

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 351 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I'm so excited to bring you today's episode. Nona Jones is back on the podcast. We talk all things digital, which is extremely timely. And today's episode is brought to you by The Global Leadership Summit, one of my favorite leadership events of the year, with friends like Craig Groeschel and others leading the way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You can get \$20 off the individual ticket if you register now at globalleadership.org and use the coupon code CAREYPODCAST, and it's brought to you by the Lead to Win Podcast. If you are looking for podcasts to subscribe to, Michael Hyatt and Megan Hyatt Miller's podcast is definitely one you want to add to the list.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, man, here we are into the summer unlike anything you and I expected if somebody said to me, "Hey, you know what, the virus is going to be surging in late June, early July," I'd be like, "What? What? I thought we dealt with that." Now, in Canada where I am, the virus seems to be very under control, at least the moment I'm recording this, but in the U.S. and other places like Brazil, I know we have a lot of leaders in Brazil who listen to the show because I hear from you, man, it is surging.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so, at the end of this episode, in the What I'm Thinking About segment, I'm going to talk to you about what would happen if you had to reclose your church and is that something you'd even want to consider strategically. And maybe after you hear what Nona Jones has to say, you might give that some thought because if your goal is to reach more people, man, there's some really refreshing options to do that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Nona is an author, a speaker, and head of faith-based partnerships at Facebook. She is an expert in expanding the influence of the gospel through social technology, and she actually coined the term social ministry, so she partners with churches around the world. She's also a pastor. She and her husband lead a church in Gainesville, Florida. Nona has been on the show before. She'll be on again, but my goodness, I really appreciate her and her friendship.

Carey Nieuwhof:

2020 has indeed been a year unlike any other and this year's Global Leadership Summit will be a Summit like never before. It's got both in-person attendance and an enhanced digital experience. So, the theme is called You Have Influence. And the 2020 GLS faculty includes more than 15 world class leaders like Craig Groeschel, said Nona Jones, Nike director, Beth Comstock, Sadie Robertson Huff, Bishop T.D. Jakes, Lysa TerKeurst, many of whom have been on the show actually, which is great. If you need some more

encouragement, some inspiration or skills to navigate the world, and who doesn't, these speakers are going to help you get there. So, it'll be telecast live in HD from Chicago to hundreds of host locations around the country, or online August 6 through 7. So, you want to get in on it. It's probably easier than ever.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You can simply go to globalleadership.org and then use the coupon code CAREYPODCAST on check out. That will get you \$20 off the individual ticket right now through August 6. So, don't hesitate. Use the coupon code CAREYPODCAST when you register for this year's Global Leadership Summit at globalleadership.org.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And podcast listeners, man, I love summer. I don't know about you, I just listen to more podcasts in the summer and audio books. And if you have not yet checked out Michael Hyatt and Megan Hyatt Miller's podcast Lead to Win, it is time to do that right now. It's so practical. They share their experience of more than four decades of professional leadership leading teams and driving results which sometimes seem hard to get in an environment like this, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

One of my favorite things about the podcast is it's not just strategies to grow your business, they're also about helping you win at home as well as winning at work. So, if you're a leader who wants to grow without sacrificing what matters most, just subscribe to Lead to Win on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, wherever you get it. Yeah, it'll help you build the double win. So, anyway, check that out. And remember, these are unprecedented times, and you and I need all the resources we can get in the Lead to Win Podcast, Global Leadership Summit, two of the premier, really, leadership resources out there today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, without further ado, I'm so happy to bring you this conversation with Nona Jones. By the way, I did not originally do this interview for my podcast. Sometimes I interview for other platforms, but I like this one so much, I did it for ReThink Leadership. And they were only going to broadcast a fragment of it because of time. I'm like, "Hey, do you mind if I run this on my show?" So yeah, that's what we're doing. Here's my conversation with Nona Jones.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Nona, thanks so much for joining us at ReThink Leadership. So, I would love for you to reflect by what you're loving with social ministry, social media, and you got a lot of church leaders, most of them have some kind of online presence. So, when you look back over the last few years, what have been some really good practices that your guys just keep going in this field?

