college campus. And I just can't help but think there's so much there that the church can begin to see and build that will yield incredible fruit. But if that's the people's pathway to digital interaction first, sort of just watching and looking, and then interacting, and then true engaging, and then meeting, then maybe there's something there. And the church is going to begin to figure this out. So whether it's a few months away, a few weeks away, or a few years away, I think the church will ultimately be a better, stronger, healthier church and our mission will be more fruitful. I hope, and I pray.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a fresh thought. I'm so glad that you raised it. And you're right. People criticized, not so much this week, but in the early days that digital is so impersonal, but there are certain ways in which digital enables far more personal connection and interaction rather than randomly assembling. Because I remember my first week of college too, it's like yeah, here I am the only guy, I don't know anybody here, just you're in a whole bunch of randoms. It's like, I don't know who you are, try to make a friend but you can, you can precede a lot of that.

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:44:04]

Carey Nieuwhof:

You know, I want to back up to what you were saying earlier, and Jeff is doing a great job leading Connexus. So I'll just pull this example for my company, but we all flew into San Diego in February, did a three day offsite, kind of strategic planned 2020, rolled out the next 12 months, and then obviously the world blew up about a month later and we met virtually and re calibrated, what does this look like? It's like free. We're going to do a free course, we're going to launch a second podcast, we're going to do this, we're going to serve our leaders, we're going to ramp up our content, we're going to run an Instagram TV video series. And so we went into... We're just going to serve, serve, serve, help, help, help. And then literally today as we're recording this, we went into the next phase, which is what else can we do to serve the church?

Carey Nieuwhof:

We got a whiteboard full to serve leaders of ideas and next week we're going to finalize that. Then we're going to go into production for the spring and the summer. But that to me feels like we just did three annual plans in 30 days so far, 45 days. I guess that's what crisis leadership is like, right? Because when you were talking about it and some of the practices of other leaders, it's like, well, here's what we're going to do right now. Here's what we're doing ahead. Is it like you're just rolling over strategic plans every, I don't know, 15 to 45 days?

Sean Morgan:

I think you have to... When there's a lot of unknowns, you have to begin to ask yourself, what do we know today that we didn't know when we made this decision? And that should cause you to question the decision. Now, you can't get up every day and do that about every decision the prior day because

you'll never make progress. And Ken Costa on your podcast released yesterday, talked about, if you're expecting 100% clarity on information before you make a decision, you're just never going to make a decision. And so I think you have to realize that. But there's also something called, I learned recently the term called Chesterton's Fence, which comes from GK Chesterton. And basically he has this rule and if you've been to England, we all know fences are not made of cheap wood and put up in a day.

Sean Morgan:

They're made of stone and they're there for thousands of years. And the moral of this, the principle behind it is that if you're going to take down a fence, you need to know why it was there in the first place before you do that. Because that fence didn't happen haphazardly. Somebody put time, energy and money to building that for a purpose. And I think in times of crisis, you do have to lean a little bit more toward adaptation and flexibility, but there needs to be an undertone of understanding the principles if we're unwinding something or changing something that's working or has been working, let's know why. And I realized there's a little bit of tension in what I just said, be adaptable, make change, be nimble and pause. But I think good leaders know how to live in the gray and still find the clarity and move the mission forward. And so I think you're right, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Group isn't canceled, community's not canceled, but suddenly we're all doing Zooms, or a Facebook watch parties or streaming. And so the idea is you keep the principal community, you keep the principal connection, evangelism, discipleship, you just found a new method that will lead you through it. And I think you're right, it's mission and methods, mission, methods, mission and methods. Anything else good and bad practices in this first season of the crisis that you think is worth noting?

Sean Morgan:

I think another good practice has been frequency of communication. I've heard our friend David Kinnaman, I think tweeted something along the lines of, "I'm glad the decade of March, 2020 is finally over." I think he tweeted that on April 1st. And it's just recognizing that when you're in isolation, especially for... I've got two teenagers in the house and an amazing bride and a dog. And so even on lockdown it feels different for me, but there's a lot of people who are much more alone and I'm even finding my extreme introvert friends are telling me, "Yeah, okay, 30 days was enough. I'm ready to see some people." Kind of thing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Even I miss people right now, Sean. So there you go. That tells you a lot.

