

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 the episode 340 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 my guest is none other than Annie F. Downs. And if you know who Annie is, she's been on this podcast before. Man, she is so much fun, and host of the That Sounds Fun Podcast.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think you're going to love this episode because one of the myths we debunk, and if you can watch this on YouTube, I mean, we're not making this up. So I know 9 out of 10 of you who listen to this podcast are going to access it via audio, but if you get a chance, pop over to YouTube, this is a lot of fun because she is literally holed up in a spare room with a blanket from target and a cheap microphone doing her podcast that is reaching millions.

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of the discussions we've had online, and to some extent on this show is people think you need a lot of money to make a big impact online, actually you don't. And so, Annie talks about that, she talks about quarantine, about, oh, just so many different things and how to really connect with your audience. And you've heard me say this before, I've had a number of leaders like Annie, Lysa TerKeurst, Ann Voskamp, Jennie Allen, et cetera. But sometimes guys will talk about, you know, "Look at my audience," but if you really want to know who has the audience, you got to listen to people like Annie F. Downs.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, it was a lot of fun to have this conversation. Tons of leadership nuggets in it. I think you're going to love it. Also, a question for you. Okay, here we are in the middle of the reopening of America and into a very uncertain future. And I really think the future is going to reveal a lot about you. And the question is, I think there will be three kinds of organizations over the next few months. We're already seeing this in the headlines. You'll have organizations that don't make it, that fail, organizations that just barely survive and then some organizations, churches, businesses that thrive.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you're already seeing this in the headlines. So the question I want to ask you is, which are you? My team and I have put together a little quiz with some tips after it. It's called the Will I Thrive quiz. There are some, I think, characteristics that are going to determine whether or not you're going to thrive in this uncertain environment moving forward. If you want to take the quiz that I've put together on that, you can do so by texting, WilliThrive to 33777, or simply go to willithrive.com.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, it's a super short quiz, like two minutes long. We'll link you to some tips and some resources, but simply text, WilliThrive to 33777 or go to willithrive.com. There's no question mark, even though that's a

question, it's just willithrive.com or WilliThrive to 33777. And yeah, I'd love to help you figure out how to thrive in this really uncertain time ahead as we move into whatever the new normal looks like.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And speaking of the new normal, well, finances are anything but stable. And it's really interesting because there are already winners and losers. I mean, you read the headlines every day, there are some churches, organizations that are really struggling and others that honestly they're afraid to say it out loud, but they're having their best year ever. What's going on?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, as Generis knows, economic cycles simply reveal what was already happening below the surface. So, if your planning and processes were effective before March, the current crisis is probably not rocking your world. Your giving may actually be up. So, they have put together, to help churches, a brand new resource called *Your 2020 Budget Just Blew Up...Now What?* It's a short ebook. I've read it. It's fantastic. I actually wrote the forward for it. You can get it for free at generis.com/carey2020. So that's Generis, generis.com/carey2020.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So just go there, generis.com/carey2020. You can download it for free. They also have a free complimentary support hotline for anyone who needs some in the moment assistance. You can get that all at generis.com/carey2020. So, hopefully those resources help you. And I would love to know whether you're going to survive or thrive in the future. Make sure you check that out by going to willithrive.com.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, Annie F. Downs has millions of podcasts listeners a month. She actually pivoted for COVID and saw a massive spike. She was in quarantine when we talked about this. She is a bestselling author, nationally known speaker and podcast host based in Nashville, Tennessee. And well, this is a fun conversation. You would not expect anything else from Annie F. Downs, so here we go. Annie F. Downs, welcome back to the podcast. It's so good to hang out again.

Annie F. Downs:

Hi Carey, thank you for having me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh man, I got to ask you, this is day 40 of lockdown for you.

Annie F. Downs:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And perhaps by the time this airs, the State of Tennessee will be free again, or at least somewhat back in the open, but who knows where this crazy is going. I want to start by asking you this question, how has the global pandemic COVID-19 impacted you personally so far?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. Well, as far as the actual sickness, a couple of my very close friends got really sick.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Annie F. Downs:

And so, I've seen the virus up close and it is ugly. Thank God none of my friends have died from it, but I have had friends hospitalized. And in fact here in Nashville, one of my best friends was one of the first 10 cases positive in our county, which is why I got locked down so early because I had been with her the day before she was sick, a whole group of us were together, she has symptoms the next day, is tested and two days later we're told by the health department not to leave our house for 10 days. Which Carey, at the time I thought, "How will I ever survive 10 days?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm not going to make it. Moses did 40 years.

Annie F. Downs:

What? That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm not doing 10 days.

Annie F. Downs:

That's right. I feel like I'm on the 40 year path now, but now we're 40 days in and I'm like, "Man, that was a joke. 10 days is for amateurs. Anybody can do 10 days," I thought. But it was different because we were genuinely quarantined, meaning we weren't allowed to leave our houses, we got called by the health department one to two times a day. I mean, it was really intense, but it was because they were trying to keep it from spreading, which is, as we know now is very challenging.

Annie F. Downs:

And so, that's been my up close experience with it. It has been scary to watch my friends be so sick with something that feels like an invisible enemy that no one can even figure out. And so, that was scary. It's been really lonely. I am not married yet, I don't have kids yet and I don't have a roommate or any pets. And so, it has literally been me for 40 days.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Just you and the walls.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

For 40 days.

Annie F. Downs:

And that means no hugging for 40 days. And you just don't realize, I don't know about anybody else. I didn't realize what a life giving part of my life physical touch was and is until it is gone. And then you'll be like-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I can tell you, we saw a half dozen people on Sunday, which is very rare. And it was social distancing visiting on a front porch. And I'm not a huggy guy, I just wanted to go up and hug all of them. And I'm like, "What is that? That's so weird." And I happen to be married and I've been with my wife for the last 40 days, but it's a very different scenario. I got to ask, did your friends recover? Are they in recovery?

Annie F. Downs:

Yes, everyone is done. In fact, one of the great things, it's been a little bit of a strange experience for us because it feels like we crusted over the experience really early. That does not necessarily mean that's true, but because my social group went through, "Oh my gosh, are people getting sick? People are sick. Woo, could I get sick? I'm really scared. I'm really nervous. I'm stuck at home. Oh look, they're starting to get better. Oh, they relapsed. Oh wait, they are getting better. Oh, they're better?"

Annie F. Downs:

We walked through all of that and we have been done with that for two weeks. So, I think that makes me feel a little more impatient because my actual social group, it seems to be on the backside of the experience. I don't know what science would say. I'm just telling you experientially what we have experienced is it's like, "Oh man, it's hard to stay home when all my friends are better."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. That's very similar here. We have not been a hotspot north of Toronto. And I was very concerned for my parents, for my wife's parents and for other people. And a few people's parents have had it, and they have actually recovered rather miraculously. And now I just don't want to line up to go grocery shopping again, which I realize is a hundred percent selfish, a hundred percent selfish.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. I'm telling you that the only time I've had like breathing anxiety, breathing problem level anxiety is at the grocery store. Every time I'm outside I'm fine. We've done some social distancing things at friends' houses and I feel fine, but man, when you have to go to the grocery store and you're like, "Who touched that? Did I touch that? Why aren't they wearing a mask? Do I need to be wearing this mask? I don't have on gloves? Are they judging me because I don't have on gloves?" I mean, it causes anxiousness in my soul. So, I don't want to go because I don't want to feel that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Isn't that interesting?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Now, not to get too personal, but did you end up getting tested because tests are pretty rare and hard to come by, but did they end up testing you officially for COVID-

Annie F. Downs:

No, they didn't.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... or you just had to monitor your symptoms?

