

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 342 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Today's podcast is brought to you by Pro Media Fire. You can book a free digital strategy session today at ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth, and by Craft & Character. I'll be speaking, along with some other church communicators, in an interactive dialog you can participate in June 4th by going to CraftAndCharacter.org.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well my guest today is Nicky Gumbel, and Nicky's an absolute delight. He's a former barrister attorney turned vicar and he leads Holy Trinity Brompton and also Alpha worldwide. Alpha is something that over 20 million Christians have been through and millions have found faith in. Nicky talks today about how he's changed his mind about online ministry. He was someone who really believed, they never had online church, and they're one of the largest and fastest growing churches in all of England, and he didn't believe in online church and he wasn't really convinced Alpha could be anything but an in-person event. Of course with all the events that have happened, they had to go online or chose to go online, and it totally changed his mind about what God can do in online ministry.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you're one of those skeptics, and I've run into quite a few of them to be honest with you, who thinks that the only way you can really do ministry, real ministry, is in person or real services are in person, you're going to love this episode. Nicky is the vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton, a Church of England congregation, they hold 11 Sunday services on five sites. Alpha has now been in 169 countries and he is also the author of my favorite Bible devotional, The Bible in One Year. He and his wife Pippa run that at TheBibleInOneYear.org. Nicky read law at Trinity Cambridge, yes the Cambridge. I love how the British say this. I read law. I didn't take law, I didn't study law, I read it, which is actually there's a whole academic history behind that, but anyway he studied theology at Oxford and practiced as a barrister for a number of years and he's written many, many books. I'm so thrilled to have him on the podcast today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, if you are looking for an event to really change your communication style, including how to speak online effectively, how to speak to an empty room, but probably more importantly, how to grow your character along with your platform, Steve Carter, Hosanna Wong, Dharius Daniels, Sean Morgan, and I are hosting something called Craft & Character. It is not a talking head online conference, which you have seen ad nauseam. This is a dialog and you're invited, and we'll be taking live questions, taking you behind the scenes and you can register for it at CraftAndCharacter.org. You'll want to do that quickly because it's coming up on June 4th. Then Pro Media Fire realizes that the future is digital, and even if you can resume in-person services let's be honest, to go back on what you've got online right now is probably a mistake, and if you're not convinced well just hang on for the interview.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But you're saying, "Well Carey yeah, but budget's tight. What do I do?" Well head on over to ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth because the Church Growth program provides your church with a digital coach, a creative team, a web team, and a social team for less than the cost of a staff hire. Your church can have an entire team of professionals, including digital strategists, and a creative framework that will help your church grow online. The strategy session with them is free, so book it now at ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth. Before we jump into my conversation with Nicky, you know by now that some organizations are going to thrive in the new normal and others won't.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think pivoting is the key to strength because in the current uncertainty, flexibility is ability and agility is a super power. I've got this program, which changes tomorrow, the price goes up midnight tomorrow, called The 30 Day Pivot. It's a framework, it's a simple three-step process that I will walk you and your team through, and it will position you to really be able to make decisions quickly and to move quickly on an ongoing basis, with or without a crisis. Called The 30 Day Pivot. Same framework I've used to pivot the podcast, to provide a free course to leaders, and we've moved things under this framework as quickly from idea to execution in 10 days. It's a simple framework. If you haven't checked it out yet go to The30DayPivot.com. Check it out now, the price goes up tomorrow. We have some very, very special introductory pricing at The30DayPivot.com.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, without further ado, I am so excited to have Nicky Gumbel on the podcast. Here's our conversation. Nicky, welcome to the podcast. I have been excited for this moment for a long time, and I'm so glad you took the time to be with us today.

Nicky Gumbel:

Oh thank you Carey. It's always lovely to see you and great to reconnect with you, even if it is by Zoom.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, even if it is by Zoom. Last year we were at Leadership Conference and had the tremendous opportunity to have tea with you and Pippa at the vicarage, I love that, that's a great term, at Holy Trinity Brompton. Here we are by Zoom and the world is slowly reopening. I would love to start by asking how has this crisis, that we're all in, impacted you and Pippa and your team? What is the personal impact been for you?

Nicky Gumbel:

I think it's mixed. I think for most people there's a mixed response at one level. Pippa had lung cancer in November so she had an operation to have some cancer removed from her lung, and we're not as young as we'd like to think we look or like we feel. As she is in the vulnerable category and I think then when we heard about his lung disease... I think the initial reaction was fear, what happens if she gets this? My day starts with a Bible in one year, firstly I want to hear from God so I read the Bible and I love that. Then I go ahead and I do a walk around our local park. That's how I pray. That's the best way to pray. Just as I started to pray I don't often feel I really hear... It isn't the audible voice of God but it's as close as it gets to that, saying, "Why are you so afraid? Who have you by worrying can add one hour to your life." It was a real challenge.

Nicky Gumbel:

Then I realized that that of course comes from the storm when the disciples are in the boat and the huge storm comes up and Jesus says, "Where is your faith?" The actual words was where is your faith? In that passage it's why are you so afraid, but the words that I actually sensed at that moment is where is your faith? It was a real challenge to me to realize that... I spoke about choose faith over fear, and it was really preaching to myself. I think that's what we have to do in times like that, we choose faith over fear and we have to... We can either look at the storm or keep looking at the news, which is the storm and then you feel fear rises, or you keep looking to Jesus who is asleep in the boat, he wasn't worried. Jesus is able to calm the storm. As you know, sometimes he calms the storm and sometimes he calms us in the storm.

Nicky Gumbel:

That's been a chance for us personally to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Then I think at the bigger level, at the what's going on in our world, it's horrible, it's terrible. I was on the phone with a pastor friend who his father is on a ventilator right now. I have members of our congregation have been very sick. We have one death, which we don't know... Of a 24 year old which could be COVID-19, we don't know, but we have other friends who've been on ventilators. I think all of us know people who's relations have died through this. I was with one yesterday whose grandfather died with COVID, so it's horrible and an evil disease. But at the same time, when you think about it, God took the greatest tragedy in the history of the world was the cross, the crucifixion of the son of God, but God used that and turned it into the greatest trial.