Sean Morgan:

So I think the frequency of communication, leaders who realized that early on and began to communicate, but I think even more so than that, I did a call with Ray Johnston of Bayside Church last week and raise an incredible leader, one of the most energetic, passionate leaders, even in the '60s probably more so than anybody I know. And to prove that point, he's not only leading Bayside Church, a massive church in Northern California, he's also the interim at Willow Creek at the exact same time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, kidding?

Sean Morgan:

So just an incredible pastor and doing some amazing things at both churches right now. But one of the things that was astounding to me was we were talking... We had a couple different conversations over the course of the last few weeks and one of the things that is coming out of communication, more frequent communication but is connection. And a guy on our team that does development work named David Dunkin actually said, "If you're in a church and you don't have all these digital solutions, you don't have the right email database and all those other things to begin communicating with your church." He just goes, "Pick up the phone, pick up the phone and start calling people."

Sean Morgan:

And one of the things that Ray shared when we started unpacking that is the need to just connect and go, "How are you doing?" Like we're just here and Ray started, shared at Bayside Church. They had a phone call and I think it's been multiple times now, but they had a phone call and somebody was elderly, did not have a lot of tech in their house and they were very, very isolated and they went on Amazon, bought a Roku or an Apple TV or something like that and went to that person's house and set up their internet on their TV, got the Roku running. So it wasn't just helping people with food. It was having a conversation and listening for needs and here's what's going to blow you away. His team made 32,000 phone calls.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh my gosh. Wow. Yeah, that's probably one of the trends, Sean. I'll just let that sink in for a minute, but as I've connected with everyone from Life Church to Central Church to I think North Point... I'm going to drop a whole bunch here, but Bayside, but these are some of the largest churches in America, but blew me away... And they've got all the technology. They got all the channels, they got all the devices. They're right up there. But those are the churches that I know of that have made the most phone calls. And meanwhile you see some small churches, churches canceled. And I've heard of other stories where it's like, "Well, I sent out an email a week and that's all I'm doing right now in this crisis. There's nothing more I can do." And like you're only serving 150 people. It's like you can make 15 phone calls a day, you can do that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And if they can do it, like you can do it. It's really amazing to me how almost instinctively these larger churches have gone even to old school technology and said, "We're just going to call everybody. We know we're going to make thousands of phone calls." And that's really incredible. I want to go back to margin because one of the things that really surprised me, even by March 15th, March 23rd in that window, and it's funny, we all know what those dates are now because we all lived through it. It's like, where were you on 9/11 right? Everybody knows where they were. The amount of financial panic that was immediate. I mean we're going to lay off, we're going to shut down. We're going to do this, we're going to do that. Let's talk about financial margin because your day job, you work with CDF Capital.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Basically you finance hundreds, thousands of churches and organizations. Any thoughts like most Americans, most Canadians live paycheck to paycheck. It's like, "If I missed one of these checks, we're not making rent." And that unfortunately has come home in a huge, huge way for personal finance. But you know we try to keep a bit of a financial runway. It's one of the reasons we're still in business and on because we've had income loss like everybody else has, but you keep a little bit aside and you can keep

doing the podcast and you can keep doing this and keep doing that and so we got a runway to move into the future. What advice would you have to leaders who have never operated with that kind of runway?

Sean Morgan:

Just in terms of having some financial margin?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Having some financial margin, having an ability to say, "If all the taps got turned off tomorrow, we've got two weeks, a month, six months ahead of us."

Sean Morgan:

Yeah. We have a friend, Casey Graham, mutual friend who provided some wisdom years ago as a personal coach for me. And I've tried to be a student of the philosophies of leaders. And I think it's like just about everything, having nothing to where if giving goes down next week, you're not able to pay your staff or pay your bills, that's not good. But I also know churches that have millions in the bank and it sort of becomes like this protected golden calf thing that like, "Oh, well we..." And I actually worked with the church through a transition because I spend probably about 75% of my time helping churches through transitions. And this was a fairly large church that a lot of people would know and they had millions, tens and tens of millions of dollars in the bank. And they brought that up in a conversation and there was a tone that's like, "Well, we're going to do fine through this transition because we have money, and let's all go to bed and sleep soundly."