Nona Jones:

Yeah. Well, I want to pull out and decouple COVID-19 from the last few years. I think that COVID-19 was such a radical moment in history that has created such a shift. I would like to just talk about that separately. So, I think over the last few years before that, there's been kind of a dichotomy. There were some pastors who were like, "The online space isn't real church, and so I'm not going to invest there."

But there have been other pastors who have realized through using live streaming, as just an example, that you can oftentimes have 5x or 10x the people watching your live stream than the people who are actually gathered in your building. And so, it was that group of people that I've seen really lean into the power of social technology.

Nona Jones:

So, thinking more deeply about how do you use Facebook groups to actually keep people connected during the week, not just using live streaming for the weekend worship service, but actually using live streaming throughout the week, and thinking more deeply about the 168 hours that we have during the week as opposed to only thinking about the program. I've seen pastors who have been really willing to lean into other types of technologies, things like TikTok, thinking about, "Okay, how do you use that for ministry, or really how do you use that just to have fun?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, you went there, I go to ask you how do you use TikTok for ministry, because I can't dance on a good day, let alone a bad day.

Nona Jones:

Well, that's the thing. I think TikTok is really more about just like the social aspect of life. So, you use it for ministry by ministering to people's need for humor. A lot of times, we think of ministry as the Bible, the Word of God, being declared over people. That is absolutely a fundamental part of the work that we have to do as leaders. At the same time, we also have to remember that not everything needs to be a conversation about eschatology, right? We just need to put on a really-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a good quote.

Nona Jones:

... and just have fun. And I think, honestly, that's where Generation Z, in particular, that's where their hearts are. Before they even want to know anything about what you believe, they just want to know like, "Are you cool? Do you-"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Are you the kind of person I would actually enjoy hanging out with for 10 minutes?

Nona Jones:

Yeah. That's important is for them to see that you're not just like this stuffy preacher that only emerges when it's time to deliver the Word of God. So, yeah, I think I've seen leaders leaning into things like that and that's been really inspiring to realize that social technology is social. It's meant to be social.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. So now, COVID comes along. What have you seen over the last few months as we move to the whole new reality?

Nona Jones:

It's like a twilight zone situation. So, I shared in couple interviews I've done that, I was heading to London. This was early February, I was heading to London, and Barna had just released their 2020 State of the Church report, which is something that I read every year. I find it incredibly fascinating just to see what the trends are, what's on pastor's minds.

Nona Jones:

And as I was settling into my seat on the plane, I started to read through the report. One of the questions was asking pastors, what are the pressing concerns on your mind in order of priority? When they stack ranked the concerns on pastor's minds, again, this was February 3rd of this year, at the very bottom of the list, like last on this long laundry list was trends in digital technology or disruptions to the traditional model of church like online church. February 3rd, 2020, bottom of the list.

Nona Jones:

So then, three weeks later COVID-19 happens. There's this national shutdown of states and local municipalities, including church's buildings. And so, suddenly, the entire church is now forced to either no longer exist or to shift online. And so, I saw many leaders who just were very quick to pivot and say, "All right, look, we got to stream, we got to set up cameras at home so that we can talk about the Word of God." But there were some who said, "You know what, this is too much for me, and I'm just going to shut down until our church can open back up."

Nona Jones:

I think where that has created some churn in my own heart, and I'll talk about this in a deeper way in a little bit, is that for so long we've thought of church as a program. We've thought of it as a place, we've thought of it as a date, time, and location. So, even now, with this push to reopen church, it's almost as if the last four months have taught us nothing. Like, "We got to open the building, because if we don't open the building, what?" I've yet to hear an answer to that question.