Annie F. Downs:

That's right. So, we took our temperature every day and then the health department employee who would call us every day would ask, she called all seven of us that were quarantined from the same party and would ask us the same set of symptoms. And I never had a fever. I've never felt off. I know that you can be a carrier and not have it, but this is so strange, Carey. So, the girl who got it, my really close friend who was sick, they were at a party the Saturday night before, this is the first week of March and 33 people got it at that party.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh my gosh. So it's like a super spreader scenario thing.

Annie F. Downs:

Right. Vanderbilt University is here. And so, they've been studying that up close group of going like, how did 33 out of 50 people show symptoms in four days or less?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Annie F. Downs:

And the others. So, I say to you, the reason I didn't get tested is they're so closely watching the group who did get sick that any of us that didn't have symptoms, they just wanted us home while they watched that up close group.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Isn't that fascinating? So, the 40 days of quarantine, and I mean for you, you're hyper, hyper social, you're out all the time.

Annie F. Downs:

All the time, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You bring the fun, you are the fun. What has that been like emotionally and even spiritually for you to be in this relational desert?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. It has been really hard. When we switched from quarantine to stay home, I had one more day left of quarantine when our governor announced that everyone would be staying home. And that day was the worst one of all of them because I was like, I was almost free. I was almost out and now everyone's going to be home. So now not only am I not getting out, but at least during my quarantine, people could come to my patio and they could be on the sidewalk and I could be on the patio and we could talk. Now people won't even be able to come over and I can't go. I mean, I had to get under a weighted blanket and have a moment. I mean, I needed a break.

Annie F. Downs:

So, it's been really hard emotionally. I am very open and public that I don't want to be unmarried for the rest of my life. This isn't the life I would have picked for myself. And so, it's not like I'm like, "Man, this is fun being alone." I'm like, "God, I didn't want this when I was social. I certainly don't want this when I'm stuck."

Annie F. Downs:

I'm an Enneagram. I identify as an Enneagram seven and my behaviors and motivations look like that. And I know myself really well, Carey and have done a lot of therapy, which is what I have right after this with you is my counseling appointment. And my fear going into this and what has made it so emotionally challenging, I'll answer real quick and then I'll tell you spiritually, is that if I don't have pretty high boundaries on myself, I can be a glutton for anything.

Annie F. Downs:

I can watch all the TV, I can do no work, I can sleep late every day, I can eat like I'm a terrible... all the things that make you feel bad, I don't think there's bad food, I think there's things that my body doesn't like that I want to eat anyway, and I can just glutton out super hard. And so, I've been scared of that every day, if that makes any sense.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it does. And being a seven-

Annie F. Downs:

And that's emotionally challenging to be afraid of your motivations every day.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're wing 8, are you?

Annie F. Downs:

And to be afraid of yourself. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm wing 8, for sure. You know me really well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Depending on the day.

Annie F. Downs:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It could be eight seven, seven eight.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's exactly right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

As our mutual friend, Ian Cron would say, my wife laughs at this when she read my profile, "If anything is worth doing, it's worth overdoing," correct?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. That's right. That's right. That's it. So, emotionally it's been hard. And spiritually, one of my goals has been to keep a pretty steady schedule every day, so I still get up like I was getting up and leaving my house, I still get ready, I still have my time with the Lord in the morning. So, that has remained similar. I am reading through the gospels this year every month. So I read a different version of the Bible, but I read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John every month. So I'm reading the same thing cyclically for the whole year. I just thought it would be interesting.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

I've never read the gospels that much and I want to know Jesus better as a person and as a friend, and I think if you listen to his friends... If you listen to somebody's friends talk about them every day for a year, you're going to know that person better. And so, that's what I wanted to do. And the coolest stuff has happened because every day, I mean, I'm on my fourth round, this is April and still every day there's something I haven't seen yet.

Annie F. Downs:

And so, when I started Luke, I cried reading Luke 2, which we've heard a million times because even the kid in the Peanuts cartoon can say Luke 2. And he says it to us where, there were shepherds out in the field and they were watching the star. And I just cried and I had to have a check in with myself of like, "Hey, be a good friend to yourself. Why are you crying? Let's talk about why you're crying."

Annie F. Downs:

And that story was really true to me in December when my life was normal. And that story is just as true today when my life is not normal. And it is just what has happened for me spiritually is all the things that that felt pretty solid under me, I've jumped up and down on to see if I'm really sure they're solid like scripture. And scripture has proven to be exactly what God says it is, which is a hundred percent true and full of hope and living and active.

Annie F. Downs:

And so, spiritually I feel like I've gotten some good experiences. Well, I'll try to be a good friend to myself, I'll be my only friend here, and having some emotional challenges and some sadness, lots of sadness and lots of loneliness. I don't want to be like there's been a nearness of God because I feel like

that's like a cheesy Christiany thing to say that any of our friends who aren't Christians would be like, "What does that even mean?" But what I would say is I have felt like I know God better today than I did 40 days ago. That's true.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's a good place to be in. What is your self-talk like when you're discouraged, when you're struggling and you're trying to move yourself out of that place?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. I say this a lot to my friends and to people listening to me online where I say, be as good a friend to yourself as you are to everyone else. If I called you and said, "Carey, I'm having a terrible day." You'd be like, "Well what can I do? Can I order you something to eat? Are you hungry? Are you tired?"

Annie F. Downs:

You would do whatever you could to help me. And so, my self-talk has been, what does it look like to be a good friend to yourself, to Annie? There was a day last week where I just did not want to get out of bed. And it's just not an option when we have things scheduled to record, or when we have work to do or... And so, I just put my hand on my chest and I said, "Okay, tell me why you don't want to get up. Just tell me why I don't want to get up."

Annie F. Downs:

And then I said out loud why I didn't want to get up. And then I said, "I totally get that. Let's list out three reasons it'd be great to get up today." I mean, I just talked to myself like there are two of me, which may sound insane-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's amazing.

Annie F. Downs:

... but I have no other friend here.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's amazing.

Annie F. Downs:

I'm going to cry saying this, I don't have anybody else.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

And so, sorry.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's okay.

Annie F. Downs:

Who else is going to care for me besides the Lord and me? And so, it is appropriate and not insane to ask yourself if you're okay and to answer. Sorry. So, I've been doing that a lot. I've been doing a lot of self-care, and a lot of self-talk, and a lot of... I mean, even today, I said something off center to myself of like, "Well yeah, that is probably why that happened."