Sean Morgan:

Meanwhile, the critical leadership things that they needed to be paying attention to, they weren't because they felt so good about how large the bank... The savings account was. So I don't think extremes tend to be very, very good.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a good point.

Sean Morgan:

And yet at the same point, the pendulum never swings to the middle. It always swings from side to side. Well we had too little, now we're going to shoot for having too much. We had too much. Now we're going to shoot for having too little. So I do think that they're... I mean this isn't the answer for every church, but as an executive pastor, we had 12 weeks. We could run our church for 12 weeks with no income. And was our church unlikely to have any in... Like go down from...

Carey Nieuwhof:

To zero.

Sean Morgan:

... income to zero? No. So the likelihood is we could actually get ahead of it, stay in the black, stay out of red ink by making good, tough but heavy and yet good decisions that 12 weeks could last, six months or a year just depending on things. And then also you can always make some logical cuts. But so I don't know that 12 weeks is the answer for every church, but I do know if you have enough in the bank that

you are avoiding making critical decisions that you should be losing sleep over as a leader. It's just part of leadership, then you've got too much. And if you can't make it a week or two because sometimes decisions take that long to assess the situation, figure out what's going on, make a decision and implement action. We talked about a little earlier, it took two to three weeks for even the most nimble churches to really get some action plans in place.

Sean Morgan:

So I think that has to be probably for me, what I would recommend is leaders consider kind of the lower end is three to four weeks at a minimum, maybe 12 to 16 is kind of in the middle range. And if you have years worth of budget in your savings, then pray about it and figure out what God may be calling you to do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Probably give some of that away. It was never yours to hoard. I think that's really sound advice and you know, it's such a interesting time. I hadn't thought about having too much because that is not the normal story, but I can see how that can make you arrogant. How that can make you lazy and how it can put you in a place where you're like, "Yeah, we don't need to do anything. We'll just reopen the doors eventually when this thing happens again." And by that point you're so out of it that you're... And you know that is the case. Like I've joked for years and others, I'm not alone, but the churches with no people have money in buildings and the churches with the people have no building and no money.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And there is a correlation there that if you have hundreds of thousands or millions in the bank and a building that's paid for and no people, you're like, "Oh well we'll just... The eight of us, we'll be here. The 80 of us, the 800 of us will be here next week." And there's no urgency. And it's interesting because yeah, it's funny, I measure my financial runway in the company in months, not in years. And I think there's a healthiness to it because it keeps you hungry. On the other hand, you don't have to panic, right?

Sean Morgan:

Yeah. And you guys, by the way, that has served the church in huge ways over the last 30 days. That the way that you guys were able to just give away crisis leadership courses and stay engaged and launch things like The ChurchPulse Weekly and things like that amidst all this, if you didn't have some margin, you wouldn't be able to do that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We would have been dead. We would have been gone.

Sean Morgan:

That's been a huge gift. But yeah, I do. It's probably my hermeneutics, probably a little off on this, but the story of the guy who basically fills up his store houses and stuff and is called a fool because your life will be taken from you tomorrow, I sort of reflect on that and go, "Okay, well if I am running a ministry and I have tens and tens of millions of dollars in the bank and my life was taken from me tomorrow, could I pause and dream and say, no we could have made a difference in lives today or in the moment, in the season that I want to be a part of as a leader, I want to be a part of using those resources to change lives and introduce people to Jesus and grow disciples." So I don't think there's any right answer.