Nona Jones:

And so, on the plus side, I think people have definitely seen this as an opportunity to become more savvy about digital ministry. I think on the minus side, people have still not yet understood that ministry can and should happen outside of the four walls of the church.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's been a massive pattern disruption. And even now, I mean, it might be a little bit different. We're recording this a week or two before the event. But when we get to June 11th, maybe it'll change, but I don't know. The people who are reopening are discovering that not a lot of people are coming back, like to a shocking level, not just, "Oh, I'm 80 years old, and I shouldn't risk it," but people who would be perfectly comfortable in a ballpark, people who would be perfectly comfortable going shopping are like, "Yeah, I'm not coming back to church," which is really interesting. Any thoughts or comments on that in the early data that we've seen?

Nona Jones:

Well, I think it's a few things. One, and this is where I think the model of ministry has to shift, I think one of it is... Let's just be honest, okay? If I'm at a ballpark or if I'm grocery shopping, I'm moving right? So, I'm not necessarily in one place, locked into one space. And so, there is a psychological calculation which

says, "Am I at higher risk?" Because there is no cure, there's no treatment. Am I at a higher risk for being stationary in one place? Or should I be outside or be in a place where I can move? I think that's one thing.

Nona Jones:

I think the second thing is people have discovered, and there was a study that was done, people have discovered that they can deepen their faith without being in a building. And that, to me, is the biggest disruption. COVID-19 itself was not the biggest disruption. The biggest disruption was people realizing that I can actually deepen my faith without going to a building. Now, what that means, I think, for pastors who are so focused on the building is you really have to think about what can people get at this building that they cannot get digitally? Now that is the disruption and I think that's the question that we have to ask.

Nona Jones:

Because typically, if you go to any church in America, there's going to be a pretty standard form of service, right? You're going to have prayer, you're going to have Bible reading, you're going to have announcements, you're going to have offering, you're going to have a message. It's pretty standard.

Nona Jones:

Yes, the quality of the teaching may vary. Yes, the quality of the charisma of the person speaking may vary. The first impressions may be amazing. But you really have to, when you strip all that away, ask yourself, "What is it that I'm giving people in this building they cannot get online?" And until you can answer that question, I think we're going to continue to see people not returning to the building because they're being nourished online.

Carey Nieuwhof:

A lot of people have said, and I would agree with this, that the locus, because of COVID, of where ministry is done shifted from a building to the home. That is basically the home, the marketplace, etc. So, let me ask you this because I think people know this but we often forget it, because you're known for your work at Facebook and social ministry, social media, but you're also a pastor. You and your husband pastor a local church.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, what would you say with that hat on, that you think you can do in a building that you really can't do online? Because the argument in some cases is, "Oh, well, people want community, people want relationship, people want discipleship that all has to happen in a building. And I think that's quickly proving not to be true." So, what is it you can do in a building that you can't do online?

Nona Jones:

I think this is where it gets to be fun, because now you are able to reimagine what the church gathering experience is. So, again, it's not that we're returning to church. Some people have said this like, "We've got to return to church. I don't think the body of Christ went anywhere." As a matter of fact, we definitely didn't go anywhere. It's about reimaging the church gathering experience.

Nona Jones:

So, something that we're thinking about is, "Okay, if we're going to have all these people gathered together, what can we do to actually facilitate intentional relationships among the people who are gathering together in the building?" You think about children's ministry, you think about youth ministry, right? And so, those tend to be places and spaces where there's different activities that are happening, there's different discussions that are happening. It tends to be more interactive.