Annie F. Downs:

And then I literally stopped. I looked at him and I was like, "Hey, we aren't doing that today. You're all right. Nobody knows how to do this." I just had one of those moments of like, "Hey, don't speak like that to yourself. And self-talk, whether you're alone or whether you're with people is a... I mean, Jesus said, the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind your strength and love others as yourself.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

Right? There were three distinct groups he wanted you to care about. And it's God, and others and you. And I'm getting a lot of practice on how to be a good friend to myself.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm so glad. Thank you for sharing that, Annie. And I'm a little emotional too. I've not been very good to myself over the years. And one of the things I'm learning in my long journey is you deal with the issue and that it's not always personal. Right?

Annie F. Downs:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay.

Annie F. Downs:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, you did this or you said that or as an eight, probably you said that. That's 9 times out of 10 my problem.

Annie F. Downs:

Same for me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I said it and I am not my words. I'm not my action in that moment. And we believe the story of creation and redemption for everyone else, but we don't believe it for ourselves.

Annie F. Downs:

That's it. That's exactly right. Because the way you would tell me about how to handle my mistakes is so different than the way you'll talk to yourself about how to handle your mistakes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

A hundred percent. And I would be like, "Annie come on, I know you and I know what you do. And yeah, you got some moments, but come on." But then I'm like, "Oh, this defines me."

Annie F. Downs:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then you have to go, "No, it doesn't."

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. I had a little conversation about this yesterday on Instagram because I said to the people who follow me on Instagram, "I know what you would literally do for me, for Annie F. Downs who you care about from a distance. You would order me flowers. Why don't you order you flowers? You would ask me if I'm okay, why don't you ask yourself if you're okay?" Treat yourself as good as you treat the person on the other side of Instagram that you think highly of. If you would treat yourself as that kindly and with that much compassion, then you will better love other people too, I think.

Annie F. Downs:

I mean, I think that's what Jesus said is, love other people as you love yourself. The more you become a good friend to you, you actually have more sympathy and kindness toward others too because you're not, a lot of times that stuff we spout off and the stuff we say on anger is because we're unhappy with something on the inside anyway.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Annie F. Downs:

The more compassionate you get towards yourself.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're a preacher, you know. You're a preacher, an author, a communicator. And it really gets down, as you said, to our foundations. Do we actually believe that God loves people?

Annie F. Downs:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because if you're preaching it but not living it, it's very different. And you listen to the narrative of a lot of preaching and a lot of preaching. We'll get to there at the end of the interview, but a lot of preaching is, you're terrible, God hates you, clean up your act.

Annie F. Downs:

Change your behavior.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Change your behavior and maybe you'll squeak by. And none of us believe that theologically, but that's how we behave.

Annie F. Downs:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, that's so honest. That's so honest. And it's disrupted our emotional life, it's disrupted everything, our patterns, our habits. But as an author, as a speaker, as a faculty member, teaching team member at Cross Point Church, everybody's had to pivot. Everyone's been pivoting your 40, 50 days into your pivot now, what has that been like for you? Because you had a whole speaking tour lined up and you're going city to city, you got this crew. It was probably a year in the making and then boom, you can't even leave your house.

Annie F. Downs:

That's right. I think that's such a great word. I think that we should hold on to the word pivot because what pivot doesn't require and doesn't say is that you have to let go of what you had planned. It just means you have to change. You're not ejecting from the map you're on and landing on a new map. The road just turns. All right, that happens all the time. You're on the same map. Your calling is the same.

Annie F. Downs:

It's been funny because one of the things we do in my company is in the first couple of days, weeks of January, we have a company-wide meeting, my agent flies in, I pretty much bring in everyone who works with us at some point during the year. And we make up a big yes, no list for the whole... like here's what Annie is going to do this year and here's what she isn't going to do this year.

Annie F. Downs:

Probably day four or five, and I've shared about it online before, we haven't shown the list because there's difference between having a secret life and a private life. We don't have secrets, but there's private things in my company that we don't talk about publicly. And so, I haven't shared the list, but we talked about building it. And I mean, I bet on day three, Carey, there were people saying, "Has your yes, no list changed? What's different on your yes, no list?"

Annie F. Downs:

And I was like, "Hey, I'm still crying about being home. How about if I settled down before you think about my strategy?" But what has happened is none of those yeses and nos switched categories

because we know what we're called to, but there has been pivoting to those yeses and nos. Some of the nos that were very good and very true in quarter one will be true again in quarter three and will be true again in quarter four, but in quarter two they pivoted. And it made sense. I had more time, I could do this, I could do that.

Annie F. Downs:

And so for me, it has looked like we do a two day a week podcast for That Sounds Fun, but we added in a daily morning show that's just 30 minutes that's just fun because I was so sad when I got on lockdown before the rest of my city that I asked my buddy, Eddie, who's an author as well, a counselor, works for IJM. He and I talk about a lot of stuff. He and his wife are dear friends of mine.

Annie F. Downs:

I said, "Will you just start recording 30 Minutes A Day With Me and can just talk about whatever until I'm out of quarantine?" Well, we thought it was 10 days. We have like 29 episodes now or something. But that's a pivot where you think, what does this... okay. And you're going to love this story. I don't think I've told you this from real life yet. My last book idea, when I was pitching it to publishers, what I didn't know is that someone had written that book already.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow.

Annie F. Downs:

I mean, the book. And after we pitched to a lot of publishers, my assistant sends me an email and says, "Is this kind of like what we've been talking to people about?" And it is like-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That must be the worst feeling in the world.

Annie F. Downs:

Title, cover, I mean, it was the strangest.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No way. It's like time travel. You wrote the book-

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... and then you discovered it at a later time.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. Yeah. And there's some questions about whether this other author likes my things I talk about but-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Perhaps he was you a little too closely? Yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

Sure, sure, sure. Or possibly I've been a fan of hers, and I accidentally dreamed up the same book she was writing, who can know which way it goes?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, my goodness.

Annie F. Downs:

Either way, it was, "Oh no, all these publishers think I'm going to write book A and book A exists." And my agent said to me and I freaked out, Carey. I mean, I freaked out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

I was like, "There goes my future and writing because I don't know what else to write." And my agent said, "This isn't, what does this ruin. The question now is, what does this make possible?" And I thought, "That's a pivot," right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Annie F. Downs:

The pivot question is, what does the quarantine at home make possible? So for me, it makes possible a 30 minute show every day because as you can see from my fancy wall decor, I nailed a blanket to a wall in my guest room so that the room sounds good. And we sit here for 30 minutes in my pajamas usually while I'm drinking my morning tea and talk. And that's something I can't do at the office.

Annie F. Downs:

And so, there's things like that that feel like a real gift in the middle of this. And so, pivoting to me is finding the gifts in this. And we can talk church strategy a little bit. Cross Point has had to pivot on a couple of levels because our church got hit by a tornado, and 10 days later we were on lockdown as a city. And so we had-

Carey Nieuwhof:

You were a portable church for one week.

