

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 358 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Man, I am so excited to bring you today's episode. My guest is Sam Collier, he's been on the show before, will be there again. And we talk about what's happening when it comes to race relations in America. I have been learning a lot over the last few months as a lot of Caucasian leaders have been, always had this close to my heart, but really this is a very, I think, important season and I'm hoping and praying things are different moving forward. And Sam and I have a very honest discourse about growing up black in America, what it takes to make it in a white world, and how white people can use their influence to help bring about racial reconciliation. I think you're going to love it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This episode is brought to you by The Global Leadership Summit. You can get \$20 off the individual ticket rate to the GLS now through August 6, when you use the code CAREYPODCAST at [GlobalLeadership.org](http://GlobalLeadership.org) and by Remodel Health. Man, we have saved listeners over \$1.5 million on premiums. And you can learn how by going to [remodelhealth.com/carey](http://remodelhealth.com/carey). You'll get a free resource from there, a Church Buyer's Guide. [Remodelhealth.com/carey](http://Remodelhealth.com/carey).

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, Sam is an author, a podcaster, he's got a brand new book called A Greater Story, and he talks about what it was like growing up in the '90s and the early 2000s in black America, what it takes to make it for him in a white world. And I'll tell you, this is a fascinating conversation. Important, we've had a few of those on the podcast over the summer. And I think it's probably a defining characteristic of our generation.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think 30, 40 years from now when people look back, what we did about racial reconciliation will be more important than what we even did about Coronavirus. It's crazy and it's terrible as that is. Sam is a pastor, speaker, writer, hosted The Greater Story Podcast and TV show. He is a speaker and host at North Point Ministries, he also communicates nationally and internationally with the ReThink Group, Orange Network, Orange Tour, Alpha International Leadership Conference, Willow Creek Global Leadership Summit, The Culture Conference, and so much more. He's been on numerous TV shows. We talk about The Steve Harvey Show here, and he lives with his wife, Toni. My Toni and his Toni get along great and their kids in Atlanta, Georgia. And his new book releases today, so I hope you will check that out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, The Global Leadership Summit, speaking of which, is almost here and Sam, along with other friends and very renowned faculty are either part of the past or the current Summit. This year's faculty includes Craig Groeschel, Nona Jones, Nike Director, Beth Comstock, Sadie Robertson Huff, T.D. Jakes,

and Lysa TerKeurst. And 2020 has been a year like never before, so they have a Summit like never before with an in-person and enhanced digital experience. The GLS will be telecast live in HD from Chicago to hundreds of host locations. You can get \$20 off the individual ticket rate now through August 6, by using the code CAREYPODCAST when you check out at GlobalLeadership.org. So make sure you do that now, it's coming up real soon, GlobalLeadership.org use the coupon code CAREYPODCAST.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then Remodel Health. So one of the big challenges right now, and Coronavirus has only made this more interesting, is health insurance for the people you care about. And healthcare can be confusing especially as a leader within an organization. But what if you can have an industry expert come alongside with you, not only to help you understand your options, but a solution that could save you and your employees, hundreds of thousands of dollars? If that sounds too good to be true, in the last 18 months, the listeners to this podcast alone have saved, I'm not making this up, \$1.5 million in healthcare premiums and without cutting benefits. In fact, in some cases, churches have improved their benefits. So what are you waiting for? You need to check out remodelhealth.com/carey and you can learn more and also download your free Church Buyer's Guide.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know you're thinking about budgets already for 2021, so don't hesitate. Go to remodelhealth.com/carey, become one of the churches that saved a million and a half dollars in the last 18 months. That's pretty incredible. And by the way, we really trust our partners on this show that's why we don't talk about them unless we have confidence in them. So hey, if you're new to the show, please subscribe and share it on social. We've also got show notes, you can find episode show notes at CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode358. And I've got a brand new resource I want to just hint a little bit with you. A lot of people are talking about the importance of culture and even virtual team culture. So if you want to create better values, like cultural values for your church, I've got a brand new 3 step guide to developing them that you can get by texting the word BETTERVALUES, BETTERVALUES to 33777. Just BETTERVALUES to 33777. Anyway, without further ado, my conversation with Sam Collier. Sam, welcome back. Man, it was a whole other world last time we were together on this show, was it not?

Sam Collier:

Man, I get honored every time you have me here. It was another world. We are living in a new reality right now and I am... All around the world really. Who thought that something could happen that would stop the entire world?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know. I'm thinking back, it's August now when this is airing, and if somebody said, "Hey, all the borders will be shut down, there'll be this virus, the global economy will collapse, people will be scared to go out, you'll be lining up for food." It's like you saw, I'm older than you are. I remember the bread lines from the communist Eastern block and people would line up for food. And I'm like, "Yeah, that'll never happen here." People are wearing masks and it's like, "Whoa, that's insane." But here we are, and an exciting moment in some ways and a devastating moment in some ways. So we're going to go all over the place, you've got a brand new book out today too, correct?

Sam Collier:

I am just overwhelmed that this book is out. The amount of love that I have received from this. This has been a three year journey, it's really been a five to six year journey when this whole thing happened with on the Steve Harvey Show.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I was going to say, what year was that with Steve Harvey?

Sam Collier:

Man, I can't give you the exact date, but I know it was six years ago because I'm 31 now and when I was 25. So maybe about six years. And it's just crazy to think that we would be here today and that a book would happen. You know, but this is my first major publishing release.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, this is your-

Sam Collier:

It's like Christmas.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And tell us for those who don't know the story or haven't seen the clip, and I got to say, we've been friends for years, for almost five or six years. So that must have happened after you and I met or before you and I met. And I just hadn't watched the clip and then I watched the clip recently getting ready to interview you again and I bawled like a baby, just like I was gone. So explain to everyone the journey that led you up to the Steve Harvey Show.

Sam Collier:

Man, I'm going to tell the story here. I never tell it because I'm always like, "Oh, I got to save it for churches." But I'm going to say here, especially because this is the day that it's out and I just love you. And I think I was two months when I got adopted me and my twin sister, we got adopted together. And we got adopted and rescued out of poverty. Our mother was 21 when she had us and she had three kids already, so that's five kids aged 21, and welfare. Dad addicted to crack and all types of substances, and so he left the picture. She didn't have enough money to take care of the three, so she gives me and my twin sister up for adoption, and we do get adopted.

Sam Collier:

But the story that led up to our adoption is even wilder, because my father was in the middle of his second divorce, and my father being my adoptive father. And he went to the laundromat on a Sunday to just wash his clothes. And he usually went on a Saturday but this day he went on a Sunday, and my mother, my adoptive mother, was in there and she was in the middle of her first divorce, married to a Black Panther. And she was there to-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Like the Black Panther. So the movement.

Sam Collier:

Black Panther Party. And he was extremely aggressive, not all the Black Panthers were aggressive, but a lot of them were and he was. And so he had hit her in the head with the hammer the night before. And honestly, man, just between us and all the listeners.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No one's listening, it's okay. It's just you and me, Sam.

Sam Collier:

Right. She was going to go kill him. That day, she was in the-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Her former husband, she was going to go and murder her soon to be divorced husband?

Sam Collier:

Yeah. Because she said, "By any means necessary, I have to get out of this situation." And I get it, it was extreme abuse and control and all of that. And so she meets my dad that day, doesn't go and kill her ex-husband and they start dating. They both go through their divorces, they give their life to Christ for the first time. And they say this is our opportunity to do it, they get married. They find out my mother can't have kids so they come down to Augusta, Georgia where we had just been given up for adoption two months prior.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you're in the system at that point?