Nicky Gumbel:

God can use any kind of evil for good, and I think that God is using this in many, many different ways for good. One of those is getting people's attention.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, we're going to talk about some of the good things that have come out of this, but I appreciate that and we have a very close friend who is also in that vulnerable category and like Pippa, not elderly at all or anything but yeah I understand that. And London, we had your good friend Ken Costa on recently on the show, and he was still in deep quarantine. London has been particularly hard hit. For those who may be new to you, and I know so many leaders who know exactly who you are, but you're right in the heart of London. I mean you can walk to Hyde Park, you're a great follow on Instagram, I love it when you show me pictures of Hyde Park, you're a five minute walk away from that. Buckingham Palace is just down the road, etc., etc., so you're right in the heart of London.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You have led for a number of decades in the church, but this is the first time... And you have numerous campuses, so for those who don't know Holy Trinity Brompton, I've been to a few of your locations, it's amazing to see the renewal work God is doing through Holy Trinity Brompton and through the churches you support and plant. I'd love to know what your personal reaction was that first moment when you realized we are not going to be able to meet in person. That was unprecedented, this has never happened in any of our lifetimes.

Nicky Gumbel:

Yes, for us it was... The month of March felt like a year or 10 years actually. Every day seemed like a month and so much happened, but we had one Sunday where we realized we've got to go online. I think

it was the 12th of March, the day that I preached on choose faith over fear. We were still in the church but only with a very small percentage of our congregation still coming and we went online for the first time. I think that Sunday was a different animal, but it was still something... It's like the difference between a horse and a camel really, but then we went to something that was completely different. We couldn't even film in the church... You could say that was a different type of horse, then next Sunday really was a camel because we filmed in the church but we had no one there at all and that was very different, that was the camel I guess.

Nicky Gumbel:

Then the following Sunday we couldn't even get into the church so we were filming from home, that's more like a giraffe. The format changed so fast, and yet we had to pivot and actually there's been a bad side of course with this horrible virus, but there's also been quite an exciting side of it. The pivoting, the entrepreneurial, the creativity I love that side of it and the fact that... Actually in some ways it's so much easier. We do one service on Sunday. We used to do 11 or 12 services on Sunday on five different campuses, and I would be on my bike in between the sites. For many years I was doing that. It was complicated. It meant that I couldn't really preach because it was too complicated to do it. Whereas now we have one service, it's so simple. We spend all week in creativity and producing something and it's really fun, it's really interesting.

Nicky Gumbel:

At the Leadership Conference, Craig Groeschel was one of our speakers, and I said to Craig, "How many times do you preach a year?" He said, "Something like 46 times a year." Then he said to me, "How many times do you preach a year?" I said, "I preach twice a year but I'm trying to cut down." That was how it was before, but now I feel I need to speak to our... To reassure our congregation and also we've decided to pivot our services to people outside of the church. This is what we've discovered. A whole lot of people who would never go to church are watching online, so my friends from the gym and one of the things I miss is my friends from the gym because I had a whole group of friends totally outside the church, friends I played squash with, friends that I've known for years, but they've never come to church.

Nicky Gumbel:

I think now quite a few of them are watching. In fact I bumped into one of them. We're allowed to exercise and I went past one of them who was running near here and he said, "Oh, ever since your first service when you invited people into your home I've been watching every week." I thought, "Wow, this is amazing." So many people. Trisha Neal, who's the President of Alpha, she came to faith in 1993 on an Alpha course and she's a tennis player and she plays every Saturday with her friends. Right away she said to her friends, "You must come to Alpha, you must come and see." She couldn't get them to church, she couldn't get them to Alpha. When we went online they started watching on Sunday. When she asked them to Alpha she said it was like dominoes going up, they all came. We run Alpha morning and evening every Wednesday now and we start two new courses every week because there's so many people who want to do it, and she has a group on Wednesday morning of nine of her tennis friends, all of whom now come.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Which she could never get before.

Nicky Gumbel:

No, never get that before. Plus another one, one of the friends has asked a friend so there's 10 guests and the friend who brought her to Alpha in the first place, she and her friend are running this group with 12 of them. The 10 guests and the two hosts, so there's extraordinary opportunity. It's so much easier to... It's a bridge I think. Now I've got a friend in Manchester who's an amazing pastor with a church called Audacious, and he was telling me they've been online for five years. What they found was every week they were getting on average 85 new people, and when he talks to those 85 new people nearly all of them had been watching online before they came to church. People can look and see, they can watch the service, they can see whether they like it, and get comfortable with it, and then they can start coming to church. We would never go back to not having services online.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Did you have an online presence prior to that Nicky?

Nicky Gumbel:

We had no online presence.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You had to attend.

Nicky Gumbel:

I didn't approve of onlines. Well it's that I didn't approve, I didn't disapprove of other people doing it, but I didn't approve of us doing it because I felt we would be getting people... It might stop people going to church or even stop people going to their local church because they would think, "Oh, we'll just watch online in New Zealand," rather than going to their church in New Zealand. I was so wrong. What this has shown me is I've been so wrong about so many things, and I'm learning, my ideas have changed so much because I simply hadn't seen all the benefits of being online. I'd only seen the downside.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can we unpack that a little bit? What have you changed your mind about in the last few months? What's this done to what you're now thinking about God would use?

Nicky Gumbel:

Well I would never go back to not having Sunday online. Partly because of my friend who has 85 new people every week because they started watching online, but more than that I do a podcast with my daughter on faith and equality and it's really about gender, equality, it's about ethnicity, race, but it's also about disability. We did our first podcast with someone who's exactly the same age as my daughter. Until she was 18 she was very active in sport, very gifted sports person and training, and wanted to be a doctor. Then she got this connective tissue disorder which has meant that she has been for the last 14 years she's been in and out of hospital. She literally cannot leave home.

Nicky Gumbel:

She said to me on this podcast, "Thank you so much for your services online because for the first time I can come and be part of them." I said to her, "Sally, if it's only for you we will never stop doing services online." This is for Sally and I will never stop doing services online. I hadn't seen that there were all these

people who want to be in church, we're not depriving them of going to some other church, they can't get anywhere, even with all the things that we have now. Disabled lifts, ramps, etc., they still can't get there if they have a serious disability as Sally has. Yes, we will continue to do services online even if it's just for her.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you unpack a little bit more of your logic pre-COVID as to... Because you're not alone. There's a lot of people. I've had so many conversations with church leaders who are like, "We're not going to do online because we want people to be there in person," and then I do want to spend some time unpacking Alpha online because I think that probably rocked you even a little bit more than that. Let's unpack the old thinking a little bit more. I'd love to know, in your mind, why you kept telling your team, "No, we're not going to do that, we're not going to go there."

Nicky Gumbel:

Well I don't think we'd ever discussed it to be perfectly honestly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay.

Nicky Gumbel:

I don't think we'd every really talked about doing it online. In my mind I wasn't interested in it. But with Alpha we had talked about it and I had... Three and a half years ago we had a new CEO. We never really had a CEO before of Alpha, but Mathew Neville has arrived as the new CEO of Alpha.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Nicky I'm sorry to interrupt, but for those who don't know what Alpha is, if we're going to go there, can you give us the thumbnail of what Alpha is. Most of our listeners are American and Alpha is taking over in America but it's much more experienced globally. Just so that everyone knows what's up.

