

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. Welcome to episode 379 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. So glad you tuned in. Lysa TerKeurst is back on the podcast. I'm going to talk about an issue that's got, I think a lot of us probably owns more real estate than you imagine. We're going to talk about how to forgive what you can't forget. And I think this is a huge issue for leaders. When you think about all the hurts, all of the disappointment, all of the betrayals, all of the things you were counting on that never happened, yeah, that's what we're going to get into today. Lysa's got a brand new book on that. This episode is brought to you by Pro Media Fire. You can get an amazing website and custom graphics every single week with Pro Media Fire's new Digital Growth Bundle. Just go to promediafire.com/digitalgrowth. And it's brought to you by Red Letter Challenge. You can learn more about Red Letter Challenge's latest turnkey church series called The Being Challenge by going to redletterchallenge.com/carey, where you'll find discounts of up to 40%.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also, for those of you who have been, well, even if you're a new listener, but I know a lot of you, you discovered the podcast, you go back into the archive, which is now 379 episodes long. I would love to know what your favorite episodes are, because if you haven't yet or lately checked out this podcast homepage, which you can find at careynieuwhof.com/podcast, we got some brand new features there. It makes it much easier to navigate some of the recent episodes. We have our top episodes, recent episodes, and then we want to do this new section called fan favorite. We would love to know what your favorites are. So hit me up on social media. I'm [cnieuwhof](#) on Twitter and Facebook, Carey Nieuwhof on Instagram. And of course, all the links to that are on the website. So just let me know what your favorite episode is, and then we'll be including some listener favorites as we move along.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Lysa TerKeurst is the president of Proverbs 31 Ministries. Also, the author of three New York Times bestselling titles. Between her personal social media accounts and those of Proverbs 31 Ministries, Lysa reaches more than 7.5 million followers. So, I am so excited to have her on the podcast. She has been featured numerous times on Fox News, CNN Online, Focus on the Family, Today Show and so many others. She writes from her gray farm table and lives with her family in North Carolina. And having been to her place to take some of her training before, I can tell you, she is a top level thinker and leader as well. So I think you're going to love today's episode.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, have you ever landed on a website, left in a few seconds? Yup. We all have. Well, this happens at your church all the time. People visit your website, your front door, and guess what? They're headed out in just a few seconds. So, why does this happen? It's the same reason you left a website in a few seconds. You decided it wasn't for you. Well, what if you could change that? The Digital Growth Bundle from Pro Media Fire helps solve this problem through the following process. Number one, you determine your core audience. Number two, create a custom website that actually engages them. And then number three, design content on a continual basis for your website and social media for that

audience. The Digital Growth Bundle includes a custom website, weekly updates and weekly graphic designs. So the launch price for the Digital Growth Bundle is amazing and it's going up soon. So lock in the special price today at promediafire.com/digitalgrowth. That's promediafire.com/digitalgrowth.

Carey Nieuwhof:

As you are thinking about what's ahead in the future for your church, you're probably thinking, how do I get more unity? We are coming out of such a divided and really in the midst of a very divided time. And believe it or not, Red Letter Challenge can help with you. They have a brand new challenge coming out, that just got released actually, called The Being Challenge. It is all focused on the words of Jesus and how to be in him. I sat down with Red Letter Challenge founder, Zach Zehnder, and I asked him this question, I just said, "So there's so much going on in the world, as we all know, some people might think you have to address felt needs. How can I possibly do something like the Red Letter Challenge right now? So why is The Being Challenge good option right now when the world is upside down?" Here's what he had to say.

Zach Zehnder:

I think there's nobody greater that addresses felt needs than Jesus. And in a world filled with, I'd say good answers, Jesus is still the best answer. And really, if our lives stem from the overflow of our hearts spiritually, if we can get our relationship with God right, think of how much better, if we're coming from that place, this world could be. The simple thing I say is the best way to follow Jesus is to follow Jesus. He's the one that is the greatest disciple maker out there. While it's cool to have other tools and programs and address felt needs, nobody is going to do that better than Jesus. So let's dive back into what he said, how he lived, and learn from him.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, if you're ready for a complete turnkey challenge that works, whether you're meeting in person, digitally or in a hybrid way, head on over to redletterchallenge.com/carey, and find a way to unite your church around the teachings of Jesus. You will find discounts there of 10 to 40% off. Well, I am so excited to have this conversation today. Honestly, every once in a while you have a conversation, you think, no, I think I've got this issue. And then you realize, Oh, you know what? I still got some forgiveness issues. So I'm going to talk about, at the end of this episode, a little bit about forgiveness and leadership as well. But in the meantime, let's sit down and have a conversation with Lysa TerKeurst. Lysa, welcome back to the podcast. It's a thrill to have you.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Well, thank you, Carey. It's always an honor to be with you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. So, 2020 has been a year trauma for almost everybody. You got your own trauma and then we have all the collective trauma. But your last couple of books, you got a brand new one out called *Forgiving What You Can't Forget*, which I think is incredible title, but unfortunately it comes out of a lot of pain. You've been through so much over the last, what, three years, four years? For leaders who may not be familiar, can you give them a little bit of a recap of what the last few years have been like for you? Because the interview will make so much more sense when they understand where it's coming from.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Yeah. Thank you for asking, Carey. So back in 2016, it was going to be a big year for my family. Three of my five kids were getting married and in the early part of 2016, I found out my husband was being unfaithful and it was very shocking, shattering and disillusioning for me. Because we were always aware that marriage trauma can happen, but we had done all the things that you think you should do in order to protect your marriage and to keep it in a good place. But I think the busy-ness of raising five kids and him running a business and me running a ministry, the one thing we did not make time to do was on going counseling. I think we reached a place where we just thought, "Hey, we're good." We really got to spend a season just focusing on the kids. So we didn't flip into full coasting autopilot mode, but we were not getting intentional counseling with the two of us.