Sam Collier:

I'm in the system as an infant. And everything about our life said that it was going to be over. They came to adopt us, the adoption lady said, "You don't want to adopt them, they're probably going to be mentally challenged because of where they come from."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because of the drug addiction and everything?

Sam Collier:

Yeah, drugs, they said that they traced some of my mother's steps back to prostitution houses. And so they said, "If you want to do it right, you guys are Christians, this is not going to be it, they're probably not going to be much." And so my parents adopt us anyway and they said, they believed that God told them it's something special about them. Long story short, my sister gets all A's from kindergarten up to 12th grade and goes full scholarship to Georgia Tech and Spelman and becomes an industrial engineer. And I turned into me, and you know all this stuff that God's just afforded me to do from ministry to radio to television, all these other things.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, dude, it's been just such a joy to watch. And we've told the story of how we met once or twice on this show before. But it was before anyone knew who Sam Collier was, but just to be there cheering you

on and watching what God's doing in your life and seeing you really emerge as a leadership voice that everybody respects has been exceptional.

Sam Collier:

Carey, don't make me cry. It's too soon in the show man.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So pick up the story. So your mom and dad, new chapter, they take the kids that nobody was supposed to take because it's too challenging and these kids aren't going to turn out anyway.

Sam Collier:

Yeah. And black family, so nobody ever knew we were adopted because we all looked alike.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So your parents are black, you're black.

Sam Collier:

Yeah. And anyway man, God moved in our story. Grew up middle-class, we weren't super rich, but we had everything that we needed, didn't have everything we wanted, but it had everything that we needed, really balanced childhood rooted in black Christianity. And I say black Christianity is in terms of black theology, black church, all that, T.D. Jakes was playing in the house every Sunday morning. And Joyce Meyer would show up every now and then, but for the most part, it was T.D. Jakes. And so man, we were living our life. And then right around 24, my dad erupts during NFL football we were watching it as the immediate family together like we do every Sunday. He erupts and he says, "It's time." And we're like, "It's time? What do you..." He said, "It's time to go find your parents."

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's in the middle of an NFL game.

Sam Collier:

And I said, "What?" He said, "And Steve Harvey is going to help you do it. God told me." So let's pause for a second. So, my dad he has, you know what I mean?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Sam Collier:

A barbershop down on Auburn Avenue, right across the street from The Martin Luther King Jr. Center.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I wanted to ask you about that with your story. So is that close to Ebenezer Baptist Church the whole deal, that neighborhood?

Sam Collier:

My dad's barbershop was across the street from Ebenezer. It's across the street from Ebenezer.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've been there, I know that neighborhood.

Sam Collier:

Yeah. You know Auburn Avenue, the home of civil rights where Martin Luther King grew up, where he pastored, where he started the SCLC, Southern Christian Leadership Conference which was his only organization, The King Center is right there too, the above-ground tombs of MLK and Coretta sit right there. And so he had a barbershop there and every day when you're in the barbershop, you do the same thing. You cut hair, you eat, you take some naps, you watch TV. So he would watch Steve Harvey every day when Steve Harvey took Oprah's slot on NBC, I believe. And so he said, while he was watching Steve one day, God told him that Steve Harvey was going to help us find our biological family.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And he doesn't know Steve, it's saying Oprah is going to help. He's not buddies with Steve.

Sam Collier:

It was so ridiculous when he said it, I got up and walked out of the room, I left the house, I said, "I'm out."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Dad's lost it.

Sam Collier:

I was like, "He's lost his mind." He was known for doing some crazy stuff. So I said, "I'm out of here, you've lost your mind." And he convinces my sister to write into the show two weeks later. And I'm asking her, "Why did you do it?" And she says, "Well, he just kept yelling." So my dad he's from the country so when he talks normally, it's a yell. You know what I'm saying? To him it's normal, everybody else is like, "Why are you talking so loud?" So it really more so sounded like this, "It's time to go find your parents, and Steve Harvey is going to help you find them!" I said, "What?" And so anyway, a year goes by and nothing happens.

Sam Collier:

And one day my phone rings it's a Monday is 3:00 PM, it's my sister. I answered the phone, I said, "Hello." She says, "Hey, the Steve Harvey Show just called me, they're going to call you back," and hung up the phone. She's mad. And so a minute goes by my phone rings and I answer, "Hello?" "Hey, this is Dorothy from the Steve Harvey Show. This is my first week on the job." She just had left Jerry Springer. And I was like, "What?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

She just left Jerry Springer, that's always a good setup.

Sam Collier:

It was ridiculous. And she said, "Out of 100 stories that they put on my desk today, yours was the top story. We think we can help you find your biological family. Do you want to do it?" I said, "Let me call you back." I call my sister, my sister said she did not want to do it, but I feel like we need to do it, I called her back. Long story short, they fly me, my sister, my adoptive parents up to Chicago where they were taping. When we got there, they said "We did not find anybody, we're so sorry. We hired a private detective, but we want to bring you on the show to make a plea that maybe your biological family will show up."

Sam Collier:

They bring us on the show, Steve goes through it, he says, "They're going to make a plea." They go to a break, they come back after the break. And Steve says, "Hey, I know we said we didn't find your birth mother, but that's not true. Your birth mother is here, Elinor, come on out." And on national television, we meet our biological mother and our three siblings that we did not know we had for the first time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can I slow you down? Because when I watched the clip, your sister got up right away, and you just sat there with your head down in between your knees for like I don't know 60, 90 seconds. What were you thinking? What were you feeling?

Sam Collier:

Carey, Carey though I said I was going to be-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know I'm holding it together too, Sam. Sort of, no, I'm not.

Sam Collier:

It was so many emotions, I didn't know which one to choose. And I didn't know if I should have been mad at Steve.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because he lied to you.

Sam Collier:

For lying. I didn't know if I should be upset with my mother, my biological mother, for giving us up, I didn't know if I should be grateful for the fact that God intervened and turned our mess into a miracle. And then I was on national television. Then I was thinking, "I think everybody wants me to cry," and I'm trying to but I'm just in shock. And so I just put my head down because I said, "I need to figure out what's going on." And as my head is down and I'm deciphering through all of these emotions, God says to me, audibly, and audibly is different depending on who you're talking to, for me, it's not like a speaker comes out of the wall.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You heard a voice.

Sam Collier:

Yeah, I heard a voice and he said to me, "You're on national television snap out of it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a great voice.

Sam Collier:

And I said, "Okay." And he says, "We can deal with these emotions later, but right now you need to hug your mother, and you need to embrace her, because this is hard for her too." And so I snap out of it, I get up and embrace her. And then we sit down, and I ask her if she's okay and it's just this moment of... But it was wow.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then your siblings come out who you kind of knew existed. Did you know that you had siblings before?

Sam Collier:

We never knew. Here's what our parents told us because people always ask me, "When did you know that you were adopted?" And from day one, since I can remember, my parents told us, "You know you guys are adopted, you know you guys are adopted, you know you guys are adopted."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So they never pretended you weren't.

Sam Collier:

Never pretended, they made it a cool thing. It was like, "Hey we adopted you." And you were one, two years old. And so we're like, "What's that?" And they're like, "Well, your mother that had you couldn't take care of you, we don't think. So we're here to take care of you." And so it was just this cool thing. And we were like, "Yay!"

Carey Nieuwhof:

"And you feed me, and you love me, and you read me stories, and it's great."