Sean Morgan:

I don't want to sound over critically of people that have been on either end, but I do think the spirit of it needs to be reexamined and a good healthy conversation with people with... Here's a great leadership principle. How many people speak into your life that don't think like you and really do not have a much of a filter? We all need some people in our lives who are going to tell it like they see it with confidence and with love and grace. And I think leaders, this is a great one to get differing opinions, people who don't think like you and who will tell it like it is and engage with them on this. And in this season, it's critical for every leader to really have a good sound process and set guardrails around this if you didn't going into this. So it's a great opportunity to begin to engage some talent.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's good. You need some Enneagram eights in your life right now just to take you over the head. But it's funny because I'm just thinking about this in real time, I didn't expect the conversation to go here, but yeah, I've had people advice in the last year that says anything from 30 days in the bank to a year in the bank and we haven't landed on either side of the extreme. But I think you're right. Not having an infinite runway keeps you hungry and humble and the other side of, "Oh, I got a day in the bank or a week in the bank." That makes you panic and make really bad decisions and enables you not to serve. I remember a message back when we had almost no financial margin personally, that Andy Stanley preached probably in the early '2000s and he said, "If God called you to the mission field, would you have the financial resources or the margin to quit what you're doing and just kind of go?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I know my answer at that time was like, "Are you kidding me? I have... No, no. Who has that kind of money?" And again, we're not like independently wealthy or anything, but when you're in a different place and you've got that kind of margin that it's like, well, if I had to drop everything for a couple of months, I could do it. That's a good feeling. And I think you don't want to produce hoarders out of this either or greedy people, but I think you're right, that whole service filter, like how can we serve, this isn't my money, it's God's. It's probably going to recalibrate what happens.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't know whether you're old enough. I'm old enough, we're close, but not that close. Where I was remembering in this first month, all kinds of people I knew as a kid who lived through the Depression and they were my grandparents age, but they wouldn't waste a sheet of paper. It's like you can reuse that and I think that's going to shape the mindset of this generation, particularly Gen Z as they go into the future going, "Yeah, I remember when both my parents were out of work and we had to rely on government handouts." Or, "I was a leader and I was the first get let go because I was 21 years old and they fired me before they fired anyone else."

Sean Morgan:

Yeah, I was talking to Dusty Rubeck, my boss, CEO at CDF Capital and he said, "I remember my grandparents still had a sock darning so they could darn their socks even into old age because those are principles they learned through the great depression that they kept with them their whole life." And you're absolutely right. We have short memories around a lot of things, but things like this, life altering things, especially that are survival and fear, I think there are going to be things that stay with us for 100 years.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I remember, not to belabor the point, but my grandparents friends would sometimes say, "Why are you so wasteful?" And I'd be like, "I don't know. I'm growing up in a sea of plenty. What's wrong with you?" That's what you're thinking kind of. But now I get it. I get it. Okay. Sean, you know I was going to ask you all about succession. I think that's round two of this podcast. At some point we've just, this has been such a rich vein on crisis management.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It is early days. Nobody really knows even by May 5th when this thing airs or whenever it airs, what the future is going to look like. But I'd love for you to just... Because I thought your interesting scenario about, well what if it's 18 months until there's a vaccine and you can actually go to an NFL game or get together with 1,000 other people or 10,000 other people or 500 other people at church in the same room and not worry about whether you're going to contract a fatal disease? I thought that was really helpful. Do you want to postulate for a little bit on some of the things that you think, yeah, probably this is going to be part of the new normal?

Sean Morgan:

Yeah. Well I'm thankful for so many leaders. I won't list them all that I've been able to just think critically about this and begin... I think post-Easter everybody has a certain amount of mental energy that they're putting into, "Okay, what is this going to look like?" And I think there's probably some overoptimism like, "Oh yeah." And sometime in may we're back to business as usual. I think I'm going to say some stats that are off, but I think they're close. I think there's somewhere between 80 and 90% of the churches in North America are under 100. Those churches will probably be affected differently than churches that average 500 and up. But as we begin to look to May, I do think there's going to be an approach where those that are considered high risk are still going to be in some sort of level of quarantine. Maybe even similar to the lockdown that we kind of are all in now. And I know that regions or States-

Carey Nieuwhof:

New York States or San Francisco versus Nebraska.

Sean Morgan:

Yeah, I was on the phone with somebody recently who said, "There's a quarter million people in my county and we have three cases and nobody's hospitalized. Like everybody is chomping at the bit to get back to some sense of getting the economy going and it's forcing... There's a few big businesses here that make furniture or whatever and it's forcing layoffs to the tune of thousands even this week." And so I do think that there are certain pockets where you can look and say that region and low risk people in that region can get back to some sense of normal.