Lysa TerKeurst:

I'm not saying that that's what caused this by any means, but I just know that as I've really taken a hard look at what did we not do, that's something that I want us to do the rest of our lives now. But also, what complicated the situation was that there were some addictions involved. So when I discovered what was happening in the midst of all of the trauma and emotion and heartbreak, I thought immediately, "Surely God will weave together a restoration and make this a redemption story." I didn't want this to be happening, but once I was facing reality it is happening, then I wanted God to use it for good, but my story was not a neat, tidy, straight line to the good that I assumed God would do.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Things got very complicated and I got very tired and after 18 months of holding it private, it was very apparent that the story was going to come out. Unfortunately, I'm a public figure. So I had to make the decision if it was going to come out through the rumor mill or if I needed to get ahead of it and just tell the truth. That's what I did. Right before I did that, things imploded again. We had about five rounds of back and forth where I thought we were about to cross the finish line and renew our vows and reconcile, and then things blew up again and other hard things happened, more discoveries were made. It was a very long journey, a very devastating journey.

Lysa TerKeurst:

When I talk about hurt, I don't talk about it in neat tidy Christian packaged up way. I don't want to make this appear easier than what it ever was. It was hard. It was very, very raw. So for those listening, sometimes when you say we're going to do a podcast on forgiveness, immediately, people are crossing their arms, rolling their eyes, and I get it. Because that word means that you're bringing up the deepest pain that people have experienced often in their whole lives. So I'm not going to be the person giving advice, wagging a finger, trying to make this sound easier than it is. I'm coming at this with my own huge set of resistance statements that seemed like for a long time, justified me being able to not forgive.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and I think to compound things, and I think you made that very clear in your last book but also in this book, that this wasn't like, "Oh, discovered, went to a couple of counseling sessions, all patched up. Everything's fine." It was up and down and around the corner and it almost fell apart multiple times. I'm sure in some respect, it's still hard. Last time you were on the program, I remember you were setting them for your house for the renewal of vows, which finally happened, I guess. Was that the end of 2018? Was that when that happened?

Lysa TerKeurst:

Yes it was. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I remember-

Lysa TerKeurst:

It was a day that I'll never forget because I just remember thinking, this has been the longest journey of hurt and heartbreak. I did not think it would end in reconciliation, and a lot of stories don't. My mom went through the same thing and my dad never came home. And Carey, I can't explain why sometimes God rescues people out of relationships and then sometimes provides a way for relationships to be restored. But here's what I do know. No matter what happens in the relationships where you've gotten wounded, whether there's a reconciliation or not, a redemption story is still yours for the choosing. Because redemption is between you and God and no one else's choices can mess that up for you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I really want to go there because I think a lot of leaders have forgiveness issues. I probably do. You don't even realize it, but reading a book like yours, I'm like, "Oh yeah, there are some layers there." You think about it, every time someone leaves your church, every time somebody sends you that angry letter, every time a board member quits, or you lose your job or someone you were counting on betrays you. Now, in addition to the marriage challenges you had, just real quick, you had a couple of life-threatening health issues happen and you had the betrayal, I remember you saying and you hint at it in this book too, the betrayal of a really, really close friend that was just devastating. So it was trauma upon trauma upon trauma.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Yeah. When a marriage implodes, there's never just two people that are affected. It's the shrapnel from that devastation goes out and hits people in different ways. You never know what it's going to attach to in their own personal life. Maybe some unhealed trauma in their life, or maybe some fear that they have in their lives. So people react in so many different ways. We're not just the only two casualties in this, so it wasn't just my marriage falling apart, but it was a lot, it was a lot falling apart. Plus, I had the added dynamic of public opinion weighing into my very private pain.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well you lead Proverbs 31.

Lysa TerKeurst:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You almost couldn't... If there is an enemy and he was going to wind up and take a shot, it's a pretty key target, I'll just say that. I'm sure that thoughts crossed your mind before.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Yeah, absolutely. I went through this season where I was just thinking my life is over, this legacy that I built with my husband. We were so intentional when our kids were growing up. And I remember saying, whenever they would hear about one of their friend's parents separating or getting a divorce, I remember telling my kids, "You won't have to worry about that with me and dad, your dad and I are both very committed. We'll go through a lot as a family, but we're not going to go through that." And then I just thought, how in the world could this be happening? How in the world could this be happening? It was so hard. And Carey, I'm really, I still cry over what happened. I say that in the book.

Lysa TerKeurst:

There's not a day that goes by that I'm okay with this. It's like if you had a signup sheet and it's like sign up for the trauma that you would go through in your life, I would not sign up for this. I just want to make that really clear because I wish that I didn't have this story to tell and yet I do. So what do I do about it? Because it's not just something that's affected me in my family. There are so many people carrying around hurt and devastation, and we live in a world today that is so epically offended over everything. It's like-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, so true.

Lysa TerKeurst:

... this slamming fist and hearts, hating hearts and division lines. It's just maddening. When I think about it, it's like, really, it's not so much that we have different political views and different thoughts on how the problems of the world can be solved. It's really that we all have a lot of unresolved hurt in our heart. Because otherwise, we can have productive conversations where we agree to disagree, but that's not what's happening right now. There is an epic amount, an epic amount of offended people. So my prayer is that we cut past the layers of all that people are saying and talking about, and walking around so hurt over and we really get to people's pain. That's where I start in this book.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, you really go there. By the time you're on page three, so you don't have to read very far and you've already raised bitterness, resentment and trust issues. I'm reading that going, "Okay, you've just read the mail of every leader who's ever led for more than 10 minutes." If you've tried this, and again, I think you're so right. We live in this, and this really concerns me, the cultural climate we're in right now that is so divided, so hateful, I'm so apprehensive. Heading into the election, which by the time we're filming this, is not on yet. And yet I've been married for 30 years. We haven't had your story, but my goodness, we have forgiveness issues in our marriage. Toni has a hard time forgiving me, I have a hard time forgiving her sometimes. We've got this.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you got bitterness, resentment and trust issues. Can you explain why those factors just keep coming up? Because I'm convinced that there are so many leaders listening to this who are like, "I don't know why I'm so angry. I don't know why I'm so frustrated. I don't know why get so irritated with the staff or with my church or with my family when I get home." But I wonder if that's underneath that.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Yeah. So Carey, have you ever had one of these situations where it's like, okay, you woke up on a day and you're feeling fantastic? The birds are singing, the sun is shining and you're excited about your day and then all of a sudden, wham, some kind of unexpected criticism comes your way or some kind of unexpected betrayal comes your way or somebody quits or somebody says something to you or about you on social media. And it's just maddening. It's like, it can hijack your emotions and suddenly you go from-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it is hijacking sometimes, totally.

Lysa TerKeurst:

It is, right? And suddenly you go from just feeling awesome to feeling so angry and so annoyed. And you just think, how could I have gone from up here to way down here so fast? Maybe you even find yourself getting a bit wrapped up in the anger and maybe you even feel a bit hysterical. Not as in it's funny, but as in like, I feel like I'm losing it all of a sudden. Has that ever happened to you?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah. Yeah. And used to a lot more, but even now my mind goes back to a podcast interview we posted a few months ago in the early days of the pandemic, and we just got pilloried for it. I just remember saying, "Well, I want to tell that guy, or here's what I want to write." And I'm like, "Don't do it, don't do it, don't do it." But it was an internal battle. Yeah, totally triggered.

Lysa TerKeurst:

So when that happens, I say, and my counselors really taught me this, when we find ourselves getting hysterical, it's historical.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I underlined that. I'm like, I've never heard that. When you're hysterical, it's historical. What do you mean by that? It's so good.

Lysa TerKeurst:

What I mean by that is, usually it's not just the pain of the present. Usually, it's traveling somewhere inside our brain where our trauma experiences are stored, which is in the amygdala of the brain. So it's like we can travel and locate those memories of unhealed, unresolved hurt that this present offense is tapping into that unresolved hurt from our past and the two get combined together and it's just an explosion. Because it's not just the story that we're living, it's the story we're telling ourselves. All those places have unresolved hurt, they form scripts in our mind of our judgments of the world. Like, "Well, people are just so rude." Or, "Nobody ever does what they say they're going to do." Or, "I bet that guy is just jealous." Whatever it is, we form all these scripts in our head and it just ratchets up our emotions.

Lysa TerKeurst:

That's why the Bible makes it clear that we've got to get to a place where we are dealing with the unhealed hurt in our heart. Carey, when hurt sits unattended in the human heart too long, it turns into all kinds of versions of hate. That's where we get bitterness and simmering resentments and grudges and frustrations. And all of it ratchets up our emotions so quickly when the present person taps into that

unhealed pain from our past. It gets combined, and we have an out of proportion reaction to the offense at hand.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We could just finish right here. Like, there you go, price of admission, paid back many times over. That is such a good thing to figure out. You mentioned it numerous times throughout the book, and it's a great book. I would strongly recommend, that's going to be my go-to forgiveness book when people ask because you get those questions. It's like, "Well, what's a good book on forgiveness?" Well, I've got Louis Meads wrote a really good one a number of years ago, but this one is quickly my go-to. So you've been going to see a counselor for a long time. You've been unpacking this, but it's like layers. It's not like you have five counseling appointments. It's like, "Oh, all my past is completely resolved." Is this an ongoing process for leaders? Because guys don't do that as well. I'm just going to make some gender. I do not do that particularly well. It's like, I go for a tune-up, then I'm fine, and then I don't know why I'm mad anymore.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Well, thank you for saying what you said about the book, Carey. That's so sweet. I don't take it lightly. So thank you for that. With saying that you'll make this the go-to book for forgiveness, that's a blessing to my heart.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, hands down. It's so good.

Lysa TerKeurst:

In the middle of the book, I have these three chapters that really help people do this. Because I know some people, either you are too nervous to go to counseling or you've tried it before and it wasn't a good fit or you're too busy or you feel like as a leader, it's like, "Ah, I don't know. They might recognize me. They might know me." So there's a lot of even resistance to going in to see counselors. I'm a big fan of going to see a counselor. But my hope is maybe this book, for those who aren't seeing a counselor, will be a good first step. And then maybe once they take the step and go through some of the exercises in the book, then it'll show them like, "Oh wow, maybe I need to continue this journey and go to see a counselor."

Lysa TerKeurst:

But in the middle of the book, I have three strategic chapters that really can help you deal with some of the unresolved hurts from your past. One that is called Collecting the Dots. The next one is Connecting the Dots. And then the third one is Correcting the Dots. Because like I said before, we all have a story that we're living. Then we have a story that we tell ourselves, and we've got to make sure the story we tell ourselves lines up with not only the truth, but the most healed version of who we are. Have you ever heard someone say, "I'm just trying to be true to myself." And it's like, "Yeah, I really get that." But we have to make sure that we're being true to the most healed, healthy, whole and holy version of ourselves. Because if I'm true to my most unhealed self, it can really take me to some bad places.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yep. And that's so good. I was reading through that thinking, well, first of all, brilliant. Collecting, connecting, and correcting the dots, but that's a whole series right there. That could be a book in and of itself. It was just so helpful. Collecting is about your past. Connecting is like, how do all these things shape who I am? And correcting is like, how do I bring that out in light of God's truth? It was a very helpful filter. There's a lot of advice circulating on forgiveness out there. What's some of the worst churchy advice or just cultural advice on forgiveness that you've heard?