Nicky Gumbel:

Alpha's an opportunity to explore the meaning, the purpose of life. It's designed for people who don't go to church, people who wouldn't call themselves Christians, and the basic format is people come for a meal, they hear a talk, they have coffee, and they go into small groups. The talks are on who is Jesus, why did he die, how can I have faith, Bible, prayer, guidance, there's a weekend about the Holy Spirit, talks about how you can make the most of the rest of your life, talks about what is church, and so on. It's a basic introduction to faith.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How many weeks is it now, including the weekend away, the actual retreat?

Nicky Gumbel:

Like 15 sessions. Four of them are on the weekend.

Carey Nieuwhof:

15 weeks of in-person attendance.

Nicky Gumbel:

11 weeks really. It's 11 weeks with a weekend in the middle. It takes 10 weeks, 10 weeks and one day to do the whole course.

Carey Nieuwhof:

An Alpha evening is a three hour event with dinner and-

Nicky Gumbel:

Normally you would arrive at 7:00 for food and it would finish at 9:15. Two and a quarter hours of which the first part is supper, then we have a little bit of singing, and a talk for 25 minutes, and then discussion for somewhere around 45 minutes to an hour.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're committing the whole evening. You don't drop in and drop out?

Nicky Gumbel:

No, no and originally in our own local church and we found we were getting so many people from outside of the church coming to faith in Jesus, and then it spread. That was my background was I wasn't a Christian, I was an atheist and I encountered Jesus. That changed my life so I wanted as many people as possible to have the experience that I had of encountering Jesus, so hence my enthusiasm for it. I tried so many different ways to introduce my friends and most of them had been fairly unproductive, whether it was knocking on doors or questionnaires we started off with first question what did you have for breakfast, last question would you like to ask Jesus into your life? It wasn't massively fruitful. What I found out though was we had all these people coming to faith and lives being changed and the church being changed because average age 27, vast majority of the guests aged between 18 and 35, and suddenly we had all these young people piling into the church, encountering Jesus, being filled with the spirit, getting excited about Jesus, asking their friends on the next course.

Nicky Gumbel:

That was back in October 1990 and it grew and it spread then to every country in the world, and then we put it onto film, and then we made a film series, and it's continued to grow in every part of the church. Fastest growing now probably in the Catholic church but also running every type of Pentecostal church, Hillsong run it... I don't know any type of church or denomination that is... Of course not every church will run it but every different... It's not like the Presbyterians won't do it or the Baptist won't do it or the Methodist or the Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox run Alpha. In every part of the church of Jesus Christ and that was an astonishing thing. We never planned that, it was something that... Over the years we've had to work a little bit on the material to make sure there's nothing that isn't acceptable both of Catholic Church and the Salvation Army. But basically because as it existed was acceptable, there were only tiny tweaks that we needed to make. It spread around the world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Pre-COVID how many people had taken Alpha over the last almost 30 years?

Nicky Gumbel:

Well I mean it's way over 20 million that we know of. I mean some countries we don't have any data because it's better not to.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This has become a global phenomena, yeah.

Nicky Gumbel:

It's probably in every country in the world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thank you so much Nicky, that brings everybody onto the same page with what Alpha is, which it's amazing. I've been on Alpha, I've led Alpha, it's incredible and we've seen millions of people come to faith in Christ, which is exceptional. Then COVID hits and you can't meet in person, so you're in lockdown. What happens next?

Nicky Gumbel:

The time when people stopped being willing to come and be in an environment with other people. We had to move it online, but we only had two weeks left of the course we run between Christmas and Easter. We went online and I was surprised how well it worked. It worked, but we already knew those people, they'd become our friends over the last nine weeks. In a sense it wasn't surprising that you could still have the connections. What I didn't know is is it going to work with a group of people who've never met each other before? It was with some trepidation, but we had no alternative we had to go online.

Nicky Gumbel:

Now the next course was due to start on the 13th of May but we finished the course six weeks ago. We said, "Let's start straight away. Let's not wait." The reason you had to wait until the 13th of May is to get the team together, to organize the food, to have everyone in one place, etc., etc., but we'd looked on, none of that applied. We said, "Okay, we'll start... Alpha ends this Wednesday, we'll start the next Wednesday." We will start morning and evening with anyone who wants to come and we'll run a youth Alpha at the same time. Then every Wednesday following we'll start two new courses.

Nicky Gumbel:

We still had one week to go before we hit the May the 13th date.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes, yeah as we're recording this, true.

Nicky Gumbel:

And already, I don't know what the figure is now but a week ago when I last heard, 1,592 people had registered for our Alpha course. Now there are Alpha courses running all across the country and all around the world, but for our own one we have never had 1,592 people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What would you typically get if you were doing this physical as you were planning, what would a typical Alpha have been?

Nicky Gumbel:

[crosstalk 00:26:25] people. We do get 600 or 700 guests typically and we get the biggest course is... You might have 1,000 people maximum in the one in the fall in September course.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You've seen 50% growth immediately at a time where you wouldn't normally do it.

Nicky Gumbel:

At least that because we've still got another few days to go. I'm sure it's way past 1,592 now because there are people who [crosstalk 00:26:51]-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah 1,592 you're right, so it's more than double, sorry more than double.

Nicky Gumbel:

Already more than doubled yeah, way more than doubled where it would be at this stage. I'm always in a small group. My 90th small group in a row, Pippa and I, 90th small group in a row.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a thing that blew me apart because you think about something that's impacted... Blew me away I should say, not blew me apart but blew me away. 20 million people globally and I assumed that you probably used to do Alpha in the 90s or early 2000s, but you and Pippa, I think when we met last year in London you were on your what consecutive Alpha? It was incredible. How many have you done personally?

Nicky Gumbel:

Well this is our 90th. It's our first online but our 90th course in a row. Those 1,592 people will be divided... 10 of those will be with two hosts and two helpers, so we're the helpers in the group and actually in our group we've got a total of 16 people in this group. First night what is astonishing is only one of those people would be on the course but for COVID-19. All the others said, "I'm here because I've got more time. I'm here because I'm starting to think about some of the big questions. I'm here because it's online." There's a mother, a young mother, she's got a two year old and a three month old. She would never have turned up at the church, so we've got all these people who would never have done Alpha but for COVID-19, and also we'd never done Alpha if it wasn't online. That's what is fascinating me.