Nona Jones:

But then for some reason, when you come into big church, everyone's just sitting and looking. So now, it's like, "All right, what experience can we create where people are actually interacting with each other, we're actually enjoying each other, we're having fun, we're playing games? There's a teaching, but it's interactive. It's not just me sitting and listening. There's something that's happening that's enabling me to actually dig into the message with the group of people that I'm with. How do we enable those experiences?" I don't have the answer yet, but I'm already thinking about this because if we want people to come to the gathering, we have to ask ourselves, "Well, what are they going to miss out on that they won't be able to experience online? Well, the in-person interactivity, the fun, the games, but those are not things that we typically have in a church service. So now, we have to reimagine what that looks like.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I mean, just to make it more complicated, I think we've all figured out pretty quickly how to do a service without needing the auditorium like, "Okay, we'll capture the message on a Wednesday, we'll socially distance the videographers and the band, and we'll capture some music." We've all figured out how to do that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And the other thing nobody's thinking about, well, I'm sure people are thinking about it, but when you really think about it, it's like, "We went from hundreds of volunteers to three, and we now can run everything we were running on three people. How the heck did that happen? What happens to that in the new normal?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think you're raising so I can almost imagine. I just want to bounce this off you because it's a fresh thought. That's why I love talking to you, Nona, is maybe you're right. We pre-produce the services during the week, and that's online content that we stream, the music, the message, etc. And we gather. We gather some interactive table thing where you bring your friends and you have conversations like a big small group, that kind of thing. You could do that now because, yeah, the whole model just broke.

Nona Jones:

Yeah. This is where I think, as a pastor, a lot of times we get very focused on being students of the Bible, students of other preachers, students of theology, and we overlook the need to become students of people. And by that, what I mean is there are people who have different personalities, different motivators, they have different interests, they receive energy in different ways. So, we have to begin thinking about how do we create an experience that isn't one size fits all? It's an experience that actually speaks to the individual needs and motivations of people.

Nona Jones:

For example, let's just be honest, introverts will probably be like, "What do you mean you're going to have people sitting at a table talking?" No. So, what do we do that actually creates an experience for introverts? How do we make sure that when they're coming to the gathering, that they're not leaving traumatized but they're leaving fed and they're leaving energized?

Nona Jones:

So, I think we do have to become students of people, what their interests are. And then, like you said, that the technology side of it is awesome. It's an enabler and it's a facilitator. But that's not the end all be all. I think the gathering now takes on a different form.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a fascinating conversation. So, one of the things you've said to me as we've had numerous opportunities to talk since COVID started was pastors are obsessed with streaming. And it's true. We're obsessed with content, we're obsessed with streaming, how many views, how many people listened, how many people watched, how many people interacted. Take us down that road. What's the upside to that? What is the downside to that, Nona?

Nona Jones:

So, I mean, streaming is important. It's important because it does create the ability to gather an audience. But you have to remember, it's gathering an audience. So, it's a passive community of people who are essentially observing whatever you're doing or saying. To me, that's like the lowest cost of admission in social technology. An audience is passive, so it's important to have live streaming as part of your continuum of ministry, but don't let that be the big end.

Nona Jones:

For example, if you know that 500 people are tuning into your live stream on Facebook, that's awesome. The question becomes, how many of those people are actually joining your group? How many of those people are actually connecting to each other, connecting to you as the leader? How many of them are being disciplined?

Nona Jones:

I tell my husband this all the time, he's so funny. The reason why I love being married to a pastor is because when I talk about the work that I do and I talk about the impact, I'm not talking abstractly. So, my husband will say things like, "How do our live stream statistics compare to other churches?" And I will say to him, "Why does that matter to you?" Well, I don't know-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a very senior pastor question, by the way.

Nona Jones:

Yeah. He's like, "Well, I just want to know. Are we doing as well as others? Are we not doing as well? Are we doing better? I just want to know." I said, "But again, why does that matter? What would change depending on what the results were?" And he said, "Well, maybe we would do things differently." I said, "Well, you need to determine what impact you want to make. Do not use other churches as a benchmark."

Nona Jones:

Because the thing about it is, the average is the compilation of the peaks and the valleys. So, it doesn't matter what the average is. You, as a leader, have to decide what is excellence for your ministry, and then you need to push to that. Because if you constantly are looking over the fence at what other people are doing and, "Oh, they got this many views, they had this many people join their group, this many people join their page," you're going to be constantly in sinking sand, because it's going to change.