Annie F. Downs:

We were a portable church for a week. That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Some subscribers, you'll remember we had Kevin Queen as part of the crisis panel where he told that story, we'll link to it in the show notes just to tie the bow on it for some leaders listening. But yeah, that's incredible. And you're part of the teaching team with Kevin.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah I'm part of his teaching team. That's right. I mean, so we had to pivot once and then quickly pivot again. And so, the question each time is either, why is everything being ruined or what does this make possible? And so for me, we're seeing that at church that it makes possible that we can teach a new theme than what we were... We had a whole series, as most churches do. We had a whole series laid out for the next eight weeks and Kevin changed it two weeks ago-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Garbage can, yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

... as he should. As he should. I could not speak more highly of the people leading Cross Point Church right now. I'm so honored to even be friends with them, much less get to teach alongside them. Him, Matt Warren that you've had on, Drew Pal that you've had on, Kevin Cook, I could just go on and on. But as I've watched them lead and watch them pivot, it has affected how I run my business too, of like, "Okay, they thought they were going to do something totally different, what can I do now?" We're a morning show. I can get my novel written that has a deadline. I can do more Zoom calls.

Annie F. Downs:

We actually have more meetings as a staff because we meet every morning on Zoom than we ever do when we're sitting in the office together. And it feels a little bit more intentional. And I mean, we joked before we started, I feel like I've done more work in the 40 days of quarantine than I did the first 100 days of the year.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's very, very true for a lot of us. One of the things, Annie, that's interesting, I've heard a number of people say this, but they said that in these first month, six weeks, whatever, we're cementing our reputations. This is how you will be remembered five years from now, 10 years from now.

Annie F. Downs:

Wow.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, you think about what you said about your leadership team at Cross Point Church and how your respect just went through the roof. It was already high, but you're like-

Annie F. Downs:

Yes, it was through the roof.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... "Oh my gosh." A decade from now, when everything's whatever normal will be long after this is a memory, you're going to sit around and talk about being hit by a tornado, being a portable church for a week, pivoting to online. These are the foxhole stories. You're going to talk about the 40 days of lockdown, daily podcasting. I'd love to get your take on that to, how do you think people are going to remember even your leadership in this season because you've done something that a lot of people wouldn't have normally done, which is, you've gone to daily podcasting. And sometimes I've listened to some of those episodes, there's not even an agenda, you're just having like morning tea with people, well, with Eddie.

Annie F. Downs:

We talked 20 minutes today about the difference between soup and stew and chowder. So, you want to know the kind of content I'm going to be remembered for in five years Carey Nieuwhof, you've really got me excited about it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, but there's something deeper here, which I think is fascinating. And we got on it last time you were on the show a little bit, but I want to drill down on it more. You're just friends with your audience, aren't you?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah, I am. And so that would be what I want to be remembered for is people felt like they had a friend the whole time. And the interesting thing, when that 10 days started for me, Carey, about day four, pretty early, my first day in was Saturday, it was Monday. My first day in, in my own house, I live here. I didn't get put in jail. I get to be in a very nice place for myself.

Annie F. Downs:

My third day, that morning in my time with the Lord, I felt an invitation and I felt like he was saying, "I want you to go first and I want you to tell the truth." And so, the days that this is too hard for me, I say that on Insta Story and I just say, "It's hard for me being alone, but it's hard for people..." I mean, so many of my friends have toddlers and it is hard being in a house with toddlers 24/7.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sure is.

Annie F. Downs:

And it's hard being with a bunch of teenagers who are trapped without their friends. And we're getting to the point where elementary, middle school, high school kids are starting to really grieve not being with their friends and they're acting out. I'm seeing it in my friends' kids where they're normal one moment and then they're super off the next moment and they just miss their friends because we aren't cool enough to be their friends and I get it.

Annie F. Downs:

We were playing a soccer game this weekend, which we're doing long distance kicking. And the little eight year old got super frustrated but he's super frustrated because it's all grownups and he wants to play with people his own height. I get that. And so, I just have to tell the truth about that stuff and that

is how I hope I'm remembered as like, "Yeah, Annie was my friend during that and she told me the truth."

Annie F. Downs:

Because what happens then, Carey is if people believe you now, they'll believe you then. And so, if they believe me now then when I am on the Cross Point stage, they believe me then. And when I am telling them something about Jesus, they believe me then because they believe me when I count how many days I wear slippers in a row.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Uh-huh. Well, and I wish, because there's been a big discussion on my blog and in different forums about production levels, and what do you need?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah, I've seen it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you got a lot of pastors going back into the studio and setting up home studios. You have to have lights and everything. I wish for a moment, and I'm not sure we're going to put this on YouTube, I wish people could see the setup because it's amazing.

Annie F. Downs:

In my house?

Carey Nieuwhof:

You have a \$99-

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah, do you want me to turn it?

Carey Nieuwhof:

What's that?

Annie F. Downs:

Do you want me to turn so they can see? Do you want [crosstalk 00:31:50].

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah. Go ahead. Go ahead. Maybe we'll put this on YouTube. It's your call at the end of the day.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah, if not cut it. I mean, it's just a blanket nailed to a four poster bed.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There's the blanket. Well, that's a pretty high end blanket you've got there, Annie.

Annie F. Downs:

Well, it is from Target, Carey, so I'm very fancy. And then you're right. I mean, it is a \$99 mic from Amazon.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's a \$98 Yeti money. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Annie F. Downs:

Exactly right. And a pair of \$20 headphones. And I have it set up on a candle so that it's high enough. We're really doing the business that way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is the best.

Annie F. Downs:

And then two miles from here is my podcast studio with professional equipment and it's in beautiful lighting and we can't be there right now. And so, we're here.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, just to give people an idea of impact versus investment, which I think is really important. Do you have any idea in the last 30 days how many downloads you would have had on your podcast? Got to be a lot.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. I mean, the thing that is easiest to look at is Amazon rankings.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

And our daily shows and our Monday, Thursday shows are staying... if you scroll down, the top shows in faith and religion, we're peppered in all through it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Annie F. Downs:

And so, people are listening. We've doubled our listenership on a daily basis.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you've doubled your listenership on a daily basis?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sorry, just to clarify, is that Apple or Amazon? Is it Apple ratings? Apple Podcasts.

Annie F. Downs:

Apple. Sorry, did I say Amazon? My apologies.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Yeah. No, that's okay.

Annie F. Downs:

Yes. The Apple Charts. The podcast [crosstalk 00:33:17] is from Apple. Yeah, I'm so sorry.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, the Apple Podcasting. So, and I know roughly your metrics. So, that would be like hundreds of thousands of listens.

Annie F. Downs:

Probably we've had millions.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Millions. Okay.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So millions of listens in the last month and you're literally in a makeshift studio.

Annie F. Downs:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And as you said to me before we started recording, I don't even have a ring light. I never bought the ring light, right?

Annie F. Downs:

I know, because I was like, "Sorry Carey, I don't even look lit up. Carlos Whittaker would just kill me because he was so much better at setting up a good scene."

Carey Nieuwhof:

A hundred percent, Annie.

Annie F. Downs:

But yeah, I mean, even everything for my show we're doing on this microphone right now, I record it in Zencastr and my producer pulls it off of Zencastr. And I mean, all the intros, outros, everything is happening just like this right here.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, we'll talk after, maybe we'll throw it up on YouTube, because this is the case in point. It is really about connection. It's not about production.

Annie F. Downs:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you riff on that for a little while? What does connection look like with your audience? Because people are saying if you watch Fallon or even, I don't know whether you saw SNL when Tom Hanks was in his kitchen.