Nicky Gumbel:

Mathew Neville, when he started as the CEO way back in... Three and a half years ago, he said to me, "My three priorities are governance, finance, and digital." I said to him, "Governance really important, finance really important," and I just didn't really comment on digital because I felt that's going to be a waste of your time but you're the new CEO I can't interfere in what you want to do because I don't want to disempower you, so I didn't actually say anything but in my heart I thought you were wrong. But

actually he was right and I could not have been more wrong. Because he has built a platform so that this can run right across the world. What we're hearing now is stories all across the world where the numbers are way up on anything they've done previously.

Nicky Gumbel:

In fact Jon Tyson in New York is starting a new course everyday. He's got so many people registering. This is not just about London or about HTB, this is about churches all around the UK but also all around the world. Everyone is finding this factor that they're getting more people. The numbers are up, but then it works so much better online. I mean this is totally mystifying to me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because wasn't part of the meal and the physical presence... I've heard you cast vision for Alpha and you're like, "You have to have the meal," right?

Nicky Gumbel:

Yeah, exactly. That's why I said it won't work online, I couldn't imagine it working online. Yes, you don't have the meal together but that's a disadvantage, but that disadvantage is more than outweighed by all the advantages. What are the advantages of Alpha online? Everyone's in their own home, they're relaxed, they've got their own cup of tea they've made just how they like it. They're sitting on their own sofa, they don't have to travel, they don't have to get on public transport or drive to a venue. Most of us run it in a home, we run it in the church because of the numbers, but most of them run at home. That's still a barrier, we've got two Muslims in our group, really hard for them to arrive at a church. You haven't got to travel. At the end of the evening instead of starting at 7:00 starts at 7:30. Instead of ending at 9:15 it ends at 9:00. It's shorter, and when you end they don't have to get on a bus or a tube to get home or get in a car and drive home, they're home.

Nicky Gumbel:

It's so relaxed, and if they don't like it all they have to do is leave the Zoom call. Press leave meetings, that's all they have to do and they're out of it. It's so much easier for them, it's so much more accessible for them. Then the conversation works better. I don't know whether you do this in the courses but we always play the name game to learn everybody's name. We just play this where you can learn everyone's name. You don't have to do that, as you know with the Zoom, your name comes up, Carey comes up. They can say, "As Carey was saying, that was such an interesting point Carey made."

Carey Nieuwhof:

I never thought about that, that is so true.

Nicky Gumbel:

Right from day one they're using each other's names, and even with the name game they were never confident enough that they'd remember the name to say it. Whereas with Zoom they can look at the screen and they can see the name and they can use each other's names, and that forms a connection. Then there is this extraordinary thing, which again I would never have predicted. In fact I would have predicted the exact opposite. They're more open online than they are in person.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Nicky Gumbel:

Right from day one people were being honest, open. I don't know what it is. Whether it's less threatening because you don't think you'll necessarily see them again or what it is but they were right from the beginning saying I'm narcotics anonymous or I'm doing this or this is the... Talking very openly about their personal circumstances. Therefore the relationships within the group formed so quickly, and the questions, I mean it was amazing. The first night the questions they asked. We always go around the first night and we say, "If it turned out there was a God after all and you could ask one question, what question would you ask?" This is the question I'd ask, "God, where on earth have you been? Why have you allowed all this to happen?" Then what happens when we die? Will I see my grandmother? Will we meet again? Then what's the point of all this pain and suffering? What's its purpose? What are we to learn from it? I mean they were such profound questions.

Carey Nieuwhof:

They went deep right session one, session two.

Nicky Gumbel:

Yeah, I mean the questions were so... In fact I then took those as the titles of my next two talks. I took the first question, God where on earth have you been as to cover that subject of why has God allowed this? Also the questions about what happens when we die? Will I see my grandmother? Good Friday I did God where on earth have you been? Answer, hanging on a cross. Will I see my grandmother Easter, resurrection, we will meet again in the air, we will be reunited. I mean every small group, as you know Carey, is endlessly fascinating and enriched by these extraordinary conversations about the most important questions, which they don't get the chance to ask in any other setting. You can't go down... It's hard, where do you do it? After a football match or whatever or soccer or baseball or whatever, say what happens when we die? You don't get to ask those questions.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well and you've got I mean decades of experience and personally 90 groups under your belt so you've actually got some good A/B comparisons on your hands. Couple of questions for you to drill down on that because that is one of the chief objections I hear all the time to pastors and church leaders who are resistant to go online or frankly business leaders who think you have to be in the room to make an impact. When would typically that level of questioning come up in a physically present Alpha? Would that be halfway through the course, would that be toward the end? When would those questions come up? Then the other thing I would ask, the sub-question under that, is do questions this deep typically come up in person Alpha? Just curious to compare the two.

Nicky Gumbel:

Well the questions asked the first night are... I mean they're not so dissimilar from the questions that would be asked. It's not so much that the questions are different, but the level of openness and willingness to talk openly. Also the drop out rate. We've only lost one person so next Wednesday will be week seven and then we'll have the weekend and the weekend will be... I don't know how that's going to work because the weekend we're going to do in two and a half hours on a Saturday morning and that's still to be... You'll have to ask me in two weeks time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I will, I will, we'll find out.

Nicky Gumbel:

I don't know, I have no idea, but all I know is that the weekend we pray for people to experience the Holy Spirit. I've discovered from Sunday online because I pray that prayer every Sunday online come Holy Spirit, and I know that the Holy Spirit is not surprised by COVID-19, nor is the Holy Spirit limited by distance. We pray that prayer come Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit comes in people's homes. People will get healed on our Alpha weekend, people will experience the love of God powerfully through the Holy Spirit in their hearts on the weekend, that I'm confident of.

Nicky Gumbel:

I don't know how the details will work because we haven't done it yet, and I don't really like to talk... There's a verse in 1 Kings 21, which I often think about, which says he who puts his armor on should not boast like him who takes it off. I talk about what's happened, I'm not going to say what's going to happen because I don't know.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right, that's fair. That's up to God, yeah.

Nicky Gumbel:

All I can tell you is the course online works brilliantly. We've only lost one person at week six.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, so normally you have a little bit of a dropout rate like a lot of people do?

Nicky Gumbel:

Yeah, I mean you have anything from... I've had a group where last night it's just me left. I think I've even lost Pippa by then. That was it, total-

Carey Nieuwhof:

But I wonder if that is, like you mentioned, some really practical things that you don't think about but it's childcare, it's traffic, it's I'm tired after work, I got to leave my house, I'm not feeling great. I wonder because we always think, "Oh, was the content bad or was this bad," but there's an awful lot of life issues that do tend to get in the way.