Nona Jones:

So, I do think there is just a temptation to benchmark yourself in a way that's frankly a false comparison. You can't benchmark your results on another church because it's apples and oranges.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you just called the game on most of us in senior leadership, so thanks for that, Nona.

Nona Jones:

Oh, gosh.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. It's so honest. Okay. So, engagement is really important, and I want to talk about social ministry. What are some best practices you've seen in terms of getting that viewer to actually become an engager?

Nona Jones:

I love this question. Yes, engagement is everything, all right? So, don't, and that gets back to this live streaming question, don't benchmark your success on how many people watched you, you really need to figure out how many people are engaging with you.

Nona Jones:

So, a few best practices, one, and I'm going to talk about online and offline, right? So, imagine somebody walks into your church gathering, right? Would you just let them walk in and not say anything? Probably not. Somebody's responsibility would be to welcome them, to learn a little bit about them. I think it's important to respond to people's comments, help to lead them into deeper relationships.

Nona Jones:

For example, let's take it to the live stream. If somebody is watching your live stream and you see them, welcome them, "Hi. We're so glad to see you, Susan. Thank you for joining us. Have you joined our group? We would love to have you on our group." So, you provide the link. Now, Susan sees, "Oh my gosh, they actually recognize me. I would love to join this group." They join the group. Well, there's another person or another team responsible in the group for welcoming new members of the group, "We're so glad that you're here. Tell us more about what you're interested in. Tell us about your hobbies and your passions. Invite your family. We would love to have you as a part of this community."

Nona Jones:

Now, you understand more about Susan and what she's interested in. And so, you can begin to disciple her. You can actually provide content that is related to her interests, her skills, her abilities. They're serving opportunities and may even be digitally. But now we see Susan and we can disciple her online, but it starts with the welcome, it starts with the greeting. The exact same process you would use offline.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's so, so helpful. Do you think you can do discipleship online? This is an active debate I hear about all the time with people saying, "Well, real discipleship can happen online." I'd love your take on that.

Nona Jones:

Well, I'm a little bit biased because I wrote an entire book about this. But yes, a few years ago when I first stepped into my role at Facebook and I was looking at how ministries were using Facebook, I realized that they were predominantly using it as a marketing tool to let people know what they were up to, to invite people to events. But that was basically the entirety of the use case for Facebook.

Nona Jones:

And so, I began praying about it. I was like, "Lord, I just feel like there's more here," and God spoke a very clear phrase to me, he said, "Digital discipleship." I said, "What in the world is that?" When I began to think about it, I began to study discipleship, I realized that there's one key for discipleship. That is the relational maturation of your faith, being in relationship with other people so that you can grow and mature in your faith. That is the entire point of social media, is being in relationship with people.

Nona Jones:

And so, you absolutely can do discipleship online, but you have to do discipleship by being in relationship with people. And this is why I've been so big on groups. Because if you only live stream, you're not discipling people. Just like we know on Sundays, that's not discipling people, that's equipping people of its exhorting but it's not discipling. That's why Jesus spent time with His disciples. He didn't just say, "Hey, guys, come see me on the weekend. I'll give you a parable and tie you over the-

Carey Nieuwhof:

"I'll be over here on the mountain. Hopefully, lots of you would show up."

Nona Jones:

Exactly. No. So, yes, you absolutely can do discipleship, but it just has to be intentional and you have to use the tools that are available in order to help people grow in their faith.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What would you say to people, because, again, this is just, "Welcome to my world." I hear this every day. People go, "Yes, Nona. But it's not the same as real life relationship. It has to be in-person to be real."

Nona Jones:

Yeah, I say it's both and. And for my fellow pastors and ministers, let's take this to the Bible. All right? So, Acts 2. Acts 2, we know this story very well. It's the day of Pentecost. There are 120 disciples gathered in the upper room, Jews from all around the world are gathered in the city for the festivals.

And the 120 disciples, all Galileans, right, so they start to praise God and they're speaking about the wonders of God. The Holy Spirit falls, and they begin to speak in unknown tongues, and they begin to declare the wonders of God in these foreign languages of these other Jews.