Sam Collier:

And so we started going to preschool and telling everybody we were adopted. We were like, "Hey, we're adopted, we're adopted." And all the other kids that were adopted were like, "We are too." And then all the other kids that weren't adopted started going home and telling their parents, "Can we be adopted?" And so it was always just this cool thing. And so as far as I can remember, they would tell us, they said, "We think you have brothers and sisters, but we don't know." Because I think it was a closed adoption and so they said, "We think you do, but we don't know. We think your mother was poor, but we don't know, but we're here now. And we love you." So, we didn't know. So when he says, "Come on out and your siblings are here," it was just like for the first time in our lives, we saw people we looked like. And people are listening, so they can't see the pictures. But if you see my brother, he looks exactly like me. My sisters are identical, it's scary. I have a weird laugh, my laugh has got-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah. I know the Sam Collier laugh.

Sam Collier:

I enjoy it. We went out to eat that night and someone made a joke, everyone laughed, we all had the same laugh.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Get out. So as if that's what genetic or who knows, who knows what that is? I don't know.

Sam Collier:

Who knows?

Carey Nieuwhof:

DNA. Wow, let me ask you this because everything shapes us as a leader. How do you think at this point in your life that shaped you into who you are? The whole story being adopted, not knowing your birth mother until relatively recently, not knowing your siblings until recently, being born into that kind of poverty and addiction, and then being pulled out of it into adoption and a different upbringing. We're all... I can't tell you, Sam, some of our leaders listening have gone back to episode one and the number of times, and this is not intentional, but we've had so many different guests who have said, "I had a really tough childhood and I rose above the odds. And here I am running this business or here I am in ministry," or whatever that happens to be. I want to know how it shaped you.

Sam Collier:

It did not shape me like many adoption stories shape people. Which is something that I have discovered over the years as I've navigated telling this story and doing adoption conferences and talking to people and even doing church services or telling this story, and then you hear these stories. A large part of this I think was my dad who always told me, and this is my adoptive dad, who always told me that it's not about the cards you've been dealt it's about how you play your hand. And so he never let us focus on the past. I was like, "Okay, cool." And frankly, we didn't really know where we came from either, which may have been a blessing maybe in disguise. But we knew that maybe it was poverty, you can process it as abandonment or what does that mean about me.

Sam Collier:

But my dad always said, "That doesn't matter. What matters is that you're in a loving family and that you have all the potential in the world to be anything that God wants you to be." And so the question is, "What are you going to do now with what God has given you?" And so I think for me, how it shaped me is it forced me, and I learn this more and more over the years, to take advantage of the opportunity that was in front of me and to not become a victim to my circumstances but to write my own story, obviously, with the grace of God. I think the other thing that it's done for me now being 31 as a leader, leading in all these different places, I'm young, I'm usually the youngest most of the time in a lot of these rooms, is it's caused me to ask the question, "What is influence really about? And what is the responsibility of influence?" Because when I think about my parents, they didn't have to adopt us. My dad's, this is his third marriage. My dad was 53 when he adopted us.

Sam Collier:

So he's 83 now, my mother is in her '70s, they're just older. So for them that late in their life, they leveraged their money, their resources, their time, their care to steward two twins for 18 years. It makes you ask, "Why does God give us influence and what are we really supposed to do with it? How are we to be good stewards over the life that we have now lived?" Which even takes us, we're are going to talk maybe about race in a second, but is the whole race conversation and all that, to my white leader friends and all that, it's God is giving you so much, not all, but there are many, why, why did he give it to you? And what is the cost of that?

Sam Collier:

Being even in America makes me ask that question all the time. Why was I born in America not in a third world country with poverty in it? What is the price of influence? What is the cost of it? What is the responsibility of it? And how do I now leverage what God has given me to help someone that doesn't have it or to make the world a better place? So I think that's been the season I'm in now, Carey is how do I, lack of a better phrase, pay God back for what he gave me and why did he give it to me? And I know it wasn't just because he liked me more than other people. So that's where I'm at.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay just to tie a bow on that a little bit, not that you can reduce a story to 15, 20 minutes, but the book tells that story and your story. What would your hope be for readers who read the book? And then I want to talk about this moment culturally, where we are for African Americans with the change that seems to be underway this summer and dissect that with you. But tell me a little bit about the book and it tells your story and what's your hope for readers as they access it?

Sam Collier:

I think the book it opens with the Steve Harvey moment, so we unpack it, we give details that I've not been able to share the day because it's just so much. You jump into this... And then we spend maybe about a fourth of the book talking about what it means to grow up black in America and how that shaped me. And we talk about Irvine, we talk about fatherlessness, all these other things and relate it back to adoption of why my father wasn't there and what that actually means. And we just tell the story of how I went from a mess to a miracle. And my hope is that as people read that journey, they are encouraged that whatever mess that you're in and during this time, we all are in a mess, we got COVID-19 happening, we've got some of the greatest racial tension since the '60s in America right now, we're all in a mess, we're trying to figure out how to move forward.

Sam Collier:

And my hope is that people would see that God can take a mess and turn it into a miracle if you let him. And there are certain moments and every small decision helps to create a pathway to that miracle. And then we spend some time in there unpacking how to actually access the greater story that God... Basically, the Purpose Driven Life. There's a Purpose Driven Life moment in there where we give a formula to purpose. Because all of that was just involved in my story, into taking me from that situation to where it was now, because not everybody that gets adopted and is raised in a middle-class family turns into my sister, you know what I'm saying?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, exactly.

Sam Collier:

What are the extra keys that you need to actually excel in this life and to excel in the kingdom under the principles of Christ? And so I just hope that people are encouraged that no matter what they're going through and no matter what their circumstances are, they don't have to be a victim of that, but that with God they can overcome.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I want to talk about growing up black in America. So I'm Canadian, definitely Caucasian. We've been friends for years, and you and I have talked a fair bit in the midst of... And we're obviously recording this before August 4th, but with the death of George Floyd and the tension that we have and the thirst for racial reconciliation, I've really benefited your voice. And part of it, honestly, Sam transparently, is I think it's hard for those of us who didn't grow up in that circumstance to imagine what it's like. So I would love for you to take me through that lens as it shaped your life. Remember, you're only 31 so you were born, what year were you born?

Sam Collier:

1988.

Carey Nieuwhof:

1988. So this is like recent history. This is not like, "Oh yeah, you were around in the '50s." No, 1988. So we're talking like your childhood was the late '90s, early 2000s. So walk us through what it was like.

Sam Collier:

Well, I think I had the benefit of growing up in Atlanta. And Atlanta, Georgia, depending on where you are around the world in the States is revered as black Hollywood. So it is the birthplace of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. It is the birthplace of civil rights movement here. We had so much black excellence come out of this city that when I was growing up, and I'm going to talk about the oppression, I was aware of the oppression but I saw so many faces of black leaders that overcame in spite of the oppression that I never saw the oppression as a crutch or as a reason that I could not succeed. But at the same time, I was educated heavily on what you need to do to overcome the oppression.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And can I just add a little bit of context? If you were born in 1988, in 1987, I just re-watched a clip of that recently, there was the Oprah Show in North Fulton County, which is almost Atlanta, which was the last white county in the South. And basically, African Americans were not allowed to live there right up until the '80s. That clip's on YouTube we'll link to it in the show notes. But so it's not like there wasn't racism in Atlanta.

Sam Collier:

100%.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. So just means to frame it.