Lysa TerKeurst:

Well, the title points to one of them. I did a bunch of focus groups. One of the number one things people would say is, "Well, you know the Bible says forgive and forget. And if I can't forget, then I can't forgive." And it's like, "Okay, well actually the Bible doesn't say that." I had to do about a thousand hours of theological study for this message, Carey. Because I had so many misunderstandings about forgiveness and I really wanted to know, what does the Bible actually say and what does it not say about forgiveness? The Bible does say that God forgives us of our sins and cast into the depths of the sea and remembers them no more. But the Bible never says, people have to forget in order to forgive. Forgive and forget is not a biblical principle. As a matter of fact, the Bible teaches the opposite, is when we remember what's happened to us, use it as a testimony.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Revelation teaches us that the enemy is defeated by the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony. So to me that says, "Don't forget, just make sure that when you're telling your story, instead of recounting all the proof of how people have hurt you, you know you're telling a healed testimony when you've traded your proof for perspective." You're not focused on what happened, you're much more focused on the wisdom and the life lessons and the perspective that you gained from it that can help other people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know we've got to watch time today. There's so much in there. And in the book, you talk about abuse, you suffered as a child. Really sad story. Some sexual abuse and other abuse that you suffered as a child. That was part of the collecting the dots. Just trying to figure out why am I this way? Why do I react the way I react? Why do I feel the way I feel? That's an unexplored journey for a lot of people, isn't it? To look back, and I know for me, everybody's story is different, but there were moments at school, there were moments at home where I'm like, "Oh, that shaped who I was."

Lysa TerKeurst:

Yeah. Sometimes it's the really traumatic things like abuse or sexual abuse. And then other times it's like a moment in time that almost gets burned into our brain that shifts the way we see ourselves and shifts the way we see the world and shifts the way we think about other people. Those little perspective shifts can affect us so much that at first it starts as an incident and then it becomes a perspective and then it becomes a belief. Then it becomes not only a belief about ourselves, others and God, but it becomes like this whole way of operating that we carry with ourselves. It becomes our processes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What was one of those for you, one of those little beliefs that just shaped you?

Lysa TerKeurst:

Okay, this is a great story. I actually didn't get to write about this in the book. So you're going to get some scoop nobody else is getting.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're going to get a scoop, guys.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Here comes the scoop. So I did this activity with my counselor. It's called the trauma egg. I don't know if you've ever seen this, but it's where you get a big piece of white poster board and you draw an egg on it. Like a big egg shape circle, and then you divide that up into little compartments and every compartment, you draw a stick figure picture of a time that you remember from your earliest memory in childhood, all the way to present day. And it's any time that you've been abused physically, emotionally, or sexually, or you've been hurt, betrayed, abandoned, or rejected in some way. So you draw all those memories, but little stick figure pictures in these little compartments. So your egg is made up of 20, 30, 40 compartments. Then after you finished and it's earliest memory all the way to present day memory, whatever you think about when you think about being hurt, traumatized, whatever.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Then I stood in front of my counselor and he just said, "Tell me the story." And what he was listening for is the shame filled script that was a belief system that ran like a filter across my brain. That any time something happened to me, everything was tainted by this shame script. So what was my shame script? As I told every little story, my counselor picked up on a phrase that I would say often, he identified that as my shame script. Mine was that I truly am afraid, and at times, really believe that I cannot inconvenience other people. Otherwise, they will see me as unnecessary or they'll see me as a pain in their butt. I have this fear of being an inconvenience to someone. Here's what's interesting, Carey. My husband, Art, did this same activity and his shame script was, I'm not good enough.

Lysa TerKeurst:

So, where this dysfunctional dance started to happen in our relationship is Art loves to do things for me. So he would often say, "Hey, can I do this for you? Or can I do that for you?" And I, because I didn't want to be inconvenienced, started telling him, "Oh no, I'll do it myself." Which said to him, he thought I was saying, you're not good enough to do that for me. That's not what I was saying. So we were in counseling one day and Art pushed back and he's like, "I'm just so tired of you telling me I'm not good enough." And as God is my witness, I've never said that to him. What our counselor helped us see is that my shame script of being afraid of being an inconvenience, and his shame script of not feeling like he's good enough, those two worlds collided and it created so much damage in our relationship, just because of this little belief that we carried all the way from childhood, both of us.

Lysa TerKeurst:

When we fixed that, Carey, now I am all the time recognizing what a gift it is for me to ask Art to do something. Or when he offers for me to say, "Yes, I would love for you to do that." If he ever gets that look in his eye where I can tell something has just pained him, I'll stop him and I'll say, "Are you hearing in the back of your mind that you're not good enough? Because that's not true. Remember, that's your shame script speaking." Then he'll say to me, "Lysa, are you hearing in the back of your mind that you're an inconvenience? Because that's not true. You are loved." Do you see how just fixing that wrong belief, that story that we were telling ourselves can transform our relationships?

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's so powerful. I haven't really unpacked this yet with Toni, who you know, because we've spent some time together, my wife. But it occurred to me the other day, we just had, it wasn't a big meltdown or anything, but we've realized with the love languages, acts of service is one of the things I really appreciate. I will do something for Toni, but it doesn't have the same impact on her that it would for me and hers is quality time. It's interesting, and that's low on my list. I'm like, "Just do something." What's really interesting, it had occurred to me that her bidding for quality time, I will often say, "Oh yeah, but we better clean the kitchen first or let me cut the lawn first." And I'm saying, "I don't value you." And then when she's like, "No, let's just sit down and relax." I'm like, "No, you don't value me because if you really did, you would tidy up the kitchen or you would get this taken care of."

Carey Nieuwhof:

I just realized, of course, the enemy's going to play out a perfect script of that kind of thing. I think surfacing those issues can be really helpful. Not the same as yours. The shame script is fascinating. I have no idea what my shame script is, but I know there probably is one. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. That's so helpful.