Nona Jones:

And so, the Jews hear it as they're walking around outside, they're not in the room, they're walking around outside. They hear it, they're like, "Wait, I hear about the wonders of God, but it sounds like it's Galileans. How is this possible?" They were not in the room physically, but the power of God was able to declare his wondrous works in unknown tongues to people who are walking around outside.

Nona Jones:

So, people feel like the only way you can minister is if I can touch you, if I can see you, if you're sitting down in front of me, that's the only way that I can minister to you. You will essentially be invalidating the start of the church which was not because people were gathered together in that room, it was because the Spirit of God used their voices and carry their voices outside of the room to people who couldn't even see them, who didn't know who they were. And the power of God led to transformation. So, that is how transformation happens. It's not the gathering that transforms, it's the power of God, and God is not inhibited by an address.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I love how disruptive this conversation is. So, final question for you, Facebook. One of the things that honestly, I should have known this but I hadn't really thought about it until Coronavirus and the big shut down, was all these big companies, Google, Facebook, Twitter, even Shopify in Ottawa, which pioneered the internet really prioritized in-person working.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You have said you were the only person in the tens of thousands of Facebook employees who was allowed to work remotely when you were hired a few years ago. Everybody else had to be in the office. Now, they've all announced you don't have to come back indefinitely. Can you talk about that for a moment and the whole massive leap forward of virtual life that we appear to be on the verge of?

Nona Jones:

Yeah. And let me say, there is absolutely value in being together. I think a lot of times, we think about this as an either or I see it as both and. They actually are additive to each other. And so, whether we're talking about a church context or we're talking about a work context, I think there was absolutely value being together.

Nona Jones:

At the same time, I always found it so funny and just curious that tech companies required people to literally commute two hours, one way, in order to be in an office. And so, that just always struck me as odd. But I do think that we're now recognizing that, yes, there's absolutely value in coming together but that is not the only way that teams can thrive. And so, I think you do have to learn, however, to steward the remoteness of work so that you don't lose touch with the human side of your colleagues. Now, that, I think is important. And that's mostly, I think, why a lot of tech companies require you to come in, is because you do need to recognize the humanity of your colleagues. It's hard to do that when you're just

talking to a screen all the time. So, I think there just has to be some rhythms. There has to be a cadence. But yeah, we are seeing now what I have always known, which is technology can actually enable productivity. It's quite a concept.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Quite a thing, isn't it?

Nona Jones:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And to be fair, you are always on planes anyway to and from San Francisco to Menlo and back pre-COVID. How in these first few months of being an entirely virtual team would you say the culture at Facebook has changed if it's changed at all?

Nona Jones:

You know what, it really doesn't feel like it's changed. It's going to be interesting to see over the next year, but people have been just as productive. I think the wildcard, frankly, has just been having our children at home with us. It's definitely been the wildcard. A lot of times, we'll be on meetings and somebody's child will just run pass them naked. It's like, "Oh my goodness." But we all get it. But I think the culture has remained pretty intact because the values of the company haven't changed even though the modality of work has.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, I appreciate that. And as I think about the future, I've led virtual teams for years, but there will be a time where daycare is available, where the school are open again. And then, all of a sudden, "Wow, now we can see what this thing can really do, right?" And you've known that world as I have. But for those who are new to it, it's a little bit of a false start.

Nona Jones:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Nona, any final thoughts? You got a brand-new book on social ministry as well, so can you tell us about that?

Nona Jones:

Sure, yeah. So, it's coming out June 23rd. I'm really excited about it. It's interesting. I wrote it back in 2018 right around the time, I got a two-book deal. One was to write my memoir, which I did, and then it was to write this book, From Social Media to Social Ministry. Now, I remember, 2018, this was like, "Whatever, digital technology, who cares? It's cool, but whatever."