Nicky Gumbel:

Yeah, it's not just that we've only lost one person but the attendance rate each evening has been far higher than it would be on a normal Alpha course.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Nicky Gumbel:

Last week we had the one person who I think has dropped out, although you never know. He came the first two weeks and we haven't seen him since, whereas I'm assuming he's dropped out, he may not have done. Sometimes that happens and then they come back on week seven or eight and surprise us. It would appear that one has dropped out, but there was one who didn't come last week, one of the ones who are from a Muslim faith but she sent a note saying she couldn't make it but she had watched the talk online. She was able to watch the talk, which is why and how should I pray, and she sent in her comments on it. She said she loved the bit about the people's determining... Sorry it wasn't the prayer, it was one on the Bible last week. The week before was on prayer. It was the one on why and how should I read the Bible. She loved the talk basically and she said why she loved the talk.

Nicky Gumbel:

It was amazing, and I think that's the thing again because normally we'd have live talks, this time we're using the Alpha film series and I think that makes it also a lot easier. It standardizes it and it means if people can't be there for some reason they can watch the material and therefore they can catch up with the others.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What you're discovering with online is that connection is deeper, people are calling each other by name. What you're discovering is people are open a lot sooner, engagement seems to be deeper, which is a deep critique of online. It's like, "Well are you really watching, are you really listening," and people appear to be and your dropout rate is lower than decades of experience across thousands of venues, and that's really fascinating. I also heard you talk with Shaila Visser, our mutual friend, a little bit about something happening with the marriage course. You also have the Alpha marriage course and marriage has been a big subject. Things are not going particularly well, and when you're in lockdown it all gets revealed. Can you tell us a little bit about what's happening with the marriage course?

Nicky Gumbel:

Yeah, so the marriage course is designed for anyone who's married basically. It's not just for people's whose marriage are struggling.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right, right, right, yeah.

Nicky Gumbel:

It's for everybody. We've done it before in a different version of it and I've always said to our congregation I recommend everybody does it. Actually Pippa and I are going to do it again. In fact we started this morning. We did the first session of the marriage course when it was released, and it was fantastic, we absolutely loved it. It's a bank holiday here in England today so that gave us the opportunity to do it this morning and then this evening we're going to do the second session. Designed to be done once a week, but we were a bit behind so we decided to catch up.

Nicky Gumbel:

The marriage course, it's a seven week course on communication, forgiveness, in-laws, finances, sex, it's all the issues that any marriage can be enriched in these areas. Nicky and Sila Lee have perfected it, millions of people, I don't know maybe a couple of million people have done it around the world and they just completed the film series, the new film series of the marriage course. Typically they would get

80 to 100 couples, again it runs in churches all over the UK, all around the world, but on the out course typically they would have 80 to 100 couples. At the last count they have over 5,000 couples in the course.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Nicky Gumbel:

It makes sense doesn't it? You're in lockdown, you're locked in with your husband or your wife and you can either argue more or you can do the marriage course.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right, right.

Nicky Gumbel:

Enrich your marriage. Over 5,000 couples on our course, let alone the ones that are running different places, different countries are doing it. They also run a pre-marriage course and they've got 500 couples on that. It's amazing to see, again the way that online makes it so much easier for people. Pippa and I could never have done the marriage course because it's a Monday night and our Monday nights are always church meetings of one sort or another. We could not ever have done the marriage course, but right now, because it's online, we can do it. We absolutely loved it this morning, we had a great time doing it. We're already looking forward to doing sessions two to seven.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We got a few more questions for you Nicky. I'd love to toggle back to church online, HTB online at your locations. Ken Costa and I tuned in on one or two services after Ken mentioned it to me but you were doing some different experimentation with that. Do you want to talk about what you're learning two months into church online?

Nicky Gumbel:

Well we are just at the start. I mean our friends who run Audacious, Glyn and Sophia Barrett they've been doing it for five years and they're way down the track. We're just starting. This is what I've learned so far. We've had services that are as short as 42 minutes and we've had one that was an hour and 10 minutes. My own feeling now is we're pitching at under an hour, but not that much under an hour. Around about 55 minutes in length. Second thing I think we've learned-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wait, what's underneath that 55 minutes in length?

Nicky Gumbel:

It's nothing, there's no scientific data, it's just I think we felt the 42 minutes was too short, people were saying that we settled down to go to church and it ended after 42 minutes, and an hour and 10 minutes I think that's-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Just drags a little bit, yeah.

Nicky Gumbel:

I didn't find it drag, people didn't say it dragged, but I felt actually... Last week we were 59 minutes and I felt that is exactly right, maybe 55, 59, just under an hour. Second thing is we tried having 15 minutes of worship and we tried having virtually no worship and my own feeling is you need about three songs of worship and not all together. You need them split up. Actually the talk this Sunday will only be six minutes long, but we've tried seven minutes, 25 minutes. I think we'll probably pitch at 12 to 15 minutes for the input.

Nicky Gumbel:

Then I think you need to have lots of different things. We have a feature on love your neighbor because we pivoted in five different ways after the lockdown, so we pivoted to Sunday online as being the priority and aiming it totally at people outside of the church. We decided there'll be enough material out there for people who were going to church but we were going to pitch it to people who don't go to church. That's our Sundays online. Alpha online was the second thing, we pivoted to that. Third thing we pivoted to was Love Your Neighbor, a practical response. To feed the setup food banks, to deliver food to people who couldn't get food, to deliver medicines to people who couldn't get medicines. Make sure that people who were isolated got regular phone calls. To make sure that doctors and nurses who were working 12 hour shifts had hot food delivered to the hospitals.

Nicky Gumbel:

We setup an initiative called Love Your Neighbor, and with all our church plants and we got a lot of church plants around London and across the country, and we're all running this initiative and we're literally hundreds of thousands of meals and connections across. That was another way in which we pivoted. Then we also pivoted to do stuff for years and then to empower the congregation. In part of our service every week is an update on what's happening with Love Your Neighbor. This Sunday I'm going to read a letter from a 49 year old man who's disabled who said that he was so desperate because he'd run out of food, he was drinking water and sucking the juice out of old tea bags, that's all he had left. He'd rung all the different organizations and everybody, every phone call he made they passed him on to someone else.

Nicky Gumbel:

Eventually he rang the police and the police contacted one of our church plants in Preston where we just planted a church. Because they're doing this, they went to where they keep all the food that they're delivering and they had every item he needed and he needed very specialized things because he was disabled. They put all those things and then they asked him would you like some milk? He wept, he said, "I never thought I'd get that." He said, "I thought I'd been forgotten and I thought I was going to die alone." You think if it was just for that guy this is so worthwhile to reach these people who are alone. We feature each week in our service, I read the letter about that guy, and then we'll have a report from some of the people, people who are getting their medicines or chemists who are saying thank you so much that you're helping us to deliver our medicines to people who can't reach them.