Lysa TerKeurst:

You're welcome.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Does that resonate? The acts of service versus quality time, it's just-

Lysa TerKeurst:

Oh, absolutely. I think because we are all the time bringing this kind of unspoken contract into every relationship that we have, it can be very easy to start to have expectations of one another and yet we don't really communicate those expectations. But what my counselor has helped me understand is expectations are really premeditated resentments. In other words, if I expect that our contract is going to go this way, you're going to give me lots of quality time, and you're expecting the contract to be, okay, acts of service are what's most important. You see how those two things bump into one another?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Totally.

Lysa TerKeurst:

What I teach in the book, and this is one of my favorite parts of the whole book, is that if we go all the way back to Adam and Eve, and we look at the fact that Adam was created from something that seems so insignificant, from the dust of the earth, and Eve was created by something that really we would think needs to be buried and forgotten, broken off the bone. But we're not just dust and we're not just broken up bone. We are breath of God and touch and design of God.

Lysa TerKeurst:

If I can remember to look at my husband with all his faults and all his uniqueness and all his amazing qualities and some aggravating qualities too, but if I can look at him and I can say, "Hey, Art, I just want you to know that I recognize you're not just the sum total of human qualities. You're not just dust. You

are breath of God, intentionally created by God to represent the goodness and the glory of God and to spread that throughout all of the world. And so, yes, babe, you've had a bad day and yes, you shouldn't have said that to me. Or yeah, that probably wasn't the best decision to make, but I want you to know, I see beyond all of that, and I know you're more than a sum total of your actions and reactions." And then for him to say back to me, "Lysa, you are not just broken off bone. You are touch and design intentionally made by God Almighty to be who you are and it's paid."

Lysa TerKeurst:

Can you imagine just changing even the scripts inside of our marriage this way? What we can have the opportunity to do? So see, my book isn't just about forgiveness. It's really about using this incredible gift that God has given us, forgiveness, to sweep our heart clean so we can start to see something so much bigger and so much more beautiful than people's faults and inadequacies and offenses and grudges and simmering resentments. Yes, we've got to deal with all of that, but it's so that we can start to see and experience beautiful, again, beautiful in our lives, beautiful in our relationships. That's what I'm really going after here.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now, it comes through loud and clear. One of the misconceptions I held on to for years around forgiveness is this idea that forgiveness really happens if I offend you. I finally come back to you, say I'm sorry. We're restored. Is it possible? Because this happens all the time in leadership where people who hurt you, people who betray you, people who wound you, offend you. And sometimes you take offense, but sometimes, no, there's a real thing there. They never ask for forgiveness. Is it possible to forgive somebody who doesn't want forgiveness or doesn't seek it?

Lysa TerKeurst:

Such a good question. So yeah, when I was a little girl, the way I thought that forgiveness worked, the way I was taught that forgiveness work is that, usually it would be between me and my sister and we'd get into a little argument and then I would push my sister and she would cry. And then my mom, the great judge, would appear and she would say, "You are wrong, and you were right. You need to say you're sorry, you need to say you forgive. And then the two of you need to hug and make up. And if you don't stop acting foolish, I'm really going to give you something to cry about." So I carry that very little girl understanding of forgiveness in just some very adult situations. I never allowed my vision for forgiveness, my understanding of forgiveness to grow up and mature into where it really needs to be.

Lysa TerKeurst:

A mature version of forgiveness and an understanding of forgiveness is when we finally realize we can't wait for someone else to make a choice to make any of this right. If we are waiting for someone else to say they're sorry, own what they did, suffer the way we've suffered, make it right, admit what they did was epically wrong, if we're waiting for that to happen, then what we're saying is, "I can't heal until they make a different choice." So a mature version of forgiveness is when we decide that we ourselves have suffered enough because of what other people have done to us.

Lysa TerKeurst:

So we're going to unhitch our ability to heal from their choices and we're going to say, "I get to make the decision to sever the source of suffering in my life. I am making this decision to forgive so that I can heal. I have carried the weight of the suffering and unforgiveness way too long." And that, Carey, is when we

really can understand that we don't have to have that epic moment with that other person. We can choose to forgive because forgiveness is the way we keep our hearts swept clean.

Carey Nieuwhof:

See, that's so liberating. I like the phrasing of it, mature. Because in the most extreme case, somebody that maybe you still haven't forgiven is dead, they're never going to come back. They died a few years ago. Or they're not a safe person. We'll talk about boundaries hopefully before we're done. But you shouldn't approach them. Or they're not repentant or they're unaware or they've lost their mental capacity to really have a conversation with you about it.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Or they don't care.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Or they don't care. Let's just be really honest. They're just indifferent. It's like, "Ah, whatever." So you would say in those situations, and I think this is a lot of leadership, a lot of life. It's like, no, forgiveness is something you should embrace so that the past doesn't own you or the hurt doesn't own you.

Lysa TerKeurst:

That's right. Carey, I always encourage people too who've been deeply hurt by another person, you don't have to start with forgiveness. That's a really hard place to start. Instead, let's start with your pain. Let's just acknowledge the pain that you've been through. Because if we skip this step, you can feel like forgiveness is saying your pain doesn't matter or what happened really didn't affect you. And it affected you and it very much matters. I guess I want to say to any listener right now who's crossing their arms and just saying, "You don't know how bad I was hurt." I have to say, "You're right. I don't know your story. I wish I did. I wish we were sitting across the table having coffee with one another right now. But I do want to say to you, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry for what happened to you. I really am."