Nona Jones:

And so, the premise of the book is exactly what we've been talking about is digital discipleship. So, I'm explaining what it is, I'm explaining why it's important, but I'm also explaining how to do it. And I talk about the different social platforms, and frankly, I talk about why, of all the social platforms that we typically think are social, Facebook is actually the only one that's truly social. And I talk about how to use it for ministry. So, I'm really excited about this book.

Nona Jones:

For the longest time, I wasn't sure why God called me to Facebook. I didn't work at tech companies before this. But I feel like my passion for ministry, intersecting with the work I'm doing at Facebook has enabled me to have a lens on this that is helpful. And so, I'm just grateful to be able to share it with others.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So thankful for you, Nona. Thanks for being with us today.

Nona Jones:

Thank you, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We have transcripts for that, and I know some of you will probably want to check them out. You can find everything at CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode351. In a few minutes, I'm going to talk about what I am thinking about. It's about why should you really close your church after reopening it? Why would you even think about that? Isn't that even a horrible question to ask? I don't know.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We got some fresh episodes coming up too all summer long. Man, I'll tell you, next episode, which drops in a couple of days, it's a longer form of conversation with Levi and Jennie Lusko, Albert Tate, and Nicole Martin about racial reconciliation. It's pretty raw, pretty open. I have actually re-listened to this interview multiple times, I found it so impactful. And here's an excerpt.

Nicole Martin:

So, there is a certain impulse that says, I'm not doing it for me. I don't just show up because it's me, I show up because there's so much that's been instilled in me. When I show up, I pray that I'm making room for my daughters to show up, and for their children to show up so that somebody would hear. And I do wrestle...

Nicole Martin:

There's another side of the black community that would criticize my showing up, that would say that my showing up is not faithful to what it means to be part of the black community, or that when I show up, I'm not black enough or that I'm not strong enough. But I also think that the Gospel calls me to steward the gifts I have, to steward the opportunities I have. And if God opens those doors, who am I to say, "No thanks." I walked through those doors because that's the Gospel. That's the call of the Christian, and I deeply believe I'll be blessed.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, so that's Levi and Jennie Lusko, Albert Tate, and Nicole Martin all in one segment on the next episode. Yeah, because you never know what you're going to get around here, right? If you subscribe, you get that absolutely for free. Thank you to everybody who continues to leave ratings and reviews. We're over 12 million downloads on this show and, I don't know, well over 1,000 5-star reviews. So, thank you so much for that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