Annie F. Downs:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Those were great moments, man.

Annie F. Downs:

Do you like that? As an Enneagram 8, as a male, as a pastor, as a leader of leaders, do you like the home looking feel of Jimmy Fallon and of SNL?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I thought it was brilliant. I really did. Because what it does, it's the great equalizer. I mean, for podcasting with you and me, this is my basement. Yeah, we've renovated it a few years ago, but this is the basement of my house. And I've met with my team today, there's seven of us I think, who work at this full-time. And we managed to reach over a million people every month. It's insane and you're like-

Annie F. Downs:

It's amazing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

A decade ago, this was millions or hundreds of thousands of dollars of investment that you would have to make. You would have to own the airways.

Annie F. Downs:

Literally a decade ago, which is not that far to think back.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, literally a decade ago you had to get a cable show to do what you do right now. And I think the pivot that a lot of pastors are making is they just assume that this is going to take millions of dollars or hundreds of thousands of dollars and a production crew and I'm only as good as the quality of my production. And actually you're only as good as the quality of your connection.

Annie F. Downs:

That's it. That's it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And what Fallon showed with his wife, his videographer, and his daughters in the-

Annie F. Downs:

Oh, hilarious.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... crawl space and doing the graphics and reading his monologue, to help people thrive in life and leadership, like almost a monotone and I'm like you're-

Annie F. Downs:

He's reading it off a piece of paper.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Off a piece of paper.

Annie F. Downs:

Last night he did the first round of jokes on his phone and the second on paper I was like, "He must have just gotten those late and didn't get a chance to print them off." Yeah, I'm a huge fan of him. He's someone that if you said, "Outside of the face space, who would you model after?" It is Jimmy Fallon.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

Because what every one of us feel, a lot of people think he's a little goofy and may not love some of the games and whatever, but what people feel about him is like Jimmy's one of us who's gotten a really good break.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

Jimmy's one of us. He's like a normal guy who is hosting The Tonight Show and now he's in his house and his daughters draw the Tonight Show logo every day. And same with SNL. I was so impressed with their pivots. I mean, all they've done is pivot and still create something that makes us as the person

watching on the other side go, "Oh, they're just like me. They're just like me. We're all just doing our best."

Annie F. Downs:

I mean, I'd put up a YouTube video on Fridays called Annie's Fun List and we did one that is like a chai, how to make an iced chai. Carey, it is, you pour the concentrate in, and you pour the milk in, and you shake it. I mean, it is not-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wait, can you say that again. No.

Annie F. Downs:

Right. I'm such a food blogger, right? But here's the thing that's A. That's what I drink in my real life. And B, it is great to show people that you're normal. There's just so much posturing that happens online, so many famous people who have the ability to have these beautiful pictures taken at home and have a photographer with them all the time. And that's just not true for any of us anymore. That has never been true for me as an Annie.

Annie F. Downs:

So, there is something about the celebration of connection and normalcy right now that people really connect with. So, when we see pastors doing prayer gatherings from their living room and they're... I love that. It does not have to look... The only people that I've watched get things shipped to their houses and that kind of stuff is Carson Daly for the morning show he's on, The Today Show. Sorry.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

You're like, well he didn't even have to do that because Jimmy Fallon didn't have that. Jimmy and his wife last night got in their VW van and put the camera up in the middle and answered questions from inside of van. So, what people want, what I want, Carey, as a person who's taking in content is I want content that makes me feel like the person on the other side understands that I'm stuck and understands that I do not know how to do tomorrow, and understands that I haven't put on jeans in some time. I mean, everybody wants to feel like, you said it earlier, we've all been equalized to some degree. Now, that is a privileged position as well because we've not all been equalized.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

But the content we take in has all been equalized. There are people in our cities, in our country that are deeply hurting and have homelessness abuse it does not equalize for them unfortunately.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Correct. Correct.

Annie F. Downs:

But as far as the content we're taking in, Jimmy Fallon and I use the same pieces of equipment to get stuff out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's exactly it. He's not New York anymore. I mean, I was there at the end of February, I guess, as the virus was outbreaking but nobody really knew it. And I'm there, The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon, I'm walking right by it in just off Times Square. And I'm like, "Oh, now he's in his house."

Annie F. Downs:

Right. Now he's in his house.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And whether he's in the Hamptons or wherever he is doesn't really matter. How do you, because I want to take good use of this time. I think you're masterful at connecting with your audience. So, if you could dissect that a little bit for us, what does it look like for you to connect with your audience and for your audience to connect with you because they are loyal, and they take action?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah, they are. I'm very thankful. Part of it is that I do use the word audience, I don't ever use the word fan because I think that's super weird. And I'm like, "No, don't. Why would you do that?" Number one, I've lived with me every day of my whole life. There is nothing to fan over here. I trust. I have as behind the scenes look as anybody. It ain't that interesting.

Annie F. Downs:

So, I mean, I have built this career, and this company, and my work around my only job and to honor God and bring him glory is to be friends with people. That is what I'm supposed to do. That is what I'm asked to do by God, I think. Is like, can you just say to them what you'd say to any of your other friends?

Annie F. Downs:

Again, there's still becomes that like not a secret life but a private life. I do have a private life that we don't talk about online, but connection-wise, when I open my Instagram, when I start talking in the Insta Story, when I am writing up something on Instagram, when I'm working on books, when I'm thinking about who to have on the podcast, and when I'm doing interviews for my podcast, the very first filter is what would you say to a friend? You're talking to your friends, what are you going to say to your friends?

Annie F. Downs:

And so, sometimes it comes out really dumb and silly and I don't do it again. Because I'm like, "Well, they know me. They know me. They know that that's going to be..." And so to me the connection points, the thing that I work the hardest at, under the umbrella, because if you don't say this, someone will send you an email and I don't want to blow up your inbox.

Annie F. Downs:

Under the umbrella of bringing glory to God, because that is why I exist on this planet, is to hopefully do a little bit of work that brings him glory, is to make people feel and genuinely feel like I'm their friend. And friendship is really valuable. People love having friends. And so, my call on my life is to work really hard to make sure anyone who wants to be friends with me feels like I want that too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hmm. You're so transparent, you're so open, and you're vulnerable as we saw even earlier on in this interview, how do you-

Annie F. Downs:

Well, it's because you and I are friends and I'm telling you the truth.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. No, I so appreciate it. But Annie, you're so real. This is a leadership podcast and we're talking to leaders here, but often we can have a public face, right?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so, I try to be vulnerable and transparent as a guy who's leading, but I watch you and I watch our mutual friends, just to come to mind Lysa TerKeurst, Ann Voskamp I was messaging in this morning, and Ann is just so raw at a level of raw that I'm like, "Whoa, that is so transparent." And she's just-

Annie F. Downs:

She does it so poetically. You're like, everything she says rhymes so beautifully like it's Snow White talking, but it's something terribly tragic she's saying.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know.

Annie F. Downs:

she's amazing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I get that Ann, right?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is totally Ann.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. Where I just blow things up and cry and I'm like, "Go look at Ann, she's so much better at this."