Sam Collier:

I mean, it's the South. When you think of the United States, it's the South. I'm doing this episode right now in California, me and you are talking because we do traveling by the grace of God during COVID-19. And California is different than Atlanta, it doesn't have the history. New York is different than the South. The South, when we talk about the Civil War with the Confederate States and the Union, all these other things, it's like this is where the Confederacy lived. This is where it was birthed. So there are even places now in Georgia where you can drive and Confederate flags fly from houses, they fly at certain capitals. And we're talking about it's a Confederate flag and I'm not going to get into that right now, but a large part of it represents oppression. The Confederate army was fighting to keep us in slavery, you know what I'm saying? So among other things, but that was one of the main tenets.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But you grew up and saw Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. You saw others, Tyler Perry has a studio there, et cetera, et cetera. You know talk about black Hollywood, but there's lots and lots of role models for you far beyond that list growing up. So I didn't want to interrupt you, but I did want to frame the context for people. I spent a lot of time in Atlanta, so I knew a little bit about the context, not nearly as much as you. So okay, pick up the narrative.

Sam Collier:

No, you're 100% right about that. And I would say because we had all of these freedom fighters that we were aware of and it was taught, they showed us how to overcome. Now that's not to say that there was nothing to overcome because I think a lot of people hear that and they go, "Oh, well, black people can just, MLK did it. And Harriet Tubman did it." And I was like...

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I would say honestly, to be totally transparent, and I love how free we can be, I've probably had that, "Oh, well, you just overcome that attitude." But it's not that simple, is it?

Sam Collier:

No, I think it's a sad reality. But the silver lining in the... Is that you do have a pathway out of it. But it is an unfortunate pathway that you should not have to have. You know what I'm saying?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Very well said.

Sam Collier:

And so the pathway goes a little something like this. "You have to work twice as hard than a white person to succeed." I can't tell you the amount of times I heard that. Hey, if you expect-

Carey Nieuwhof:

And that was from what? Your parents, teachers, whatever.

Sam Collier:

That was from my parents, that was from my coaches, that was from my uncles, that was from my mentors, that was from black America. Everyone said it. Every time we had a motivational speaker, because I grew up in a black context, all black neighborhood, all black school, all black so on and so

forth. We heard that from everyone. And it was being black in America means that you don't have the luxury of underachieving. You have to overachieve to even be normal. To succeed, you have to overachieve. And so they taught us that. And even as explicit as, "Okay, if the white person is rehearsing their lines," let's just say it's theater, "The white person is rehearsing their lines two times, you need to rehearse it five."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Sam Collier:

"You need to know it better. Because you'll be tested harder, the expectations will be greater, and the obstacles will be heavier and will be taller." So that's just what you know. And so because of Martin Luther King Jr. and because of all the other people that did that, you had the competence to know, "Well, if I do that, I can succeed." I know racism is still alive, I know prejudice is still alive, I know systemic oppression is still alive, but I can overcome. I just have to work harder. And so that's what you do. You work extremely hard. And another lesson that you learn growing up black is with law enforcement. It's, "Hey, when you get pulled over, do not make a move. It could go south very quick. And the moment you as a black man get thrown into the justice system, your life's over." That's what they told us.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can I just ask and I've been trying to listen along with many, many other non-black leaders to friends and between podcasts, personal conversations and other conversations I've had with African Americans, is that almost a universal script where you are told, like, I've heard everyone from Dr. Tony Evans to George Raveling to, I think Albert Tate, I don't want to put words in Albert's mouth to you say there's almost this script-

Sam Collier:

I'll put it in his mouth.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Huh? You'll put it in Albert's mouth, okay.

Sam Collier:

I'll put it in his mouth, yeah. Definitely in America, I can't speak for other nations-

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, but just in America. So walk through the protocol, how are you taught to think about being pulled over for speeding or a defective brake light or something like that?

Sam Collier:

I'm going to make it plain, be as nice as possible, Sam. That's the plainest that my... Be the nicest, it doesn't matter what they say to you, they could curse you out, call you the N-word, spit in your face, do not react because that is the only system that if they have the power, if they say that it was assault, if

they say you were talking back, if they say you were out of line, if they say they were threatened, you get thrown into the system off of the word of a white cop.

Sam Collier:

And so you be as nice as you can be and you take whatever abuse you have to take. Now, obviously, if you're getting beat up and if you're getting killed, that's a different story. But even at that, it's like, you do not do anything to set a cop off because it could be the beginning of the end for you. And so it looks like... So whenever we got pulled over, we were nervous, we were afraid. We were, you breathe in hard. I remember if I was ever talking on the phone, when cell phones came out...

Carey Nieuwhof:

You have to hang up.

Sam Collier:

I'm like, "I'm getting pulled over, let me call you back." And you did everything you could, it's like, 10 and two, keep your hands up. I had a friend of mine that told me recently he was with some friends in the car, we grew age and he got pulled over and a police walked up. And the first thing he said was, "So where's the weed? Where's the weed?" And he went off on him because his dad was a cop at the... Black guy, his dad had to tell him, "Don't ever do it." But he was like, "What are you talking? We're just riding around. What makes you think we have weed?" So anyway it is an experience with law enforcement and it is unfortunate because when you compare it to what your white friends hear, it's completely different.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and I would say too, because you and I have talked about this, sure, anybody who gets pulled over and I don't get pulled over a lot, but when I have, your heart races, you hang up the phone, you're extra polite. But I think in a previous conversation you and I had, it never occurred to me, it just never occurred to me that this could be the beginning of the end. It just never occurred to me that if I'm speeding yes. The only question in my mind is, is he going to let me off? Is he going to drop it? You were doing 80 in a 60 zone but I'm going to drop it to 70 to give you a break or is it he's just going to give me the regular ticket. It just never occurred to me that I would be arrested for that or that he was going to look for something else. It never did. And listen, I know a lot of good cops, you know a lot of good cops, this is not cop bashing.

Sam Collier:

I know amazing cops out there. I think I want to take a moment and honor them and thank them for... Because there're black cops and white cops. The greatest thing about where we are right now in America as pertains to George Floyd and just the... I coin it the liberation of black and brown people around the world. The movement that we're in right now is that you get white cops and black cops speaking up on behalf of this. And so that's why it feels different this time because there's a sense of unity. I've never been more hopeful than I've ever been this country and us moving forward in the last 40 years than right now because there is a sense of unity and everyone saying, "Hey, there's a problem, there are a lot of bad apples in the bunch." I won't get into the argument around there are certain people that believe the police system was built this way, and it should just be torn down all the way. And it was built this way so let me go ahead and give credence, we know the origin of policing in America it was slavery.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I did not know that until you told me that. Do you want to give a thumbnail of that just to not leave people dangling on that? How did that happen?

Sam Collier:

For sure. So the first officers that ever existed were birthed out of slavery. And they were created to keep slaves in check, so if slaves ran away, they would go get them. If slaves were doing anything bad, they would beat them. They would sometimes hang them, kill them. They were called slave catchers. And so out of that system as the years matriculated, and as his life matriculate, as America grew, those slave catchers became the police department. And so-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I did not know that.

Sam Collier:

A lot of the ethos that is within the law enforcement system and a lot of the policies came out of a system of segregation and of oppression and of slavery. And there were moments when we got integrated with the Civil Rights Movement where black cops were being brought into the force and could not change in the same room as a white cop. And so we're talking about years of oppression, years of racism, years of separation. And now almost, I don't know, 60 years later, we're surprised that we're having an issue with black and brown people and law enforcement. It was birthed out of this place. There is a sense of you need to rethink this whole thing, reevaluate, uproot, replant to start over.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you were vocal early on. I tried to, as best I could, lend some support to African American friends in the cause of racial reconciliation from my perch in Canada. But one of the experiences a lot of leaders had, and we're recording this weeks in advance of air, so I don't know what's going to be true August 4th. It's just that kind of year, you know what that's like, Sam. But a lot of leaders, white and black and brown were getting beat up like crazy for saying anything on social media, you included. Can you walk us through the dynamics of that a little bit because I think there's a lot of leaders who are afraid to post?