Lysa TerKeurst:

"I want to say, I believe you. Your pain is real and it's deep and it's hard, and you shouldn't have been hurt the way you were hurt. If no one else in this world has ever dared to bear witness to your pain, I will. I'm sorry for what they did. I'm sorry for what they didn't do. I'm sorry that you're living with this, but friend, you really do deserve to stop suffering because of what another person has done to you." So start there and start with your pain and write it down. I took three by five cards and I wrote down all the different ways that I've been hurt. That is how we can get that out. And then I just went card by card by card by card. And I just said, "I forgive you for this pain that happened, for this back of what happened." Then I added this little statement, "And whatever my feelings will not yet allow for, the blood of Jesus will surely cover it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Yeah.

Lysa TerKeurst:

The reason I added that is because hurt feelings don't often want to cooperate with Holy instruction. So I had a wrong view of forgiveness. I thought forgiveness was me bossing my feelings around or

overriding my feelings or just trying to conjure up enough spiritual maturity to grit my teeth. And then my own determination just speak out, "I forgive you." But forgiveness is not based on my determination. Forgiveness is based on my cooperation with what God has already done through the blood of Jesus. And as God's forgiveness flows to me, it can then flow through me. I just cooperate with the flow of forgiveness that's coming from God. That's what I then give to other people. It's a beautiful process. It's not easy, but it is possible.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's so helpful, Lysa. In the book, and I'm so glad you went there, you talk about, I think this is a quote, "Forgiveness is more satisfying than revenge." Maybe it's my personality type. I sometimes think about revenge usually with my words, "Well, I'll go in there and I'll set this straight and somebody's going to pay." Over time, I've learned, "Well, that almost never goes the way you think it's going to go. And even if it does, it's not very satisfying." How is forgiveness more satisfying than revenge?

Lysa TerKeurst:

Well, when I wrote that, I had to sit with it for a little while. I had to really challenge myself. "Is it? Because I don't know, sometimes revenge feels like it'd be pretty satisfying."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it feels pretty satisfying. Yeah, let's be honest.

Lysa TerKeurst:

I have the curse of come back. So it feels like it might feel really good to just say that thing, to cut that other person down to the quick and prove how wrong they are and right the scales of justice. Right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I get it.

Lysa TerKeurst:

But at some point, I started saying this to my kids and then God started saying it to me. Has that ever happened to you?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah. Sometimes my kids or wife quoted back to me something I said. It's like, stop quoting that guy. It's terrible.

Lysa TerKeurst:

I know. But this is what I often will say to my kids. "You got to trade all that for an upgrade. You going to trade all that drama for an upgrade in your life. Do you really want to jump into the cesspool? Because that revenge, it'll feel good for about two seconds, but what revenge really is, is it to you signing up to get hit and hurt twice by that person's offense. You've already been hurt by what they did to you. So don't hurt yourself by now participating in the more emotional trauma of the action of revenge. It just continues a vicious cycle that will never end. You got to trade all that drama for an upgrade." And Carey, let me ask you something. When you sin, now, I'm not saying you have confess, but let's say you do

something wrong. You sin, you hurt somebody, do you ever find that the consequences for that sin are already built in? At some point, you're going to suffer for that sin that you create, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. You know what, a couple months ago I sent an email I shouldn't have sent when I was really upset. I still am untangling the damage from that.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Yeah. So we know that when we do something wrong, that we suffer the consequences for it. It's built in to that wrongdoing. We forget when it comes to other people that the same is true for them. So I'm going to let that sit on you for just a second. You see, we know it for ourselves, but we assume, because we see that other person smiling, laughing on Instagram-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you think they got off Scot-free? They're not.

Lysa TerKeurst:

We think they got off scot-free and they don't. Sin comes as a package deal of consequences. When that person sin, they unleash consequences they probably didn't even realize they were unleashing. I think that's why the Bible says, pray for your enemies, because they are going to suffer the consequences of their actions. It's built in. You don't have to see how they're suffering to know that they are suffering. So what God says is, "Revenge is mine."

Lysa TerKeurst:

God says, "I will avenge, not revenge, but I will avenge this situation." So you take that person and you place them in God's hands because God sees the consequences they've already unleashed in their lives. Only God can address this in equal measures of justice and mercy. So we place them in God's hands and we say, "I don't have to see it to know that God is addressing it. I can trust this." This is the best form of justice. Is us deciding we're not going to take this on because to do so, is going to cause more and more and more emotional hurt in our own lives. And there's just been enough hurt. So we decide, "You know what, I am not willingly signing up for anything more. I've suffered enough from this." And Carey, another thing that I will often say to my kids is, "You don't have to attend every drama you're invited to."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Your 1,000 hours of study, really showing off. This is incredibly deep and really, really helpful and penetrating. Not only a reread, but also a relisten. This is good. Because I'm thinking about one person in particular. I'm pretty good at forgiving, I think, but there's in particular and I'm like, "Yeah, I have suffered way more than he has in all the drama I play out in my mind, not in real life." But ah, this is so good. Let's talk about boundaries before we wrap up, because you've got a whole section on boundaries in the book. This doesn't mean, and you're very good at pointing this out, that we're all just hugs, reconciliation. Forgiveness is very different than reconciliation. It's very different than restoration. You may have to have some boundaries in place or you will have to with certain individuals. Can you just touch on that?

Lysa TerKeurst:

Yeah. First of all, I want to say, let's talk about what a boundary is and whether it is not. A boundary is not meant to shove the other person away. It's meant to hold us together. It's holding me together. I know how I want to act and react, but sometimes people trigger me or push my buttons to the point where I'm not able to hold it together. So my boundaries help hold me together.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, that's a fresh take. That's good.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Yeah. Also, a boundary is not meant to control or manipulate another person, but that is often what somebody who you try to draw a boundary with, they'll often say, "You're trying to control me. You're trying to manipulate me or you're being so unforgiving." So we have to make sure that we understand that's not what's happening here. It's often the people who resist having a boundary put into our relationship the most that truly need that boundary. You know what I'm saying?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Lysa TerKeurst:

So it's often the people that need boundaries the most that refuse to cooperate with them. I think that's an important point too. So if you have somebody saying, if you put up a boundary, and let's just give an example of what is a boundary. So a boundary, to hold me together, one of the boundaries that I had to do with my kids is I had to say, "I can have conversations with you all day long. I am happy to talk with you all day long, but at 9:00 PM, I am no longer willing to engage in conversation because this is not good theology, but it's absolutely true for me. The Holy Spirit leaves my body at 9:00 PM every night. So enter in at your own risk." And I just know, in other words, I know that's not theologically sound, but what I'm saying to them is, "I know I cannot bring my best self into a conversation past 9:00 PM."