Carey Nieuwhof:

But it feels like you play with your life, not play with your life, but you come forward, you step forward with your life. And so, that's why you can talk about here's how you make a chai tea latte, powder, water, mix it up. And then, "Yeah, I'm in day 40 of quarantine and actually today sucks," right?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Or Tuesday, you ain't cute or whatever-

Annie F. Downs:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... it happens to be. I'm curious as to any advice you would have, and I'm thinking particularly to male leaders and let's just say perhaps we're not as good at that. Not to stereotype, but what would you advise us? Where's the line? Is there a line? Where would you say, "Oh, would you guys just please be more transparent?" Coach me, coach us for a moment.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. One of the best parts about being on a teaching team with three men is we all read each other's work before we preach it on a Sunday. And so, we usually see every sermon for days as it's being built before it comes out on Sunday. And often what I get to remind them is, "This is such good content, our guys write the best content. It's such good content. Will you tell me a story of your life?" Sometimes it is just so easy to make a list and to stack the four things that that scripture told you. And it's so important, but you forget to tell me how you are changed by it.

Annie F. Downs:

And so, what I've experienced with my guy friends and with preachers that I love is, there's just always an opportunity for you to tell me why this mattered to you and why it stood out to you. Not just that it's true, that's a great-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, that's a good filter.

Annie F. Downs:

That's a great breakdown of the scripture, but after you break down the scripture, tell me why you broke it down that way? Because your mom said this when you were little and it stuck with you forever and that's why that word jumped out at you. And I think all of us, I don't think this is a man problem, but I think all of us don't want to talk about our failures from stage, or even on Instagram.

Annie F. Downs:

I still put on makeup every day, right? I'm not being the most vulnerable Annie in the world, but when you have tens of thousands of people looking at you, you're not walking out on stage without makeup. Why would I do an Insta Story without it most days? Right? And so, there is still a level to me of being professional and not being like, "I'm curled up in my bed, watch me cry." But there is a level of, "Hey, here's what I'm learning, but here's why it matters to me."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I liked that. I'd never heard anybody who counsels, preachers, communicators, so why is that important to you? Because there probably is a reason why you're bringing that forward. And if you haven't intersected with the text or the message at that level, you're probably not the right person to bring it. It's not ready.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Annie F. Downs:

That's right. That's right. That's right. I in fact did this morning, I called another buddy preacher of mine because I was reading about the persistent widow, Luke-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

... because I'm still in Luke. At the end it says, "Will God keep putting you off? No, he will show justice and quickly."

Annie F. Downs:

And I was like, "Has he been putting us off? Is that what we're supposed to pull from that?" And there is a reason that jumped out at me. And so, if I was teaching that from stage, my next move is, do you ever feel like God's keeping you from what you want on purpose? Because sometimes I wrestle with that. And here's why I'm wrestling with that this week.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Annie F. Downs:

And that doesn't feel good and I don't want to tell people that, but I know when I read that scripture today, there is a reason that pinged me is because God wanted me to ask myself, "Why do you think God sometimes keeps things from you?" And so, I have to wrestle that down. So when my friends who were teaching or even on Insta Stories or leading in some public way right now, I don't just want to know the scripture, I want to know why this scripture matters to you and why did it stop you because that didn't stop me. I didn't notice that.

Annie F. Downs:

Kevin taught last week about Joshua and he did a whole thing about how when Moses changed Joshua's name, he changed it from, I'm going to mess this up, but I think it meant you will be saved to God will save you. Or you can save to God will save you. And the power switched off of Joshua to be the one who can do the work.

Annie F. Downs:

Well, I wanted Kevin, and he did, I wanted him to tell me why that mattered to him. I would have never caught that, but I love that he caught it. And then I wanted to know why did Kevin catch that?

Carey Nieuwhof:

And on Kevin's highlight reel, you ever noticed this? Whenever he shows up on Instagram, it's always his stories that make it.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's always like we were at Chipotle or we were in the driveway shooting hoops the other day and you get this story.

Annie F. Downs:

That's right. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now, that's a good challenge. I think a lot of men, I'll just speak for a half of the planet right now, we hide behind our teaching and we hide behind our ideas.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah, and I appreciate how smart, I appreciate the work that goes into good teaching. I know I do it too. I appreciate the word that goes into good teaching. Just tell me that it moved you. Tell me you picked that scripture. Don't keep to yourself why this stood out to you because someone listening is struggling with the same thing you're struggling with but they would have never found that in scripture, but you found it for him. So, tell him you found it and then tell him why you found it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Everyone's got to find their own voice and I think a bunch of us are on Instagram tomorrow showing people how to put powder in water or milk together and making a chai tea. It's probably not going-

Annie F. Downs:

Very welcome.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... to resonate the way it does, but I'd love for you just to take one more crack at this because I think it is multi-faceted. Why do you think there is such an appetite right now for that, or for Fallon from home, or from, "Hey, look at my blanket from Target, and my \$90 mic," and you're connecting with millions of people a month. Why do you think there's such an appetite for that?

Annie F. Downs:

Well, I mean, do you have a thought of why there is?

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, I think you're so good at it. Sometimes we don't understand why we're so good at something. And so, I mean, you've given us a bunch of reasons. Okay, let me ask you this. What kind of messages do you get back from people? Whether those are direct messages, or comments on your site, or emails that you get in your inbox. What are you hearing? Because all of us have a feedback filter that we hear from and often it's good teaching or that was a great idea. But what are you hearing?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. Yeah, I am hearing that people feel less alone. That's what I'm hearing. I think this is what God set me up for a little bit, but I heard a lot in my days, in my twenties, which was most everybody's teens of being trapped at home. I heard people saying, "If you can do this, I can do this." Which is hilarious because they're like, "If you can do this, and I didn't think you could do this..."

Carey Nieuwhof:

They didn't think you were going to make it.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. Yeah. And so, I'm the leader that nobody thinks they're following. Does that make sense? No one thinks they're shaping their behavior after me, or no one goes like, "My favorite leader is Annie F. Downs." But yesterday I posted about the flowers that I bought in my house-

Carey Nieuwhof:

A powerful post.

Annie F. Downs:

... and within hours, the company was out of flowers for the week. Right? So, people won't list me on the list of most influential women in America, which is fine, but what I know is that my behavior and how I handle things seeps into people and changes what they think. It is not what they take notes on, it is what they breathe in. Does that make sense?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). It does. And I would absolutely see you as a leader. And it's really interesting because I've had this conversation with Lysa on Lysa TerKeurst's on this podcast and to some extent with Ann Voskamp, as well. And nobody would don the mantle leader. And yet to quote John Maxwell, "Leadership is influence." Clearly when they sell out of flowers for the week, there's a bit of influence going on there.

Annie F. Downs:

Right. Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And my working definition, because people go, "Am I really a leader?" I'm like, "I'll tell you what, look over your shoulder. Is there anyone following?"

Annie F. Downs:

Is there anybody? That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is there anybody following? Because there are people who like, "I'm a leader," and it's like, "I don't see anybody behind you." And not that you're getting people to follow you, you want to build them up, equip them, prepare them.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. When you said that what I thought is, for myself, what I would say is, if you look behind you, is there anyone following and how can you make their life better? That's what I'm asking.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, and that's where it's going.