Carey Nieuwhof:

And not to date this interview too much, but there's a very well known preacher who's being dragged. He said something that probably he shouldn't have said and he's a good guy and he's like, "Man, people are just getting pilloried." And I imagine there's a lot of leaders who could perhaps be excited about some of the change that's coming and committed deeply to racial justice and reconciliation, but who are like, "Sam, listen, man, I'm going to support you privately. But if I say anything publicly, I'm going to get creamed on social media." What would you say to them?

Sam Collier:

I think I'll talk about that, and then I'll talk about how I was getting slaughtered.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah. Because we went back and forth, you were getting slaughtered too. It's not just...

Sam Collier:

I would say to my white leader friends, especially, that we need your voice more than ever and so choosing to say nothing is not an option. And when I say it's not an option, I'm not demanding you, I'm saying it doesn't help us, it hurts, we need you. When we talked about the prize of influence and the price why does God give it to us? I think there's a section of people all around the world, of black and brown people all around the world screaming for help. And one of the biggest ways you can help is by speaking up. Now, I do think when you speak up, you have to be humble. So one of the things that I'm really passionate about right now, Carey, is helping my white brothers and sisters that are speaking up that I'm very proud of and excited that they are doing that. I want to help them approach it the right way, because I don't want them to be quiet, because we need them. The worst thing for them to do would be to be quiet and especially at a time-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Or do one repost the week something happens and then go silent again and back to business as usual. So you got a lot of white leaders listening, do you want to talk?

Sam Collier:

Yeah, I posted, and this is going to be a little strong but I think it will be helpful, I posted something recently that said, "A message to my white leader friends, now is not the time to be prideful concerning racism. I believe that God is cleaning house from a prophetic lens and you don't want to get caught in the crossfire." And so what I simply meant by that is, I think God is pruning our world right now. I can't tell you how many leaders I sit on the phone with, white leaders specifically, helping them navigate. From Africa, to South America, to Australia, to America, to Canada, white leaders everywhere going like... The aboriginals were riding in Australia. You know what I'm saying?

Carey Nieuwhof:

And indigenous people in Canada and blacks and Canada and brown people in Canada. Yeah, for sure.

Sam Collier:

And so my thing with all of them is, "Hey, it's obvious that God is doing something with this otherwise, it would not be as big." I think if you have a spiritual antenna at all, then you can sense that God is working on this right now. And so what you want to do is you want to be as humble as possible in this as God himself, I believe, is pruning a lot of these areas to make the world what it should be. Which is equality for all, which is dignity, which is love, which is all of this. Unfortunately, sometimes when God moves, he moves a little bit aggressive.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That would be consistent with scripture.

Sam Collier:

Right. From the Old Testament, Leviticus. It's like, okay. And so he is moving a little bit. So my thing to my white leader friends, I always them, if you're as humble as you can be in this, you'll be fine because God loves humble people. It's the prideful that we have seen him knock down with a vengeance.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What's is the difference between someone who's being prideful, and I don't mean that to be a trivial question, but how would I be proud about my position and how would I show humility? What's the difference?

Sam Collier:

I think one of the ways to be prideful is just having an approach that is angry, that I'm angry about what happened and I'm angry and you respond out of that anger in a way that is, "I'm justified in my anger," which ignores the... When people talk about, and please hear me in the spirit when I say white privilege because white people hate the term, just hear me when I say that what they're talking about. I renamed it white advantage because it's easier for white people to understand. While I still agree with the term white privilege, I renamed it white advantage so that they could understand what I was saying. It means because of the color of your skin, you had an advantage in life because of the history of our country and so on. And so-

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I buy that. Tell me in your mind what white privilege is or white advantage is.

Sam Collier:

And this is what it shows up as now because I think one of the reasons why it's so difficult to understand is because it was very apparent and very blatant in the '60s and in the '70s, you could just see it. We literally couldn't go in the same restaurant, we literally couldn't drink out of the same water fountain, we literally couldn't get the same loans, we could not go in the banks, you know what I'm saying? It was so apparent.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You were not supposed to buy a house in this neighborhood, period.

Sam Collier:

Right. It was just like, "No, you're black and that's a policy that we have in this neighborhood that black people can not stay here, and so get out of here." So that's white privilege, you know what I'm saying? At the highest level, white advantage, if you will. I think what it shows up as now are systems that have been put in place, I'm going to get deep, families that have been in power for such a long time, that has matriculated into 2020. And we are living in the results of those systems set up in the 1930s and '40s and '50s and '60s. We're living in the result of what those systems set up to be, for America to be. And so what it looks like now is, well, 80% of the CEOs of the largest companies in our world are white, or let's just go America, are white, 20%, even maybe lower 15% are minority.

Sam Collier:

You start to go, "Okay, now how did that happen?" And then what it looks like is, "Okay, well, we got to hire for this company." Well, how do people hire? They hire out of their immediate circle. And so if your immediate circle is white, which for all of us, I think we would all agree most of us live, and there are outliers that have multicultural lives and so on and so forth, but most of us tend to live in a homogenous world where we hang around our people. Like I grew up all black, I hung around all black people. Most white people hang around a lot of white people. It's not that you are a bad person, that's just where you grew up, it's that. And so when you hire out of your friend circle, what does that look

like? Well, if you're a CEO of a Fortune 500 company and you hire out of your immediate friend circle, everyone at the top is white. And then everyone below them is white and then everyone below them as well.

Sam Collier:

And so that's an example of white privilege. And what it is, it's the result of a system. So how do you break it? You have to break the system. You have to shock the system, because it's the system that we're living in now that is now starting to work against us. And so I could go on and on and give example, after example, after example. But if I were to sum it up, I would say that there are systems that were put in place a long time ago, that is obvious for us if we know the history of this country, to favor white people that are still living today, that no one has changed. So now we need to change it. And I would say this, good well-meaning white people have not changed it, not because they didn't want to, they just didn't know. And so now it's a system of, "Hey, people of color need you. There's some discrimination happening. There's some this there, and we need you to shock the system a little bit so that everything that's white can be changed and be now more multicultural."

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, Sam, that's so helpful. And it's interesting, it's not what you know, it's who you know, that's an expression that's been around forever. When I was younger as a leader, I always thought that was about, "Oh maybe somebody here was the best candidate for the job, but we picked you because we got you in. But you didn't really deserve the job." But then I realized, much later in life, that the way you describe it is actually way more accurate. That it's not what you know it's who you know, it's not about, "Oh, I'm going to let you in even though you don't belong here."

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's like, "No, I went through my network and hey, I happen to know this guy Jake is awesome, because I know his dad. And I know he's very capable, and so I'm going to hire Jake before I hire a stranger I don't know, regardless of the color of their skin." But what happens is when 80% of the CEOs are white, they end up hiring 80% white people just because, "Well, I may know Sam, but I don't really know Sam. So why would I hire you and I know this guy and I know he's got a good kid?" And so it ends up being unintentional, is that what you're saying?

Sam Collier:

100%. And what it results in is discrimination, that's what it results in. So then you, as a black person, you go, "How come all the Google executives are..." I don't think Google is that way, I don't know Google, but I'm saying, "How come all of these massive companies that are making all these decisions, how come they're led by white people? And how come they're making all these decisions?" And then when you start to look at the products, what happens is it all trickles down. And so when you have certain people, and I'm going to get a little bit more deep, when you have certain people in certain environments that live a certain way, that are a certain color, they also think a certain way. So now when they encounter somebody that doesn't think like them, it's wrong per se, but it's because they don't understand it.