When you subscribe, you are going to get a steady diet of leaders like Henry Cloud, Jo Saxton, John Eldredge, Dharius Daniels, who else do we got coming up this summer, Gordon MacDonald, Danielle Strickland, and so many more. You get that all for free.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, now it's time for What I'm Thinking About. Should you re-close your church after reopening it? And this segment is brought to you by The Global Leadership Summit. Get \$20 off the individual ticket rate to the GLS now through August 6 when you use the code CAREYPODCAST at globalleadership.org. And looking for new podcast? Check out Michael Hyatt and Megan Hyatt Miller's podcast, Lead to Win. Man, it's all about winning at work and at life. Available wherever you get your podcasts.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, man. Like I said at the beginning of this show, I did not expect the virus to be surging. Didn't everyone say it was going to go away in the summer? Yeah, and not happening, especially across the U.S. and other places in Brazil. We see you. So, what do you do about it? Well, I've been thinking about this, and I'm going to be writing quite a bit about this on my blog this summer, but this is a time of massive change for the church and in the same way that reconciliation is going to define us, I think, how we handle this Coronavirus. And really, it's not just like a virus, it's the way our culture is changing, our culture is thinking, our culture is behaving.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so, I want to ask what almost seems like a heretical question, which is would you consider closing your church after you reopened it? At the time I've recorded this, I was talking to David Kinnaman from Barna this week, 54% of churches in the U.S. are now reopened, but it's not going particularly well. Attendance levels are abysmally low, people are afraid to come back. And so, would you ever, if you want to reach more people, strategically think about perhaps, "So, we're just going to close until things become more stabilized?" As much as we say, it's not true, there's a nagging sense among many church leaders that unless the building is open, the church isn't. And if you're actually going to reach more people, that may have to change. So, is it going to have to change?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, a few things. Again, if your goal is to gather people in a building, then keeping your building open despite public health risks and diminished returns makes sense. But if you're like me and your goal is to actually reach people, maybe it doesn't. So, here are three reasons why you may want to reconsider whether you should close your building after reopening it, or if you're in the position we are where we've chosen not to reopen our church even though we could, why do you want to stay? Could you stay close a little bit longer? So, here's one factor to consider.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Being open is way more complicated than you thought. I talked to one guy last week who had 25 pages of just safety regulations on how to reopen kids' ministry, and that was only kids' ministry. Attendance levels are really, really low. There's all kinds of restrictions in place depending on where you live or sometimes they're not required but they are social distancing, fractional attendance, caps, bands on singing, physical contact, and even in some context like if we were to reopen our church, which we're not going to anytime soon, you can't even have a lobby conversation. That's "illegal." So, it's like, "Why are you going to reopen again? Can you remind me?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then, the second thing is you may end up, if you reopen, succeeding at nothing, because reopening is really a lot of work for very diminished results, right? As a result, many churches have the highest level of staff and budgets invested where they're now seeing the lowest returns. I've talked to leaders of major churches who are getting 10% or 15% of their former attendance. And that's sometimes where restrictions are lifted to the point where they could get 70%, but people are just not coming back.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, why, here's the question, would a church leader spend the vast majority of his or her time, budget, and human resources on in-person services that very few people currently attend? Again, if your mission is to fill buildings, then keep going with your strategy. But if your mission is to reach people, it might be time to rethink things.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then third, and I'll leave it here, there's more on my blog. You can get that at CareyNieuwhof.com. Manufacturing energy is exhausting for everyone. Okay, so let's think about no COVID, okay? There have always been seasons where, as the leader, you're like, "Okay, we got to get people to go to this event." All right. Andy Stanley calls that manufacturing energy, and he asked it in the form of a question, is there anything you're currently doing for which you have to manufacture energy? That's a great question, and the answer would be yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because sometimes it's that Tuesday morning group that's been around for 20 years, nobody wants to go to, but they keep saying, "Make an announcement. We need new members." That is manufacturing energies. Or even again, in normal times, which one day may come back, who knows, that Saturday night service that was already three-quarters empty. You just don't want to preach there anymore but you have to go there, and you don't want to kill it. Or that standing meeting you just hate, and you go to week after week.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Long-term manufacturing energy to do things that aren't helping a lot of people, that's exhausting for you, for your team, and for your organization. And honestly, sometimes it's exhausting for the people who are supporting the failing venture, because they're like, "Well, I better show up because nobody else is going to show up." So, the question is, why are you doing that? And if you had momentum or could get momentum online, why wouldn't you do that for a season and focus the efforts of your staff on that?

Carey Nieuwhof:

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You see, it doesn't take a leader to stop doing what's failed. But great leaders will find the courage to stop doing what's merely good to embrace what could be great. And I think that's all the difference. So, whatever you do, I think it's important enough to ask the question, "Why are we doing in-person services right now? Is that really producing what we want? And if we put our energy into online for a season longer, would we see greater results?" Just a question to ask.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know it doesn't make me the most popular person in the room, but if you enjoy conversations like this, sign up for my daily email. If you go to CareyNieuwhof.com, you can join about 70,000 leaders who every day get little nugget of leadership wisdom and inspiration put in their inbox. You can do that at CareyNieuwhof.com.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, thank you so much for listening. I'm excited to be back in a few days with a fresh episode. It's a really important one, really honest, really raw on race relations, the KKK, what black leaders are really thinking about white privilege, and what white leaders can do. It opened my eyes, I think it'll open yours. We'll see you then. In the meantime, 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.