Nicky Gumbel:

This Sunday's going to be particular devoted to Loving Your Neighbor, so we always have a feature on that and then I always do an interview. This Sunday I'm interviewing a couple who are in one of our

church locations is on what I think they call in America... What do we call them? We call them estates. It's urban projects, on a-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah project yeah.

Nicky Gumbel:

Project, so he and his wife have gone to live on a project. Actually he was born on a project. His father jumped off the tower of the Worlds End Estate when he was six, committed suicide and he thought he had absolutely no future, his ambition was to stock shelves in a supermarket but he couldn't get a job. Through something that we setup on his own at that project, he encountered Jesus and then he came to work at the church as a verger, which is like a janitor. He did that for six or seven years. I said to him, because he's an outstanding guy and he married someone who was working as my PA, who was a phenomenal young woman. Now they are getting ordained in the Church of England. He's going to be a Church of England vicar. He's two-thirds of the way through his training. He's 30 and a phenomenal, phenomenal guy.

Nicky Gumbel:

They are living on this project, they're living right next to the church. The house is attached to the church and he's been living there now for two years. That church has grown. It had 13 people when he started and it's now has about 100 people. When this reopens they will not be able to get the people in the building because they are reaching... Every Thursday they're delivering this food, enough food for seven days to hundreds of people on that estate, and he's getting to know everyone the estate because they're all coming to the church because they're a food bank, that's what they've turned into. The church building is no longer for... It's now a production center for food for the community. I'm interviewing him and his wife about what they're doing on the estate so that's part of it, that will be 12 minutes.

Nicky Gumbel:

Then we got another one, a young woman who's training for ordination. She's 30, she's going to be wearing a hat when she speaks. She's really cool, she was a model before, she worked in the film industry, but from a very... She's had a really broken background, she's had to be careful how to say it because there often are families watching it. We feel like we got to be much more careful about the language we use because you can't-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right, everybody could be watching.

Nicky Gumbel:

Yeah, so she was going to talk about abuse, but what she's had to say is some bad things were done to her without her consent. For a child that could mean her top toy was stolen. For an adult listening will understand what that means, so we've had to alter the language a bit because of the families watching. She's also getting ordained and she's never spoken at HCB before. She's doing her first talk.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's amazing.

Nicky Gumbel:

I spent an hour and a half with her on the phone working on it. She's done a number of versus. It's like TED Talk, you do it over and over again until you get it right. We've worked on it all this week and the final version, which is only six minutes long is brilliant. It's on Shadrach. Her title is There's Another in the Fire. It's brilliant that she went through all this fire in her life, all the trials that she went through, people in lockdown may feel you're in the fire but there's another in the fire, Jesus is in the fire with you. Then she turns it around to say now there's a fire in her belly. The bad things that can happen to you during lockdown can actually become the energy within you at the end of it and she's got tattooed on her arm fire, which is what she had tattooed after someone prayed for her to be filled with the Holy Spirit and she experienced the fire of the Holy Spirit. It's only six minutes, but it's dynamite, it's powerful. This is our service for Sunday.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What I didn't tell you is I sent you a bunch of questions. I've got 16 other questions that I didn't send you, which I wrote on the ride back from London, which will have to wait for another day because this is what I'm thinking about. For you to lead such a global movement and a large church, HTB is a very large church, and to do it so well but also to really have the heart of a pastor and be so minutely involved in some of the details, I would love to unpack that one day because I want to acknowledge that, that that's very rare. Sometimes people only see dashboards, they only see trends, but your heart that got you into ministry is something that's still beating really strong.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Couple more questions in the few minutes we have left Nicky quickly. You mentioned a couple times that you pivoted to church online for outsiders. Has that done anything to your insiders? Are people going, "Whoa, you changed the program." Or, "What happened to our church?" Any comments on that? Because I love that pivot but I would love to know what you're seeing or feeling about that.

Nicky Gumbel:

Well the honest truth is we don't know.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But you're not getting angry letters everyday.

Nicky Gumbel:

I see that we're a startup, that's what we are, we're a startup. When this happened I said... This is what I said to our leadership team. I said, "Look, this is not a moment to retreat, this is a moment to see the kingdom of God advance because God used the worst thing in human history, which is the cross, to be the greatest trial, so we're going to believe that God is going to use this so we are going to advance and this is what we're going to do." My leadership style totally changed because I'm always very consultative and in a crisis you can't lead like that. You don't have time to consult, you have to be very decisive and even if you're wrong you've got to be decisive. I said, "This is what we're going to do. We're thinking of this in four phases, there's going to be crisis, there's going to be grief, then there's going to be the new normal, and then it's going to be exit. Right now we're in crisis, and in the crisis I can't consult. This is what we're going to do."

Nicky Gumbel:

We started actually with four priorities and then we moved eventually to five. When I say eventually, 10 days later, which seemed like 10 years later. We pivoted very fast, and so we went for the people on the basis that so many people would be trying to look after the Christians. There's so much material being produced for the church. If you want material for the church you can get it, but we're going to go for people outside of the church because this is our moment, this is the opportunity to reach people outside of the church. Are the congregation happy? I don't know. I'm assuming we've lost our entire congregation on day one because who knows now? You can go to any church. If you want to you could go to a church in Australia. Who knows where everyone's gone. We don't know, but the church leadership I know are absolutely thrilled.

Nicky Gumbel:

When we have our lay leadership meetings we've never had so much positive feedback about it. We know that. Then we are, of course, we are trying to empower the whole congregation. Apart from anything else, we desperately need the entire congregation because we've never needed more leaders and hosts on Alpha. The thing about the marriage course is you don't need any hosts, it's just couples doing it on their own. So 5,000 couples, there's no limit, we can have 100,000 couples. With Alpha with 1,592 people each of those have got to be in groups of 10, which means we need a lot hosts and helpers. But that is empowering the congregation to lead, they're all learning through that experience. With Love Your Neighbor we have hundreds of volunteers who are out on the streets delivering food all around London to people who are in desperate need.

Nicky Gumbel:

Then we're mobilizing lots of people to lead small groups in the church because people really need connection. There's a huge amount of mobilization taking place, and I'm hoping we will still have some congregation left at the end of it. We're doing our best to look after them. Certainly more people are watching online but I don't take too much from that because you don't know where they're watching from and how many others are watching online. I'm not sure we can take too much from that. In some ways the smaller churches have the advantage I think in the current situation. If you've got a church of 30 people you can look after each of those 30 people, you can ring them everyday or certainly every week you can ring all 30 of those people, see how they are, make sure their needs are met. But if you have a larger church and quite a few people it's much harder to do that because you're inevitably operating through a delegated system of small group leaders.