Sam Collier:

And then it becomes, "Well, we're not going to do that idea, we're going to favor this idea because it's something I understand." Can I translate? "Because it's something white, and I'm white, so I get it. And

so I'm going to say no to this black idea, I'm going to say no to this black loan, I'm going to say no to this black community, I'm going to say no to this black student, I'm going to say no to it, because I don't understand it. And I'm going to favor what I understand." And it's all a result of just all that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I get now. One of the things I've been trying to do is to learn a lot over the last little while and you've helped with that as have some others. And because you think, "Oh, if it's discrimination, it has to be I don't like black people, or I don't like brown people, or I don't like people who don't look like me." But that's not it at all, it's much more subtle than that sometimes. There are definitely people like that, it's like, "I'm never hiring someone who looks different than me." There's definitely people like that. But you're saying it's more complex, and I think you're right because you're saying, "No, it's just, I don't know, we're looking for a communicator and your style just doesn't really fit our style or our congregation, it's not about the color of your skin." Is that fair?

Sam Collier:

Well, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is that fair?

Sam Collier:

Carey, can I just stop you right there? Hold on, hold on, hold on. You're hitting it. You are breaking this down.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's it.

Sam Collier:

Keep going, keep going. I'm sorry.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm just trying to learn, and I'm trying to see it. And I think I see it a lot more clearly because before 2020, the white term white privilege has been around for a long time, also used by white people on white people. And there was a part of me, I never said this publicly, would be like, "I can't help that I was born with this color of skin that I come from Northern European descent that's not my fault." And I hustled hard and there's lots of people who didn't, but I'm seeing it in a whole new way, and you've been so, so helpful with that. So now I want to get to, okay so I am in a place where, with some exceptions, a lot of my friends are white and what do I do about that? How do I fix the system? So I'm not President of the United States. I have a little tiny sphere of influence, so what do I do with my little sphere of influence, Sam, to help make change?

Sam Collier:

Let me first of all say this, for every white leader that's listening and that is out there, the fact that you would even be open and the fact that you're leaning in, and the fact that you're passionate about making a change is amazing. And I want to encourage you in that because we need it. I want you to hear

a person of color say, "Thank you for helping to write the wrongs of history. Thank you for leaning in. Thank you. Please don't stop leaning forward. And even though some of this stuff is hard to understand and hard to accept, and even though some of it you may take personally, I appreciate you sticking on the journey with us because this is on the heart of God and more importantly, you're helping image bearers that need it the most. And I want to say that." Okay, I got emotion. I just felt the Lord-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's awesome.

Sam Collier:

So I think when we talk about solutions, how do we break the system? I'm going to tell you Carey, after doing this work for the last six years in predominantly white spaces and multicultural spaces and even in black spaces, but more so predominantly white, I would say the only way, and there may be others, but I believe the largest way, the only way to really fix the system is you have to break it. I want to say in a different way, you have to completely shock it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What does that mean?

Sam Collier:

What it means is... I was working with an organization, i know we can't talk about staffing, but a lot of these are leaders. But then this flows into content, this flows into marketing, and if you're a banker, this flows into money and giving, this flows into colleges, this flows into admission, this concept hits everything. What it means is this, I was consulting in an organization Carey, and they hired eight new staff members after four years of doing racial diversity work and wanting to diversify and wanting to shock this, fix the system of white advantage, white privilege, whatever you call it. And after four years Carey, they stood up eight staff members and all of them were white. So I'm in the room going, man, they're "woke now" they should know. I'm like man, they're going to be sad. So I'm thinking I need to go and pat everybody on the back and go, "It's okay, we're going to get there." And I went around and nobody saw it, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Nobody saw it.

Sam Collier:

Nobody even saw it. They stood eight new staff members up one by one. And nobody noticed that they were all white, but me. And so I started going... First of all, I asked the question, "How did this happen?" So I'm like, "Why didn't you see it?" So then I went on an intellectual journey, I started reading Harvard books, I started looking at entrepreneur.com, magazines, articles from some really smart professors on why white people can't see white things.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a great title.

Sam Collier:

And I discovered there's actually an academic term for it, it's called white normativity. And white normativity is a concept that simply means if you've grown up white, if all you've seen is white, white is normal.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's almost like that metaphor where it's a cartoon, there's fish swimming in the water and someone says, "How's the water today?" And they're like, "Water? What's water? I don't even see it."

Sam Collier:

100. They're like, oh. So for them it was normal Carey. And so a large part of that is pointing out the fact that, "Hey, when you see something that's all white, it doesn't mean it's all right." So you have to now condition your mind to see something different, so that was one. But two, and this is talking about shocking the system, I had a conversation with the CEO, CEO was devastated.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because he didn't see it or she didn't see it.

Sam Collier:

I don't even think he saw it for real, he or she. And devastated, and then he said, "We have to change this. We got to do something drastic, because if we don't, there's no way." And it was each department. And by the way, how they all get hired is they went through their phone and they hired their friends or the friend of their friends-

Carey Nieuwhof:

And that is how it works a lot.

Sam Collier:

That's how it works. And they were in positions of power, so we're repeating the narrative. And so here's what they did Carey, they said, and people are going to hate this, they're going to hate what I'm getting ready to say, but I want you to think about the alternative of what I'm getting ready to say. So in other words, what else would you do? So they said the next 10 hires cannot be a white person.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Just can't be.

Sam Collier:

And they said, we... We talk about an organization of 200 employees, 300 employees in all.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So it's not like you have five in the next 10 can't be white. Its like, yeah...

Sam Collier:

No. We're talking about, "We can't break this cycle. And it's 300 of us in here, and we have to diversify, and we have to give people of color a chance, and we have to break the system of white advantage."

And so they said, "The next 10 hires have to be people of color." And here's what they say, Carey. And they obviously couldn't put this on a document because it could probably get legal and-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah. Reverse discrimination, whatever the charge might be.

Sam Collier:

Yeah. But privately they said, and I'm sharing this publicly so that people would know, they said, "Whatever you have to do to get a person of color that is competent, educated, and knows how to do this, I need you to do it. And whether that takes us a year or two or even six months." He got so passionate about it here. He said, "I will not let this organization continue in this direction."

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's an example of breaking the system.

Sam Collier:

Yeah. And you know what happened, Carey?

Carey Nieuwhof:

No.

Sam Collier:

They found them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think it was Kadi Cole who was on this podcast a couple of years ago, we were talking about gender in church. Because you get in the rooms that you and I are in, it's a lot of white males, let's be honest, in evangelical world. And people... Or maybe it was Danielle Strickland, I can't remember. But it's like, we can't find any female preachers and the line was, "Maybe you better look harder." And I'm like, "Yeah, you're right. We just have to look harder." And...

Sam Collier:

Because when we are challenged, we rise to the challenge, Carey. People... No, go ahead Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No. And I think you absolutely nailed it. It's the Rolodex system. It's who do I know? And so let's give a lot of white leaders the benefit of the doubt. We do not all deserve the benefit of the doubt but there are people who are not saying I'm not racist because they're just trying to say they're not racist, but they would be like, "Sam I'd hire you in a heartbeat." But the problem is they don't know you and they don't know people who look like you. And as a result, they talk to their cousin whose kid is looking for job, whose an awesome kid, who happens to be white and they're like, "Man, I'd hire him in a heartbeat." And so we perpetuate the system.

Sam Collier:

Yes. And that's how you become a part of perpetuating the problem even though you're a great person. I think the same is true for us, I think black normativity is real too in terms of... When I first started trying to diversify, and I have to help black churches with this when I'm talking to them that want to be more diverse because they do. I'm going, "Hey, can't be all black. You have to switch it up." Obviously, it leans a little bit more heavy towards the white side, because I think that's one concept. I think the second concept Carey, is for a long time in America, white people moved away from black people. They call it white flight.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know that term.