Annie F. Downs:

So, when I go, "Okay, there are people back here, how can I make their life better?" Flowers, Jesus, chai, a new bag, a sporting event? And so a podcast to listen to? So, that definition rings really true to me versus me standing up and going, "Look everyone, I'm leading. Don't you see me leading?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Exactly. Because I've seen people do that-

Annie F. Downs:

Look at me lead.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... and it's like, but there's no one in the room and there's no one commenting and there's no one listening. That's not condemnation, it's just like, yeah, whether you have the title or not, when you get a million people or more dialing in going, "I just want to hear what you had for breakfast today and whether Eddie saw that show last night," right?

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah, exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's what I want to hear.

Annie F. Downs:

Exactly. Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's [crosstalk 00:52:57].

Annie F. Downs:

So, I think that's what connection feels like is when you feel connected to someone, not because they're telling you that you're leading them, but because you realize they're leading you. I'm not announcing to Instagram, you follow me, but what I am experiencing is I have to be careful about what I talk about, and what books I suggest, and what TV shows I talk about because people are watching and listening and like the things that I like. The people who follow me like the things that I like, so I tell them what I like.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. And you and I have talked about that before off mic where you and I are both very careful about what we endorse or what we talk about. Because if someone goes out and spends \$8 or \$14 or an hour on something and they're like, "Oh, that was a piece of junk," that is a misuse of that leadership and responsibility.

Annie F. Downs:

It was a little bit of a struggle for me with Tiger King because so many people were talking about it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

And I watched it and I wanted to talk about it, but what I didn't want to say is, "You should watch it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

You didn't want to endorse it.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah, I didn't want to endorse it, but I think it's a funny conversation. I mean, so I wrestled down a lot of that stuff and have voices like you or Kevin. I have voices in my life, some women that helped me. Do I talk about this publicly or not?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

Because it matters to me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's where-

Annie F. Downs:

But you're right, if you have 10 followers on Instagram, you have people that really are listening to what you're doing. We should all be paying attention. It's not just those of us who have more than 50.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, exactly. And your influence is always, I don't think it ever stays static. It's either slightly growing or it's diminishing by the way you behave and who you talk to.

Annie F. Downs:

Oh, that's interesting. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm not sure it's a static thing, whether you follower count.

Annie F. Downs:

And it's probably good that it goes both ways. It needs to go both ways. There are times where your influence needs, my influence needs to shrink back in someone's life and someone else that's a different voice at a different season of life needs to step in. And so, those of us who have that influence, when we start to see it wane, which it does. Living in Nashville helps because you watch country music stars become shooting stars-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow.

Annie F. Downs:

... where you see it go up and up and up and then you see it explode and come down. And so, it happens to everyone. It happens to everyone. You have a good album, you have a bad album, you have a good tour, you have a bad tour, you have a good book, you have a bad book. And so, even in my own life, I have to go today while I've got this amount of years, while God has trusted me with whatever today's number is that's going to tune in, then tomorrow it may go up or it may go down. But you're right, I haven't thought about it.

Annie F. Downs:

It may go up or it may go down, but God's trusted me with the exact right amount of people tomorrow as long as I'm trustworthy. And one day it'll diminish and my wave will go out into the ocean and I'll just care for the people who have my phone number. And when that day comes, if that's what God has asked me to do with my life, I hope I'm thrilled with that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I love that perspective. That is very refreshing. And what I'd love to do, because I'd love to find out who you are paying attention to. Who do you think is leading with influence really well? People are looking for new follows, new people to read, and you're navigating this season, COVID, the post pandemic, reopening America, whatever's happening by the time this thing goes live, who do you think is leading well in this season?

Annie F. Downs:

Well, I'm probably going to say all people that you really love.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, great.

Annie F. Downs:

And that you've had on or have thought about. John Mark Comer from Bridgetown Church in Portland. I feel like he's a goldmine. His books are incredible, but the way he's leading right now, the way Bridgetown Church is leading in prayer. I haven't heard another church, and that doesn't mean there aren't, I haven't heard another church that's publicly talk about, we fast on Tuesdays and asking God to remove this virus from this country. I mean, I haven't heard anybody else saying we're calling our church to fast to get rid of this thing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, I haven't either.

Annie F. Downs:

And they do a daily meditation as well in the mornings that is very compassionate and kind. I listen to it every day. So, I feel like John Mark's leading really well. There's a woman on his team named Bethany Allen who's an incredibly good communicator.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I follow her.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah, she's really interesting. She's great. Jon Tyson, of course, out of New York City or Church of the City.

Carey Nieuwhof:

New York City, yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

He's interesting because he's in the hotbed of New York. And so, he's got a perspective that's very different from mine of being tired of being home. And the other thing I love about Jon Tyson is he has done the footwork, literal, the travel footwork to figure out what brought on revivals in the history of the church and what the role of prayer is. And he's brilliant. And so, you listen to him teach, and you listen to his podcast, and you hear him on interviews. And I mean, when he was on my show, I was like, "Is this revival?" And he was like, "No, people aren't repenting enough."

Annie F. Downs:

I was like, "Oh, he knows. He knows because he's studied them all." And so, it's not revival yet. It's not revival yet. So, I'm listening to Jon Tyson, I'm listening to Jo Saxton. I think Jo leads really beautifully. She is strong but kind, and I think strong kind leaders are worth their weight in gold. You can be strong and be

too strong and be rude. You can be kind and too soft. And to find leaders who are strong and kind, I feel like is a really beautiful combination. So, those are the ones that I'm-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Those are great.

Annie F. Downs:

... those are [crosstalk 00:58:35].

Carey Nieuwhof:

The others have been on. Jo Saxton will be on-

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah, that's good.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... some point in the next few months. We just did the interview and she is an Enneagram eight.

Annie F. Downs:

Yes, she is an eight. Strong and kind. Yeah, I bet y'all liked each other a lot, huh?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Strong and kind. Oh, yeah. She's got backbone. I really respect her.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah, me too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I really do. Those are some great voices.

Annie F. Downs:

[crosstalk 00:58:56].

Carey Nieuwhof:

We'll link to all the profiles in the show notes.

Annie F. Downs:

That's been a funny thing too, Carey is that one of the things I think this is a particular Christian problem is that we do, I said this pretty early in the quarantine, but I think one of the things we have to do is limit how many pastors we listen to, purely out of like you can't be discipled by 60 men and women leaders right now. You need to pick two or three churches. If you want to watch more than just your church on Sunday, commit to two or three, send them some money. Tithe to them like they are your church and stick to them instead of watching nine one Sunday at nine the next Sunday.

Annie F. Downs:

I've found that for my own mental and spiritual health having Jo, Mark, Jon, and Jo helping lead me has been enough to keep me between the lines besides my own church, besides Cross Point.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think that's a good advice. I mean, there's so much out there right now and there's so much-

Annie F. Downs:

There just so much.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Noise. Noise.

Annie F. Downs:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. You got to pick your lanes, you got to pick your influencers and have enough quiet too to be able to discern and distill it all. I love how you're reading through the gospels. That's awesome.