Sean Morgan:

To me that seems highly appropriate than a unilateral stance. I do think it's probably likely we will have some clarity on that before May and we may even have some implementation of that before May. I think there needs to be a percentage of us that realize that if there's a spike, my hope would be that if there's another resurgence at some point that we get better at this and we can get more localized in the restrictions. But if there's a resurgence it's in your area, it doesn't really matter if it's localized or not, you're going to go back into probably a lockdown and there's a 10 or 20% possibility that things like that could happen until we have a vaccine.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So we could be toggling in and out of virtual/physical church. I mean, I'm not sure virtual is going to be shut down, you know what I mean? You're not going to turn in that dial back, but where access to building, shopping, life as we know it may be intermittent from time to time.

Sean Morgan:

Yeah. I don't think that'll happen US-wide, but I think there could be areas where we go, "Oh, we're seeing a resurgence here. We're looking at our ICU beds and things like that, and we need to tighten things down to make sure we don't see a larger spike." So those are possibilities. But in general, I think large gatherings, let's just say, I think in May we're going to start seeing some openings in the 50 range. And if we continue to take good precautions and social distancing measures alongside that by summer, I think that could go up into the hundreds. And so that's why I say some smaller churches could potentially gather their entire congregation in my opinion, probably over the next few months, whereas larger churches will not be able to, maybe for years. And then I do think... So that's sort of some things about majors and restrictions that the authorities would be responsible for. So it will be a tiered response, little more a localized response and churches will have to respond to that differently.

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:06:04]

Sean Morgan:

But then also the idea of really thinking through with your leadership teams what things are actually good that we have seen happen in our church or churches we're connected with that we want to continue to do or implement? One of the opportunities and actually responsibilities is, is there's a lot of churches that have seen more first time decisions for Christ through this than ever before. You got a responsibility now to disciple and to connect with those people, and so what are your methods for that? And you're going to be able to start dreaming. If those are small group level things that you plan, that could be really healthy. I mean, the church could be more on mission, more relevant to its community, more engaged in circles rather than rows, in terms of groups rather than big gatherings.

Sean Morgan:

So there could be some real opportunity in the tiered reopening of our worlds to use those as foundational building blocks. Not to say we're going to put it on the whiteboard while we're on lockdown, it's there, but then we're going to erase it and go back to business as normal. So I hope churches begin to dream and get creative and find things that are working for them and find opportunities and potential in that, and then they share the wins, because there's going to be lots of great best practices out there. And so sharing those wins and seeing those cascade into other churches. There's probably going to be dissertations written about this, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah. Let me ask you a couple of other questions on the new normal too. Because in the early days, people were talking about a V shape recovery that as much as the stock market fell off a cliff and massive unemployment, they'll just be this just as rapid rebound. That's at the time of recording. I don't think anyone's really expecting that right now. And again, by early May, could be totally different, everything's changing day to day. But there was a sense in church world and to some extent in business that it would be a light switch, lights off, lights on. Do you think there's any model of church that can just be lights on again and go back to normal?

Sean Morgan:

No. I've heard some leaders make that argument and I totally respect their opinion. And there probably will be on the smaller end of churches, they'll probably be a few churches where there is a bounce back, kind of like, "We're back and we've got this vigor and attitude."

Carey Nieuwhof:

You have 30 people, it's always been these 30 people in their back. Yeah.

Sean Morgan:

Yeah. But I think even if the restrictions were lifted, there's still so much fear that so many people have. They've been hurt and wounded by fearing for their lives, and cutoff in isolation fearing for their jobs or even losing their jobs in this. I don't see there being that elastic rebound. I think the new normal on the other side of whatever it is we're now... and where we are now is not the new normal, we're in some in between phase, will be a higher level of concern, especially for certain parts of the population, for gatherings of any size. And the church needs not to be tone deaf to that. The church needs to receive that and ultimately minister and pastor through that and develop systems and put the right people in charge of ways of leading through that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and here's the thought I hadn't had. This is why I love these conversations, and this is happening in realtime. But a lot of our churches, they minister to under 60s intergenerational, lots of young adults, that kind of thing. But you think about a more traditional church setting where the average age might be 65 or 70, gathering might look very different for people in that more vulnerable age category or people with other complicating health gatherings that it's just not the free pass that has been in the past, and then how do you minister to that? Any other final thoughts on the new normal? And then I want to ask you about your podcast.