Sam Collier:

And really, can we just be honest? It was a result of racism. That's what it was.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, 100%

Sam Collier:

And you can call it whatever, you can call it prejudice, you can call it we wanted to keep our neighborhoods safe. We wanted to be a certain way, I get it. But at the end of the day, that started with racism. And I'll probably venture to say that you probably live in an all white neighborhood. And if you trace it back to when it probably first began, it probably been white for a long time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, it's been white for 200 years. That's just the Canadian settlement patterns and it's this, I live in the country, so it's the cities that have become more diverse with immigration. And that's starting to change here, which I think is super encouraging. We've lived here for 25 years, I think it was 1% or 2% diverse when we moved here now it's probably closer to 10%, which I think is awesome. But it's one of those things where it wasn't white flight or anything like that, these are just historic patterns and European immigrants in an area for many, many years and not a lot of new immigration settling in these patterns, although that's beginning to change. Keep going, I had a question, and it slipped my mind.

Sam Collier:

No, I think to that, I do think it's worth asking the question, how do we change that? How do we diversify it? How do we even make people of color more comfortable with moving out there? Even asking the question, what would happen if people of color move there? Would people feel some type of way, or would it be normal? So I think what we are in our world is making us rethink everything and just go question everything.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I think that would speak to, I had a conversation with Levi Lusko, who's in Montana and he's like, "Yeah, it's not particularly diverse here either." And you got a lot of people living in middle America, listening to this, we hear this about Coronavirus all the time, "Hey, I'm not New York, I'm not California, it's not an issue here." And I think that's very easy to do is to say, "I don't live in New York City, so it's not an issue here." I know what I was going to say. I love what Tim Keller says and I've heard him say that

when you're talking about white flight and what happens, he says, this happens in cities too. When cities begin to change, what happens is churches move to the suburbs. You've seen that where churches move to the suburbs.

Carey Nieuwhof:

He goes, "If you look at the gospel, the gospel is actually the only example," I think he was preaching through Jonah, where the city gets wicked. And I'm not saying diversity is wicked, that's not at all. But the city starts to become a place where people are leaving, but the church moves in, the prophet moves in, the church moves in. And I think that should be the solution for the gospel is whenever... But if other people are running, we move in, if it seems to be too difficult for some people or too tense for some people, that's where the gospel moves in. And so the thrust of the gospel is toward the challenge not away from the challenge. Any comments on that? And I want to talk to you about how you got beat up on social media. And then we got to one of my questions today so thank you, Sam. This was another productive interview, and I love it whatever we get together. But talk to anything you would say about running toward the challenge rather than away from it. That's what I was trying to say with Keller.

Sam Collier:

I think Jesus is always caught running towards the mess. The people that nobody wants to be around, he's running towards them, The people that are making all types of mistakes, he's going after them. The tension in the room he's... I think Jesus is a great example for us and even the story of the good Samaritan, which is an amazing story, when he's asked the question, "Well, who is my neighbor?" I think that is a story about racism and going across, putting down our political affiliations and ideologies and our cultural histories and coming across the line to love our brother. I think that Jesus is always running towards the mess and I think as believers, we have to run towards anything that's separating us.

Sam Collier:

Whatever is separating us, and as we move into an election cycle in this country in terms of America, we have to run towards each other. We have to not let our political ideologies divide us. And I think this is going to be a critical election as we look at what the next eight years of our world can be. I think the choice is so important, and I think it would behoove all of us to spend time with each other, because I think we'll spend time, it'll give great context.

Carey Nieuwhof:

To me too, because I've done a series of interviews, I think these will air on this podcast, but I remember doing one and just thinking, "Coronavirus is going to pass, as devastating as it is, Coronavirus is going to pass." But when you look at racial reconciliation, I think actually this is the issue that will define this generation. That 50 years from now looking back on it, coronavirus will be like, "Yeah, there was a pandemic but look at what happened." It'll be like the mid 1960s in America, it has a potential be that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sam, to wrap up, and this has been so rich and so good, talk to us about why you got beat up on social media. And I think there's a certain level of leaders are tired, leaders are exhausted, nerves are frayed. This is a difficult issue on top of a difficult issue that we were already navigating. You got hammered on social media from every side, including by some of your brothers and sisters in the African American community. Talk about what that was, where the opposition came from, how you dealt with it, and then encourage leaders who might be afraid to say more because they're just tired.

Sam Collier:

I think what I would say, Carey, is it was so difficult for me in the beginning because I was pursuing an MLK route, a Martin Luther King Jr. route. When I looked at how he created social change, which I think everyone would agree that he was the greatest leader of social... One of the greatest, at least, if not the greatest leader of social change in our world today. There's not a continent that you can go to that does not know Martin Luther King Jr. because of what he did in this country. And so as I'm following his lead, one of the things that he did really well was standing in the middle. He stood in the middle of both worlds while speaking truth to power and seeking to create change that would eventually turn into reconciliation.

Sam Collier:

And so as I tried to stand right in the middle of this, some would say the second pandemic that we're going through right now which is the racial tensions in our world, I got hit from both sides, man. And there were some black people that felt like I wasn't militant enough. There were some white people that felt like I was talking about it too much. And then there were people in the middle that were just confused and trying to figure it all out. And so for me, Carey, I had a come to Jesus, if you will, moment with myself and with Jesus. And I realized there's no place in this fight that I can stand and not get shot unless I don't fight at all.

Sam Collier:

And I knew that wasn't an option, but I'll be honest for a moment I gave up, I said, "I can't win." And it was Jesus and it was God and it was MLK that night that I had the spiritual experience. And for me, as I watched MLK, what I realized through his interviews about rioting, through his interviews about nonviolence, through his interviews about social change, through his interviews about speaking truth to power, I realized he always got hit on all sides, always. There were black leaders that criticized him publicly about him being too soft. There were white leaders that thought he was trying to move too fast, and that he was saying too much and that-

Carey Nieuwhof:

He was a communist.

Sam Collier:

And he was a communist. People think that they would love Dr. King today, but I think Dr. King would be screaming black lives matter. I think he would be screaming it, I don't know that he would necessarily be endorsing all of the policies of the organization. And frankly, I didn't even know there was an organization, most black people didn't even know. And I think the hashtag itself is being hijacked politically by all of these policies, "And here's what we need to do this, and we need to try this." And I separate the hashtag from the organization. And frankly I don't know much about the organization, but the hashtag itself around the world just simply means the liberation of black and brown people everywhere.

Sam Collier:

I believe that he would be saying that today. I don't think people would like him as much as they like him now, and they didn't like him back then. And so-

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, he was very controversial.

Sam Collier:

At one time he was the most hated man in America, but he changed our world. So I had to get the confidence to go, "I'm going to pick where I stand, and I'm just going to take the bullets."

Carey Nieuwhof:

What would you say to white leaders who are, and I'm sure this has implication above that, but as a white man myself who are like, "Sam, that's good for you. You're African American, you're right in the middle of it. But I got people who are going to leave my church. I got board members who are going to get mad. I got donors who might just disappear. I could lose influence over all of this. It's just easier for me to let someone else do something, and I don't want to say anything anymore."

Sam Collier:

What I would say to them is I think maybe one of our biggest things for this particular show, this episode, and it is what is the price of influence? What's the real price of influence? Why does God give us influence? Is it so that we can protect ourselves? Or is it so that we can leverage everything we have to make a difference? And I would say this, Carey, I lost some followers, but I gained more than I lost. You're going to take a hit anytime you stand up for what's right. People hated Jesus, they killed him.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Ultimately it was his opponents who nailed him to the cross.