Nicky Gumbel:

Of course you try and make it work as well as possible, you try and look after your small group leaders and so on, but you don't actually know what's happening to all those people, you only know very indirectly. I hope they're all right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hope there's a few people left at the end of it. I love your heart, I absolutely love it and I think that's the best answer to that question. Okay, hypothetical final question. Tomorrow COVID disappears from the earth. You can go back to the way things were.

Nicky Gumbel:

Have a celebration.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We would have a big celebration.

Nicky Gumbel:

We'd hug our children and we'd see our grandchildren and we'd hug them, we'd celebrate.

Carey Nieuwhof:

After the celebration you can go back to the way things were. Are you going to? What's going to be different? Are you going to keep church online? What have you learned in this crisis that you're like, "No, we're hanging onto this and we're not going back to the way it was." Or is it going back?

Nicky Gumbel:

YouGov survey in the UK only 9% of people said they wanted things to go back to how they were before. Why? Because we've tasted something better. The skies in London, I've never seen them so blue. There are no airplanes. We can hear the birds. When I go for my walk in Hyde Park people smile, they say hello to me. People I've seen for years say hello. People are getting to know their neighbors, they're kindness. We go out every Thursday evening we clap the National Health Service. The world has changed. We tasted something better and we've also seen the potential for a nation to pay a cost for a few.

Nicky Gumbel:

Yes of course we'll keep doing Alpha online, it'll be a mixed economy, we'll have services on Sunday, we'll have Alpha in person but we'll keep doing it online. My real hope is that the world will be different. The priorities of the world will be different post-COVID-19 because what we have seen is that because this effects not just the poor but also the rich. By the rich I don't mean millionaires. I mean anyone who owns a bicycle, for example, you're rich. If you have a roof over your head, if you can eat, if you don't have to worry about having enough food everyday you're rich. This disease affects not just the poor, but it affects the rich and therefore we are saying locked up, we don't want people to die and quite rightly we're going to pay a cost for this, and as a result we've been able to control it and reduce the number of deaths.

Nicky Gumbel:

But what that demonstrates is if you pay a price you can save lives. What price to save the fact that 25,000 people die everyday of starvation, 18,500 of those are children. Put those faces on our front page everyday and say you could save these children's lives. What about clean water? What about sanitation? What about homelessness? What about climate change? Are we prepared to pay a price to save people's lives, and what I hope will emerge out of this is yes we'll go back to business, and we'll go back to school, we'll go back to Alpha in-person, we'll go back to church in-person, but what I really hope is that our world will wake up to the fact that things can be different.

Nicky Gumbel:

The prayer that we're praying, I think with uniting with millions of Christians around the world, hundreds of thousands of churches, is 2 Chronicles 7:14 and the context of that, as you know, it's 2 Chronicles 7:13, which says, "When there's a plague..." It's the most Googled word in China because the same word for plague and pandemic in Chinese. So when they Google the word pandemic, what comes up is 2 Chronicles 7:13. When there's a pandemic this is what's to happen. If my people, who are called by my

name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then when I hear from heaven and forgive their sins and heal their land. That's what I'm hoping, praying that will emerge out of this is a healed land.

Nicky Gumbel:

Now all those things, homelessness, in London we put all the homeless into hostiles. Why can't we do that in normal times? That word healing, as you know the same Greek word for healing and salvation, so what we want to see is God's salvation on our land. That means dealing with homelessness, hunger, preventable disease. But it also means healing people's souls, and that's people coming to encounter Jesus. That's why we've pivoted everything we do to try and reach people outside the church with the good news of Jesus because if they encounter Jesus they will be healed. Enough people come to Jesus and start serving him in the kingdom of God then our land will be healed, and that's what we're praying that God will heal our land.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Nicky wow, thank you so much. I am so grateful for this and if we get to do a round two I will be very anxious to see how this start called Holy Trinity Brompton, that meets in a 19th Century facility and has been around for hundreds of years, is doing and how the land is healed and how online Alpha and in-person and online services and in-person services are working in the future. This has been inspiring. We didn't even get into as also a former lawyer, I wanted to at some point have asked you about your law, all that training, and I so appreciate you... If you haven't checked out the One Year Bible on YouVersion, it is the plan that I use. Craig Groeschel who you mentioned, I think that's his plan for the last few years. If people want to know more about you or about Alpha where can they find you online Nicky?

Nicky Gumbel:

Oh goodness, I don't know.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh you're on Instagram, so let me tell you that. I'm going to look you up right now because I do follow you, but what about Alpha? There you are, you're NickyGumbel, that's it. G-U-M-B-E-L and a great follow on Instagram.

Nicky Gumbel:

I think if you Google-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Just Google Alpha, yeah.

Nicky Gumbel:

You Google HTB I imagine that's how you get to our... I'm not very good at that sort of thing anyway. I'm sure if you Google, Google's very good.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How about we link to everything in the show notes, that's a really, really good plan. Nicky this has been an absolute joy, thank you so much for being on the podcast today.

Nicky Gumbel:

Oh man Carey it's so lovely to see you again. I think Zoom is amazing because we do really feel we've met even though you're a long ways away. [Crosstalk 01:05:23] to England, I don't have to come to Canada but we can meet. That's one of the great advantages of this.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It is, thank you so much Nicky.

Nicky Gumbel:

Lovely to see you Carey. Thank you so much, God bless.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well I loved that conversation with Nicky and hey we got a gift for you because you listened right through to the end. If you head on over to Alpha.org/Carey you'll receive a summary report of Alpha and Barna's study called Reviving Evangelism. With a number of factors, curbing many Christians enthusiasm for sharing their faith including the decline of religion in America in the west and apathy. Where does that leave evangelism? You'll discover some fascinating findings around the number of Millennials who say it's wrong to evangelize and what non-Christians look for when wanting to talk about their faith. Head on over to Alpha.org/Carey to get that. Of course we'll link to it in the show notes, we have show notes in all the usual places including transcripts of this interview. You can get that at careynieuwhof.com/episode343.

Carey Nieuwhof:

To save yourself time head on over to Alpha.org/Carey to get that free report and thank you to Alpha International and to the Barna Group for offering that, we so appreciate that. I've also got one more thing coming up on this episode and that is the What I'm Thinking About segment at the very end. I'm going to talk about why online attendance numbers now seem to be dropping. They were rising rapidly and now they're not, why is that? Well we'll look at that because obviously there's a future in online.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Next episode though we've got Scott Harrison from charity: water and I have been doing everything I can over the last few months to pick the brains of leaders I trust and respect about what they think is going to happen next and hence the podcast over the last few months as we pivot into this. Scott Harrison has probably the most stark view of the future of any leader I've talked to and I think it's absolutely worth listening to. Here's an excerpt from the June 2nd episode.