Sean Morgan:

Oh, final thoughts on the new normal. I just hope there's a spirit of opportunity that churches see to make adjustments. We've seen adjustments of all kinds that were reactionary in the last 30 days, and I just hope there's a spirit of, God's on the throne. There are certain things that we don't have to worry about, but when we go on a journey, here's the expectation. We're going to leave something behind. God's going to take us through something as he's taking us to something, and where we're going, the to of where we're going, is going to be somewhat unknown, right? It's Abraham. It really started out as Terah, his father, his journey out of Ur, through Heron, and then Abraham's call into the promised land, to the land that I will show you.

Sean Morgan:

And that's a beautiful thing because Hebrews 11 says, "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." And verse six says, "Without faith, it's impossible to please God." So as we leave things behind, we get transformed through things which can be hard, but where he's going requires faith. But when we do that, when we proceed toward the unknown with faith, that God's on the throne, that he's going to do something through this, we have the opportunity that's the foundational piece of pleasing God. And so I hope there's a real spirit of this. I don't want to be ignorant that there's a lot of pain in churches right now that are struggling through this.

Sean Morgan:

But that's our job, is to begin to understand that beyond the journey that God knows where the destination is, and we'll find out eventually, our job is just to take the next few steps.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what are you learning from podcasting? It is a fascinating podcast. And I got to tell you, if you're a young leader who is going to inherit something or someone in my shoes ready to hand something off, it's a must listen to. And it's just a treasure trove of leadership insights and you get a little sampling of it today in this interview. So what are you learning as a podcaster?

Sean Morgan:

Yeah. Well, I'm so honored to be able to record conversations with leaders that I have so much respect for. And their time's important and obviously the time of the listener invested into that. And I think the thing that I'm learning is everybody has aspects of their story that people still don't know, that in many cases are personal, but there's insightful things there that really help you as a student trying to get better, trying to develop in whatever it is that you're doing. A lot of our first episodes are really focused on transition leadership and that'll shift as we finish up our 11th episode. And so for me, it's just everybody has such an amazing story that I don't yet know that my listeners don't yet know and I get to be a part of putting a microphone out and sharing that with the world.

Sean Morgan:

And it's infinitely scalable, right? So one person can listen to it, thousands of people can listen to it. And to me, that's probably been the biggest learning. And then just on a personal level, I've just found I've enjoyed that. I was really concerned if I was going to be good at it, and I finally just said, "I don't know if I'll be good at it or not, but I'm seeing passion and joy come out of me getting to do these interviews." Man, the whole thing has been an absolute wonderful ride and we've been at it for about six months now. And by the way, Carey, you were on my podcast, and I thought about this the other day because you've got some great listenership and it's just amazing how God's blessed you with that influence.

Sean Morgan:

And you did my podcast when I had zero listeners because we hadn't launched yet. What an honor it was for you to say yes and dive into that with me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you got stuff out of me that... I re-listened to the interview recently and I'm like, "Yeah, Sean's good." You got stuff out of me and I get interviewed a lot. And it was a joy. Well, listeners, you got to insight into why I have three-hour breakfast and dinners with Sean, and why wouldn't we hang out? Time always seems to fly. I didn't get to half my questions. We'll have to have you back down the road when maybe things have new normalized a bit.

Sean Morgan:

I'm in. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We'll talk about succession and what you're learning because I think that's a whole other show. And business leaders, that's a huge problem for business leaders, it's like they got no successor. I read a stat years ago that 90% of businesses die with their founder, and you don't want to see that happen in the church world. You're a ninja at that and so we'll have to come back and do part two down the road. But Sean, thank you so much. So Leaders in Living Rooms podcast just available everywhere, and where's a home base for you and where can people track with you online?