Sam Collier:

They killed him. My question is what are you willing to give up for this world to look better? And I would challenge you and say again, what is the price of influence? And could this be a test from God to see where your heart truly lies?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, that's good.

Sam Collier:

Does it lie with your image or with your big buildings or does it lie with the cross?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Or the kingdom coming.

Sam Collier:

Or the kingdom coming. And I'll say this as an encouragement, whenever you stand up for the kingdom, you win.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm with you, Sam.

Sam Collier:

You don't lose. God actually increases your platform, he grows your influence. You may lose something on the outside for a moment, but you stand up for the kingdom, and God's going to back you every time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you did the right thing at the end of the day. Well, Sam, anything else you want to say in closing? This has been so helpful for me. I'm trying to learn, you're a great teacher. Thank you for helping me see things I didn't see, correct things that need correcting, and address things that need addressing, and I really appreciate that.

Sam Collier:

One, Carey, you know I love you, man.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's mutual.

Sam Collier:

I feel like you're always on the right side of history. You're always doing what you need to do with your influence, not that I'm the judge. You've invested in me more than many leaders. I'm just so grateful to know you. You're an incredible leader to follow, and you're worth following. And I think the last thing I will say is we've never been more postured for change in this country and in this world, as it pertains to the issue of injustice and racism in the last 40 years, than we are right now. Now is the time to make the move, put all your cards on the table, stand up for what's right, and see God do the miraculous. That's what I'd say. And it would really help me if you bought this book.

Carey Nieuwhof:

A Greater Story. Actually, just that section you talked about, about growing up black in America, I'm really looking forward to digging into that more, because I think it's really important for those of us who didn't grow up in that context to understand more, to learn, to listen, all of that. Sam, this isn't the last conversation by any stretch but it's been a great one. Thank you, my friend. And if people want to follow you online, Sam Collier on Instagram and what website, obviously Amazon, everywhere books are sold, but if people want to check out all things, Sam, where do they find it?

Sam Collier:

Just go to AGreaterStory.org, go to AGreaterStory.org and you'll find everything. Carey, you're the man.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're the man, Sam. Thank you. Well, I think that more than delivered on the promise at the beginning of the episode, what a great conversation with Sam Collier. If you want to check out his book, links to that or show notes or even transcripts, you can find it all at [CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode358](http://CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode358). And coming up next episode, we have got Levi Lusko. Now, Levi has been on for a little bit, but he's coming back and we're going to talk about how his church has responded to COVID. It's going to be powerful, and I think Levi will give you one of the best snippets, the best previews of what the future church could look like in this conversation. I was really encouraged after it, here's an excerpt.

Levi Lusko:

I would think we will never approach things the same way again. Honestly, I think out of the scope and scale of all that we're doing, I think that the in-person gatherings in our minds will be somewhat like the traditional service that many churches used to offer. These are our services, and for those who like the old school, we have a traditional service. So God is opening our eyes to see the blue ocean of opportunity of seeing regardless of where you live, you can be a part of it, you can be resourced, you can be equipped, and you can be sent that happening on such a grand scale that the 13 locations we had going into this, oh yeah, we have a church online also, is almost now like we have a church online, and we have some brick and mortar locations. I definitely feel like it's caused me to look at everything in a completely backwards fashion.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So that's next on the podcast. Subscribers, you know the drill, you get it automatically for free. If you haven't subscribed yet, please do so. I only listen to the podcasts I subscribe to, and if you enjoy this episode, please leave a rating or review on iTunes or wherever you listen to your podcasts. And now it's time for the What I'm Thinking About segment. And What I'm thinking About today is whether you should close or reopen your church, I've got a few thoughts on that. It's brought to you by our partners, Remodel Health, you can visit [remodelhealth.com/carey](http://remodelhealth.com/carey). Be one of the churches or not for profits that's already saved \$1.5 million in the last 18 months, simply by going to [remodelhealth.com/carey](http://remodelhealth.com/carey). And get \$20 off your individual ticket rate to The Global Leadership Summit now. It's right around the corner, like two days, it's not too late. Use the coupon code CAREYPODCAST when you check at [GlobalLeadership.org](http://GlobalLeadership.org), so you really don't want to miss that event.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I want to talk about reopening your church, because as I'm recording this, and we're working a little bit in advance because of summer, but cities are shutting down again and the Coronavirus is surging. And what if this is the new normal? I know not forever, I get that, but what if it is? I think churches have to rethink more deeply than we have been rethinking over the last six months. So, few thoughts about this number one, the mission is eternal but the methods are not. Almost every day on my social channels, I hear from leaders who are like, "Well, we got to reopen, we got to reopen." Look, look, look, you don't have to reopen, there is nothing... What do I say? I get pretty bashed about this. Okay, there is nothing magic to a church building. It's the way we have done it for thousands of years, I understand that. But the mission is eternal, the methods are not.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And way too many leaders get wedded to their methods, and they forget or lose the mission. You almost throw up your hands and go, "You know what? We can't, we just can't really do much for Jesus as long as our building is closed." That's just not true. I really believe the future has been digital for a long time anyway. Think about it, you're listening to a podcast, chances are we've never met. I have not met 99.9% of my listeners, but we have a meaningful relationship. So the digital revolution is here to stay, it's an exceptional opportunity for churches. And right now, as a church leader, you have options that are not available to every manufacturer, restaurant owner, airlines, hotels. You can do far more for the gospel than most can, but churches that over-focus on their buildings run the risk of becoming like shopping malls in the age of Amazon, taxis in the age of Uber, cable TV in the age of Netflix, Disney Plus, and YouTube. And, the church was never a building anyway.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And as much as it's easy to say that church was never a building, for centuries we behaved as though it was. So I think in the future, Christians who realize they are the church, will have a much bigger longterm impact than Christians who simply go to church or consume content. Another reason to think maybe closing our church building again or restricting in-person services isn't the end of the world, is the world is watching. And if you're being reckless with people's health, I promise you unchurched people are just forming one more opinion about your church or the church. So wisdom often shows itself in the form of restraint.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then finally, the decision might get made for you. See, when you're pushing against the tide going, "We're going to stay open no matter what," or, "We're going to reopen no matter what," the government can just come in and shut you down. Or, the community can come in and shut you down. So the decision might get made for you. You are in a much better strategic position, as a church leader, if you make that decision rather than have it made for you. Ultimately in leadership, your unwillingness to make a tough decision means the decision could be made for you. And that is rarely a great moment.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then finally, and this is the most important thing, guess what? Your church was never closed. Even when it was closed, it wasn't closed. You were open, your people were active. I'm going to say some more about this this summer, but I think you could do so much more if you just stopped focusing on your building, started focusing on your community, started focusing on online. And if you do that, whether your facility toggles between open and closed is irrelevant, because your church is very much alive. And leaders who fuel, fund, and celebrate that will have a much stronger future than leaders who don't. So that's just me on my little soap box, once again. Not the most popular guy in the room, but I think it's really, really important that we get this right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And man, if you'd like a little bit of leadership nuggets, you can text the word, CAREY, my name, to 33777 and we will get you that. And then if you want my exclusive offer, which is to help you create a much better cultural value statement, I've got a shortcut for it I'm pretty excited about, text the word BETTERVALUES, that's just BETTERVALUES to 33777. So thank you so much for listening, I really appreciate you. And to all of our new subscribers and listeners, welcome, we're so glad to have you on board. Back next time with a fresh episode and 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.