Scott Harrison:

Some of it is gut. Some of it is the feeling of where it's going and how it's going to play out. It was the gut that caused us to close our office the first week of March. That is definitely a part of it. I would say then it's trying out that hypothesis on dozens and dozens of smart people. I probably had 60 conversations with CEOs, CMOs, entrepreneurs, our donors, and I'm asking them. Here's how I'm thinking about it, how are you thinking about it? Am I wrong? Should I be more bullish? Should I be more optimistic? What I'm hearing from all of them is no.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's coming up next time and I think it's absolutely worth listening to. Hey we have seen a ton of new listeners show up. I can't believe it. We had 100,000 downloads in a single week alone a couple weeks ago, and a lot of you are telling your friends, inviting your friends, thank you for that. Thank you also for partnering with our partners. As we move into the What I'm Thinking About segment, just a reminder if you haven't yet booked a free strategy session with Pro Media Fire, go to ProMediaFire.com/ChurchGrowth and please register for the Craft & Character event with myself, Steve Carter, Hosanna Wong, Dharius Daniels. It's live, it's interactive, it's not a whole bunch of talking heads with a talk they've given before. But you need to do that fast because it's coming up on June 4th, so go to CraftAndCharacter.org.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What am I thinking about? I am thinking about why your online attendance numbers are dropping. David Kinnaman and I do a weekly check in on my other podcast called The ChurchPulse Weekly, and at one point we had noticed in some weekly polling they were doing, 59% of churches were saying their church is growing over their normal attendance and now only 29% of church leaders report their attendance is higher than it would normally be. In other words 71% say it's now flat or lower. Why is that?

Carey Nieuwhof:

We'll want to suggest five reasons. Number one, in the first days of the crisis online church was novel, a lot of churches went online or suddenly it was the only thing people could do and the novelty is now wearing off for your congregation. Now don't give up, it's like podcasting came along in what, 2006. I mean somebody's going to email me and tell me that date is wrong, but here we are all these years later podcasting and it's really still an emerging field. Online will be a similar way, and just because the novelty of online church is wearing off for people doesn't mean there isn't a great long-term potential. Just know it's probably a novelty thing, but then think about this. The second reason, the novelty is wearing off for you as a leader.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's be honest, I don't always feel like recording these podcasts. I'm going to be truthful with you okay? The novelty is wearing off. I've been doing this for five years week in and week out, but I know that this makes a difference. There are days where I absolutely can't wait to do this and then there are days where it's like, "Oh yeah, I got to go record another segment." That's what online church is going to be. It means if you're doing some kind of online Bible study or prayer group or you're offering some value to people the novelty wears off. You know what we do as leaders? We walk away from that stuff. Well when you lose interest in something don't be surprised that your congregation does.

Carey Nieuwhof:

For example, in podcasting I get asked all the time because our podcast is done fairly well, what are the keys to success? I'm like consistency. Never miss a Tuesday. We've five years, almost six years into this, we've never missed a Tuesday delivery. Now, sometimes that was 3:00 in the morning when we figured out what the glitch was, but we never missed a Tuesday and you need consistency. If you're going to do something online be consistent, make it part of your job. Number three, I think this is a big one. You're over-focused on reopening. As a friend of mine said to me recently, he said, "Reopening our church is far more complicated than closing it was, the in-person services."

Carey Nieuwhof:

He's right, but here's the reality. As much as you want to get back into your building, and America and the world are reopening right now, there are a lot of people who aren't coming back. Some of them because of their age may not come back, some of them with kids because we don't know how to do kids ministry yet may not come back, and then some, as data is increasingly showing, don't want to come back. I'm going to do church online forever. If you are pouring all your energy into reopening and you neglect online it will show in the numbers. I find, as a leader, what you focus on expands, and if you're passionate about it people tend to be passionate about it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Number four, you've stopped experimenting. The innovation that happened in the first few months of lockdown wasn't really innovation, it was adaptation. You've stopped experimenting. A lot of churches they tried all kinds of new things, and then after about three or four weeks they said, "Okay this is what we're doing for online." Listen, that is a death nail. I've got this 30 Day Pivot thing that you can still get, you can get that indefinitely but the pricing is good today and tomorrow. I'll tell you, we have pivoted numerous times on this podcast so let me walk you through some of that. Pivot number one was to take all the spring shows and push them into the summer and talk about crisis. At first we didn't see a big jump but then all of a sudden there was a spike and we hit 80,000 listens in a week. Then we did another week and we saw 90,000 and then recently like last week, we came within 13 downloads of 100,000 listens in a week. We've never seen that kind of traffic on this show.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What was that? That was a pivot. Now that was a lot of work for me and it was a longer obedience in the same direction. We've seen a similar thing with the email list that I have. We have been trying to get more people to subscribe by email and we did some pivots and some experiments. At first, first pivot we saw I think it was 100% growth. Then the second pivot where we tried a new strategy we saw 400% growth, and then we tried a brand new thing and I'll tell you about it at some point but we don't have the time today, and the third pivot produced 1,000% increase. I'm like, "What just happened?" That's the power of innovation. When you just say, "Oh well we pivoted, we're done." No, no, no, no. That's why I'd love for you to embrace The 30Day Pivot. If you haven't checked it out make sure you head on over to The30DayPivot.com and check that out. I'd love to give you the framework that we use. We've used it, other organizations are starting to use it, and I'll tell you, it can produce exponential results.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You haven't really started innovating yet that's a fourth insight. Then number five, you haven't fully figured out how to help people yet. Why do people listen to podcasts? Why do people read emails? Why do people watch videos? I'll give you the answer. Because it helps them. If you're not helping them, if you're all about you they're not going to listen. If you want to grow an audience, grow your ability to help people. The key to sustained, meaningful online growth, I think with integrity, is help people. Yeah, you can get some growth hacks or you can buy a list or you can hire a marketer and that will get you a little boost, but it's not going to be a long-term play.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The reason you want to continue to invest online is remember, online ministry scales in a way that in-person ministry doesn't. Again, I've been in lockdown like everybody, but two and a half months into it I think I would have spoken to 10,000 to 15,000 people live, but because I have been holed up in my

studio in my home and we pivoted, we've now reached probably an additional million people than we would have reached otherwise simply because we tried some new things. Anyway, that's why I think online attendance numbers are dropping. Those are the five reasons. I would love to see you keep experimenting and make sure you check out The 30 Day Pivot before the price goes up. It's at The30DayPivot.com.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey we're back real soon with a fresh episode. Thank you so much for listening 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.