Sean Morgan:

I think the best way to track with me online is through social media, just @_seanmorgan. Everything I'm doing, I'm going to have on there. And the next thing if you wanted to track with what we're doing really with leadership circles and cohorts would be TheAscentLeader.org. But even that stuff, I'll post it on my social anytime we're doing stuff there.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you want to get into one of those groups Sean has talked about, that's the way to do it. And I've hosted one of those groups. You guys spent a couple of days here at my house last year, back when we used to meet in person. It was great. That was a lot of fun. Cook some Big Green Egg, did a lot of hanging out. It was awesome.

Sean Morgan:

Yeah. it was one for the record books for sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. All right, Sean. Thank you so much.

Sean Morgan:

Thank you, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I so appreciate it. As always, I have learned a ton.

Sean Morgan:

Me too. And thanks to your listeners.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Man, I love Sean's heart and also his insight. His insight is laser sharp focused. If you want to drill a little bit deeper or check out transcripts or the show notes, make sure you head on over to CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode338. I've got a What I'm Thinking About segment. I'm going to talk about how to dull your innovation curve and miss the future. I think we're in a really interesting time and all the innovation you've done over the last two months is perhaps in danger, so we're going to talk about that. But I also want to say, hey, if you're new to the podcast, we have seen that spike in traffic, really welcome. I know it's an unusual spring.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm listening to birds chirping as I record this outside my window and yet the world is a very different place. We're doing everything we can to help you. I've got an email list. We send out an almost daily email to over 60,000 readers. The gateway to everything else I do beyond this podcast is at CareyNieuwhof.com. If he can't spell that, which I understand, go to LeadLikeNeverBefore.com. If you love this episode, leave a rating and review. And then next week, a long awaited episode, my conversation with Tim Keller. Tim is I think one of those people who we are going to be reading 100 years from now. Not a lot of people alive on the planet for whom that's true. He'll be one of those. He is a renowned preacher, author, thought leader.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Tim and I spent, well, the better part of two hours together, and I bring you a long, detailed conversation with Tim. We met before the whole COVID crisis in New York City. It was probably going on but nobody really knew about it at the time. We met up in his offices and here's an excerpt.

Tim Keller:

He says, "Ducklings want to swim, there's such a thing as water. Babies want to suck milk, there's such a thing as milk. Desires don't exist unless satisfaction for those desires exists. And if you find in yourself a desire for something that nothing in this world can satisfy, it probably means you were made for another world." Now that's logical and yet it's basically working on emotion. It's really not. It's not the evidence for the resurrection. It's not saying there's the existence of God. I Was trying to say, there is an emptiness in you that you can either say, "I'm going to find it in this world," or you can say, "I'm going to kill my desire for happiness and then become a real cynic and snob." Or you can say, "There's actually something else out there. There's another way."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So that's next time on the podcast. Also coming up, we have Danielle Strickland, Patrick Lencioni, Henry Cloud, Annie F. Downs, Paula Faris from ABC News, Sam Collier's back, Mark Miller from Chick-fil-A, Ryan Hawk and so many others. Oh! Did I mention John Eldredge? Yeah. It's going to be a great, great lineup coming up. And well, we want to just get behind you as much as possible. So what have I been thinking about lately? Well, I have been thinking about how to keep innovating in a world where you're just longing for normal. And What I'm Thinking About is brought to you by Generis. Make sure you check out their new book, *Your 2020 Budget Just Blew Up...Now What?*

Carey Nieuwhof:

Go to Generis.com/Carey2020 and check out Pro Media Fire. You realize how important digital is, so do they. You get 40% off the original price of the Pro Media Fire team by going to ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth. So yeah, if you think back over the last two months, you've done more innovating probably in the last two months pivoting that you've done in a long, long time. You went from meeting in person to meeting online. You went from leading your team in person to leading your team remotely. You went from a stable financial plan to a completely new financial plan, predictable org chart to a flexible org chart, and you went from not knowing how to make it work to probably figuring out how to make it work at some level.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And that kind of innovation curve is amazing. Now, the challenge is right now, you probably feel it, I feel it, we're all longing for, things please be more stable. And yes, ultimately, they need to be more stable,

but what's at risk is you will unintentionally and quickly stop your innovation curve and as a result miss the future. If you think about it, it's not just crises like the global pandemic that get in the way of innovation, companies and organizations get disrupted all the time. One day you're running a great hotel, next day couple of college grads who are broke decided to rent out an air mattress for 80 bucks and Airbnb is born and it disrupts an entire industry. You bought a taxi medallion in New York City worth a million dollars and then Uber comes along and changes the game.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean, interruption and disruption are normal part of life. Now, one of the challenges you'll have, the easiest way to kill your innovation curve, I want to share four with you. One is, think of what's happening right now as an interruption not a disruption. It's been really interesting to see the tone online shift in late April, and I'm sure by the time you hear this in early May, because I see a lot of leaders going, "You know what? This isn't a big deal." It's almost like denial. It's like, "This is just an interruption. Everything's going to go back to normal." Well, I'd love to believe that's true, I'm not sure that's actually true.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because if you look at how many multiple factors there are in the world right now, and even in America and Canada and North America, you end up with an economy that is really uncertain, industries that are struggling, a variable government response depending from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. I mean, life as we knew it isn't back. And it's also accelerated things, like, businesses are now saying, "Well, why are we paying all this money in rent? And are we really going to do that much travel in the future when you look at how much travel costs and virtual actually works?" So if the current crisis is a disruption, leaders who see it as an interruption will be disrupted in the future. So I would really encourage you to see this as a disruption and continue to plan for the future.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hope I'm wrong, but in case I'm not, what have you got to lose? A second way to kill all the innovation you've experienced so far is just settle for the changes you've made. Just because you found something that works doesn't mean you've found what works best. Just because you found a new pattern doesn't mean it won't become a holding pattern. And just because you've made progress doesn't mean you've realized your potential. So I've seen a lot of leaders, six, eight weeks in to the crisis, settle in and go, "Okay, I think we found it. Let's just rest there." And listen, I get it. You're tired, but keep innovating, keep experimenting. The future belongs to the innovators and crisis is the cradle of innovation, so I would keep going on that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Third thing, and I feel this too, let your fatigue make the decisions for you. I was in a meeting last week and we were pushing for something brand new, which you're going to hear about very soon. I got to tell you, I just felt it in myself. I'm like, "Well, we could wait another month or whatever," and then I realized, wait a minute, that's my fatigue talking. Now, I need to get good sleep. I need to get exercise. Self-care is really important in normal times, it's 10 times more important during crisis. My goodness! I got to tell you, don't let your fatigue make decisions for you. Take care of yourself and let the mission determine your decisions. That quick pivoting you did in the first few weeks, yeah, that is actually a really good strategy. I'm going to have more to say on that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then number four, this is just the fourth idea, just if you want to kill all the innovation that you've experienced and the growth you've experienced with that, just stop disrupting yourself. I really believe that you either disrupt yourself or you get disrupted. And we've had to pivot here on the podcast. I mean, I took a whole bank of shows that were done for the spring and we moved them into the summer and I brought you all of these episodes, everything you've heard in the last month and will hear for the most part over the next month or two are newly recorded episodes to help you with the crisis. I had all kinds of speaking events canceled, so I changed. But I also realized, it's really important to disrupt myself. What does this make possible? What can I keep doing to keep changing?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because, otherwise, you're going to get incremental results. Incremental change brings incremental results. So it's a highly dangerous practice to let circumstances force you to change. First, circumstances are entirely out of your control, second, they catch you unprepared, and third, by the time external change happens, it's too late for organizations that were status. So best practice moving forward, keep disrupting yourself. You either disrupt yourself or you'll be disrupted. I really believe that. So I love all the innovation that's happening. I'm a change guy and I want you not to miss the future but to seize it. Things are changing deeply and that's what I'm thinking about these days. We are back next time with a fresh episode. I am so excited to bring you Tim Keller. Thanks so much for listening and I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never.

Announcer:

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

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:25:24]