Annie F. Downs:

It's great. I've never done anything like this before, but I'll send you a picture when we're done. I Googled read the gospels in a month and I found the plan, I wrote it in the back of my Bible. And so, every day I just mark off 1:20, 2:20, 3:20, 4:20. And then every month I've found, I've asked myself the whole time, "What's one thing about Jesus she didn't know?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow.

Annie F. Downs:

And so, every month there's been one little thing that stood out to me about Jesus that I didn't know. And this month, even though we aren't finished yet. There was this one, I think it's in Mark, forgive me that I don't remember, but they were talking about Jesus healing people. He had healed a deaf and mute man and everyone was astonished. And the phrasing says, "Everyone was astonished and they said, 'Jesus does all things well.'" And I was like, "Jesus does..." That is what people said about my friend. Now, I'm listening to people talk to me about my friend Jesus. And they say he does all things well. And I love that. I've just clung to that this month.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, Annie I got to tell you, every time we talk I have high expectations and you always just make it better. I don't know what that is.

Annie F. Downs:

Thank you Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This has been a fascinating conversation. Really good.

Annie F. Downs:

Thank you for what you do. We need voices like you and Jenni Catron helping lead the leaders.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thank you.

Annie F. Downs:

So, I just could not thank you enough.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I hope paradigm shifting for people. I hope people will go back and re-listen to the part about influence and how this has flattened everybody and why millions of people would tune in to you every month because I think that is a very different style of leadership and connection and influence that needs to be understood more because the whole idea of there I am on stage looking really cool. I don't know. I think that's got a shelf life. I think that's got a shelf life.

Annie F. Downs:

I think it had a shelf life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, had a shelf life, thank you.

Annie F. Downs:

I think it's expired.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Uh-huh. Yeah.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah. So, if we just change it from, how great could these people think I am to how good a friend could I be to them, will really help us. Let's just ask, how good a friend can I be to the person listening to what I'm saying? And I think when people fall in love with the people of God, they're going to fall more in love with God.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Annie if people want to track with you, it's That Sounds Fun Podcast.

Annie F. Downs:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And the repository on the internet for all things Annie F. Downs is, where do they find you?

Annie F. Downs:

AnnieFDowns.com. It's embarrassing how easy it is to find me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Amazing.

Annie F. Downs:

Annie F. Downs on all the different places, so.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. Well, till next time, Annie, thank you so much.

Annie F. Downs:

Thank you friend, I'm grateful for you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, that was a really vulnerable and honest episode. And honestly, you should just go over and check out the YouTube video version of this, which Annie so graciously allowed us to post because you'll see this is not a \$10,000 studio, this is a spare bedroom. And I just want you to know, I know we're all producing more online content. I mean, I started this podcast for under a thousand dollars. Really, you've got all the technology you probably need and it's the quality of the content, not just the quality of the gear. Do you want better gear? Sure you do, but you can start with what you've got. What a great episode. And so, head on over to YouTube if you want to see that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We also have show notes, which you can find at CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode340. And I've got a What I'm Thinking About segment coming up where I'm going to talk to you about the three kinds of leaders that I think get revealed in a crisis. So, in the meantime though, we are doing more to bring you some real time resources on how to lead through uncertainty. And I'm super excited about the next episode.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I mean, think about all we've been through. We just have Mike Todd talking about that, we've had Joel Manby, Sean Morgan's episode was amazing. And Joel Manby became the CEO of SeaWorld in the midst of their greatest crisis. He also led through the dot com crash of 2000, literally started almost on day one of the dot com crash of 2000 when he worked with a partner company of Amazon and so on and so forth. So, Joel is back on the podcast and I'll tell you, this episode's gold. Here's an excerpt.

Joel Manby:

When we're in crisis, we tend to accumulate power quickly. Now, it's true you have to make fast decisions, but if you don't delegate at the same time, we become the blocks, we become why the company can't move fast enough. And it's an absolute art, Carey, it's not a science. Because on one hand, you do have to move faster. I'm a consensus leader usually, but in a crisis I go to a majority vote because you just got to move fast.

Joel Manby:

But at the same time, you just can't afford to pull all the power and because then people don't feel empowered and that has a much more destructive behavior, but mostly not being able to move fast enough.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Subscribers you get that all for free. Joel is super transparent. That's coming up on May 19th when we release that. Plus, I just finished up interviews with Scott Harrison from charity: water who's got a lot to say about what he thinks is next. Ian Morgan Cron, Paula Faris. Oh, so many more.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Guys, thank you so much. Listenership is through the roof on this podcast, so thank you for sharing, thank you for subscribing, leaving ratings and reviews. And now it's time for What I'm Thinking About. And I'm thinking about three different kinds of leaders. This segment is brought to you by Generis. Make sure you check out their new ebook, *Your 2020 Budget Just Blew Up...Now What?*, by going to [generis.com/carey2020](https://www.generis.com/carey2020).

Carey Nieuwhof:

And yeah, speaking of thriving in different kinds of organizations, I would love for you to take this little quiz I put together at [willithrive.com](https://www.willithrive.com) or text WilliThrive to 33777, and here's why. There are three different kinds of organizations, and I want to walk you through some of the thinking behind that quiz because we want to come alongside leaders and help you become a thriver, not a survivor. And certainly we do not want you to fail in the midst of all this uncertainty that is upon us and coming our way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, I think really what happens when you go through uncertainty or crisis is there's three kinds of leaders. The first type of leader I would call is like a frozen leader. And we all felt that, listen, when March hit, it was like, "Oh my goodness, this can't be happening." Frozen leaders do not make it. They just don't make it. They say things to themselves like, "I can't believe this is happening. All this is out of my control. Everybody is impacted by this, there's nothing I can do." And they don't really act. So, that's one kind of leader.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The second kind of leader is a hesitant leader. So hesitant leaders, they're not frozen, but they really haven't got all the characteristics of the leaders who are really going to thrive in uncertainty and crisis. And the thought bubble of a hesitant leader sounds like, "When will things go back to normal? We made a bunch of changes, so let's just lock in. Do we have to pivot again? Like really, can we just do this for a little bit longer?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

And those leaders may actually survive because they will adapt a little bit, but they're not going to thrive and then the demise might come down the road. And then the third type of leader is what I call an agile leader. And I really think in crisis, agility is ability and flexibility is a superpower. An agile leader has a very different thought bubble. And so, the question is, which kind of leader are you? Right? And that's a really good question to ask.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, that's why I put that little quiz together, that assessment. And we were going to call it an assessment, but an assessment always sounds like, oh, I don't have 20 minutes to do an assessment. No, this is two minutes. They're carefully thought through questions. I built the quiz to help you determine what kind of leader are you. Are you an agile leader, a hesitant leader or a frozen leader? And that has a predictive quality for how your organization is going to do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, I would love for you to take the assessment, the little quiz. Head on over to willithrive.com or just text the words WilliThrive to 33777. And yeah, I'll share a little bit more about that in upcoming episodes. And of course, all of this happens at CareyNieuwhof.com. If you can't spell that, just go to LeadLikeNeverBefore.com, takes you to the same place. And we have all kinds of crisis leadership resources for you, including some stuff I'm really excited about.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, thanks so much for listening. I can't wait for the next episode. And I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before.

Announcer:

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