Lysa TerKeurst:

"My boundary is, in order for me to hold myself together, my boundary is that I am happy to have conversations, I want to have conversations, but they need to start so that they can end by 9:00 PM. Because after that, I'm no good. I've made that decision for myself. I'm not trying to push you away. I'm not trying to control you or manipulate you. I'm telling you how I need to function and operate at my best. That's what I need." That's an example of a boundary.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Another example of a boundary is maybe you have somebody in your life. Every time you get on the phone, they want to bash other people. You can establish a boundary. You don't have to be victim to their chaos. You can establish a boundary and just say, "Hey, Carey, I really enjoy talking to you. But I have to say, I've established for myself, I'm no longer willing to participate in conversations that bash other people." If that is what you start doing on the phone call, I'm going to have to say, "Hey, Carey, I think you need to reserve this conversation for someone else or better yet in your prayer time. But I can't participate in this because it's just something I've decided for myself I'm not willing to do. Then you have the right, Carey, to decide if you're willing to continue in the conversation with me to respect my

boundary or not. But if you don't, then I'm going to have to put another boundary up." Do you see what I'm saying?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. That's so healthy.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Yeah. I think people get very paralyzed in relationships thinking, "I just have to go along with whatever the other person lays down." And I'm like, "No, you don't. No, you don't. You are responsible for you." No one else is going to be able to take care of you as best as you are. So you've got to do some self care, some soul care here, at determining what is, and is not acceptable to you. What is, and is not permitted with you. What is, and is not healthy for you. And you get to make that decision. I know it's a lot easier to talk about than it is to actually live it out in everyday life. But once you start to understand, it's actually a gift to the relationship. It's not a detriment to the relationship. I think you'll start to feel a lot safer in your relationships.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, often that other person, if they're relatively healthy, picks up on those clues and goes, "Huh, maybe I should throw people under the bus a little bit less." I've seen that dynamic play out as well. Okay. I got to ask you this because you have a lot of content creators. So final question, this could be a three hour episode. It's so good. But final question, because we all have to do this and you have done it masterfully in your books. But the last two in particular, and this one, I feel even another layer of rawness and vulnerability there, but how do you write about your pain in the middle of your pain?

Lysa TerKeurst:

Good question, Carey. I think for me, I'm always trying to make sure that I've allowed enough healing to happen so that I'm not just putting my pain on paper for the sake of writing another book. So I have to make sure that I'm not trying to prove how right I am in my book. But instead, I'm trying to excavate the life lessons and the perspective shifts that I've made so that it really can help other people when they're in that pain. I think it's a timing thing. We really do have to experience some healing before we can help other people heal. I think that's important. But I also think it's important for us to remember there's a big difference between secrecy and privacy. Secrecy is us hiding from other people, things that are making us more and more unhealthy. Privacy is withholding some details for the purpose of healing. Do you notice in my book, I am very vulnerable about the big picture of what we walk through, but I share very few details?

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, there's almost, if you're hunting for details on a gossip level, there's nothing there. I think that's very appropriate. It respects your relationship and it respects you and your marriage.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Yeah. And details, I've found just satisfy people's curiosity, but they get so full of consuming the details that they have no room for then consuming the experiential wisdom, which is what will really help them transfer the life lessons from my life to their life. I think that's the more important thing. So when I'm in pain and I'm writing, I try to make sure that I've healed enough, but I also try to make sure that I hold

private details that aren't necessary. But what's more important is to unpack the emotional fallout that people can relate to and learn from and experience the depth of the emotion so they trust that I've heard just like they've heard. So they know that this experiential wisdom could possibly work for them as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Lysa, I want to thank you so much for your time today. I just want to say, I've learned so much from you, have the privilege of taking your Compel training. I think we talked about that before on an episode. It's so good for those of us who produce content. It's really challenging. Particularly as a guy, I just find you're so good at vulnerability and it's so easy. I think last time you were on, we talked about the different voices. It's so easy for me to become the teacher. It's like, "Oh yeah, I used to struggle with, but now look, I got it all together." You're just so good at keeping it honest and writing out of the constant journey that is life. And you've done that with this book. We'll link to everything in the show notes. If people want to learn more, where can they find more, Lysa?

Lysa TerKeurst:

Yeah. So you can go to forgivingwhatyoucantforget.com. That's the book website, and they can find all the information, the trailers, all that kind of stuff right there on that website. And of course, you can check me out on social media. Instagram's one of my favorite places to communicate with people, @LysaTerKeurst. My name's complicated, L-Y-S-A-T, and hopefully you'll find me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. That's awesome. Lysa, once again, thank you. We really, I really appreciate you. Thanks so much for being with us today.

Lysa TerKeurst:

Thanks, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Man, I just love how authentic, vulnerable, transparent Lysa is. I've learned so much about being a better writer from her. You can find out whatever you want, including all the links that we talked about, links to all those subjects over at the show notes, which you will discover at careynieuwhof.com/episode379. So happy to provide that for you. It also has transcripts, and all that is for you waiting there. And thousands of leaders, check out the show notes. Make sure you check that out. We're also on YouTube these days. So if you prefer to watch rather than listen, you can find my channel over on YouTube as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We've got a fresh episode coming up next time, and I'm so excited to have Beth Moore on. This blows my mind, but every once in a while you meet a leader like Beth and you find out she's actually a listener, which I was so humbled and excited to hear about. So of course, we had to get her on. Beth explains how she stayed engaged on social media, despite the controversies and the challenges she gets, how she handles her critics. Well, we went all over the place with it. Here's an excerpt.

Beth Moore:

I could not live with thinking that a 25-year-old would have looked to me and watched me be easily run-off and bullied. I have a responsibility to her.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Beth Moore:

There were some days, it's been a long time since I've been here, but there were some days that I think, "Oh my goodness, the last thing I want to do is open up social media." Because it was just constant. It was constant hundreds and hundreds. Oh, I was called everything you could imagine, but I would think, no, every day I'm getting on. If all I've got to say is, "Man, that was a great breakfast talk." I have to get on here today if it is the last thing I do because there might be some young woman...

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm so excited to have Beth Moore join me next time. Leaders, if you subscribe, you get it all for free. Also, coming up, cancel culture with Scott Sauls and Sarah Anderson, William Vanderbloemen, Mark Batterson, Andy Stanley, Patrick Lencioni, Rachel Cruze, Craig Groeschel, Mark Clark and so many more. So excited for this. Plus we got some other stuff we're working on in the background. Stuff I can't wait to tell you about on the podcast. Well, it's time for What I'm Thinking About. And I am thinking about apologizing and forgiveness in leadership. It's brought to you by Pro Media Fire. You can get an amazing website and custom graphics every week. They'll update it with Pro Media Fire's new Digital Growth Bundle. Go to promediafire.com/digitalgrowth before the price goes up. And if you haven't yet checked out Red Letter Challenge, whether that's the original challenge or the Being Challenge, go to redletterchallenge.com/carey. It's a turnkey complete 40-day campaign for your church, done for you. You'll get discounts of 10% to 40% off at redletterchallenge.com/carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So here's What I'm Thinking About. I'm thinking about how forgiveness works in leadership, and yes, I'll tell you one of the occupational hazards of leadership is you think everybody owes you an apology, but sometimes they do. Sometimes as a leader, you owe them an apology. That's what I want to talk to you about. I have found it was much easier to apologize early in the days of my ministry than it is now. In fact, the bigger things get, the more "successful," whatever that means, you are, the harder it is to apologize. I just have to bring myself back to this again and again. I really believe if you're the leader, you should be the first to apologize. You'll have a thousand reasons that ring through your head as to why shouldn't apologize or why it was somebody's fault or while you're the leader and you don't have to, and all that stuff is wrong.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. So how do you apologize well in leadership? I have to remind myself to do this regularly to my team, sometimes in public, to our church. When I've done something, I think at its heart, an apology is ownership. It says, "I'm responsible." Whether you intended to hurt someone or mess up, irrelevant. Hopefully you didn't, but even if you didn't, you still need to apologize. So what should you do? Number one, I think go first. It's easy for you because you're the leader, just to sweep it under the rug, let it go, hope it never gets brought up. But if you're the leader, and even if you're not the senior leader, just take the initiative and go first. You'll feel so much better and believe it or not, that has a way of increasing people's trust in you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, principle number two, say it in person, but if you can't, don't delay. So ideally, if you made a mistake, go to the person that you owe an apology to, and you make it in person. If you can't and you're restricted because of geography or time, try to do it digitally, like do a Zoom call or FaceTime, apologize, shoot a video if it's more public than that. And if you still can't do that, set up a phone call, but don't delay and try to do it as personally as possible. To send an email, yeah, you can send an email, but I think it's better if you can make it more personal. Super important.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Number three, be specific about what went wrong and what you did. So don't just say, "Hey, I'm sorry if I offended you." It's like, "No, that's not an apology." Just get, "You know what? I said this, and I was wrong. I'm sorry. I want to make sure it never happens again. I apologize for hurting you." Or let's say you did something and you're like, "You know what? The action I took was really not the wise course and I made a mistake. I ask your forgiveness and I commit to making sure that this never happens again." That can be really, really huge.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Fourth principle, don't defend, don't defend. You're going to be so tempted to say, "Well, you know what? If you were under the same pressure I was, or given the circumstances." Nope. Don't defend yourself. Don't blame others. Just own it and apologize. And don't justify. Maybe you have an explanation, but an explanation is not a justification. Yeah, maybe you were late because there was traffic. Well, you should've left 10 minutes earlier. Maybe you didn't get there on time because FedEx didn't deliver, UPS didn't deliver. So what? Your job was to get it there on time. Or maybe you were just tired. It was like, "Oh, I was so tired. I didn't know what I was saying." Well, then you should've kept your mouth shut. So don't justify. Listen, this is hard. It's hard in marriage, it's hard in leadership, but if you blown it, and you're the leader, please apologize.

Carey Nieuwhof:

An explanation is not a justification, own your piece. What I find is that when I apologize using these guidelines, things go way better for the team and for the organization and coincidentally for me, because I've owned it. So I grow, I learn, I move on, it's painful. Better pain now in the moment and health for the organization than just sweeping a whole bunch of stuff under the rug hoping nobody ever notices, and really compromising your mission in the process. That's What I'm Thinking About. Yeah, I know that's the flip side of like, "That person needs to forgive me or I need to forgive them." But yeah, if you're the leader, own it. Do you think about how many crises, when you see people issuing their statements or their lawyer talks, you know how many would be avoided if someone just said, "You know what? It was my fault. I apologize, I'm sorry, I was wrong. I accept responsibility for the consequences." Yeah, I'd get rid of a lot news. Anyway, that's What I'm Thinking About.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, back next time with a fresh episode. If you haven't subscribed yet, please do so. Thank you for all the ratings and reviews. We really appreciate you, leaders. I love doing this with you. I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before.

Announcer:

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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.