

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 381 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Man, so glad to be on this journey with you. I have a conversation I've been looking forward to for a long time with Scott Sauls who you've heard before if you're a long time listener and Sarah Anderson. We're going to talk about Cancel Culture, public shaming, how to find common ground with people you disagree with and the crazy that has become the internet and civil discourse which is mostly uncivil discourse and what on earth has happened to us. I've been looking forward to this conversation for a long time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Today's episode is brought to you by Pro Media Fire. You can book your free digital strategy session today at [promediafire.com/churchgrowth](http://promediafire.com/churchgrowth) and by ICM, International Cooperating Ministries. Check out their free report, Five Ways Churches Transform Communities, by going to [icm.org/transformcommunities](http://icm.org/transformcommunities).

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really glad to have you guys on board today. If you're new to the podcast, welcome. It would be amazing if you subscribed and left a rating and review, and we got show notes too. So let us know in the comments or on social how we can serve you, and we are so excited about the lineup heading into 2021. I'm going to tell you about that toward the end. We love to tackle really challenging subjects, important subjects, practical subjects, theoretical subjects. And today we're heading a little bit more toward theory.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm going to finish this episode at the end of the podcast by talking about What I'm Thinking About, why we seem to hate each other so much. Five reasons that anger is a new epidemic. So it's a bit of a reflective post.

Carey Nieuwhof:

A little bit about our guests. Scott Sauls serves as a senior pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee. Prior to that he was the lead and preaching pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City with Tim Keller and served in other ministries as well. He is the author of several books including his most recent work, A Gentle Answer, and he blogs regularly at Scott Sauls.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also, so glad to have Sarah Anderson. I've known Sarah for years. She is a native of the greater Washington, D.C. area and a current resident of the Bible belt. Her dad actually ran for President back in 2000 was the year, Gary Bower. She writes and speaks on culture and faith. She works for Orange, a non-profit that partners with families and churches. This past September she released her first book, The Space Between Us: How Jesus Teaches Us to Live Together When Politics and Religion Pull Us Apart.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Just a note to file. We did this episode before the election and if you follow North Point, Andy Stanley just had Sarah on and her book hit the top 50 in all of Amazon which is incredible. Really excited for this. Hey, does this sound like your 2020 as a church leader?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Number one, you've been faced with constant challenges. Yep.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Number two, your team is overwhelmed with all the demands of digital content. Yep.

Carey Nieuwhof:

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Carey Nieuwhof:

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Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm so excited to get into today's show. Here is my conversation with Scott Sauls and Sarah Anderson.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, Scott and Sarah, welcome to the podcast. It's so good to have both of you here today.

Sarah Anderson:

Thank you for having us.

Scott Sauls:

Yeah, thanks. Great to be with you, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I would love to know, and obviously answer this individually, why each of you got involved in the conversation. And Scott, I know this has become a recurring theme to you, right? Bridge building rather than bury or erecting. But why you got interested in the tone of the current conversation or public discourse that we seem to be having or not having in our culture right now. Sarah, why don't we start with you? What about you? Where'd that come from?

Sarah Anderson:

Yeah. I'm a mom to two young boys. I have a 10 year old and an 8 year old. The last Presidential election, this one, where it seemed like the tone and cultural conversation just really took a turn. That was the first time they really started noticing what was happening around them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Even your kids were like wait a minute.

Sarah Anderson:

Yes. Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really? And again, how old are your kids? Because these are not teenagers.

Sarah Anderson:

That's right. 10 and 8 years old. And hearing them begin to say, "I don't want to talk about politics because it's so mean." And hearing that they were picking up on that cultural piece of how the conversations were going and I just thought, "That isn't how it's always been. Our tone has not always been that divisive." It's certainly become that recently, but I didn't want to just tell them that there was a better way to do this, I wanted to be part of a solution to make it happen. And I wanted them to know that they could experience it not just in theory, but around our kitchen table and around extended family table and be able to have these kinds of conversations that even if they're not happening publicly and they're not happening in the larger sphere, they're happening in our home.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. How about for you, Scott? This has been a long standing theme that you keep turning the joule on which I really appreciate about you.

Scott Sauls:

Yeah. It's really interesting, Carey. When I first started thinking and teaching and writing on the theme of reconciliation and loving across the lines of difference, I had a lot of things going on with respect to our ministry here in Nashville. I was asked to come in and do revitalization work on a historic church here in Nashville. It actually is the church that primarily sent Tim and Kathy Keller to New York to plant Redeemer so we came from there to here. There's a lot of history there, but the church was aging and they really were desiring fresh vision and leadership to sort of recapture younger generations. Of course, what I was aware of coming in was that if you're going to talk about trying to do an inter-generational thing in today's climate, you're also talking about cross-political differences. You're talking about a lot of differences generationally.

Scott Sauls:

So we just started there and then started getting in to conversations about race, conversations about urban people and suburban people because we've got a little bit of both sensibilities in our church. We started to see this political diversity emerge. And with that a lot of tension, a lot of misunderstanding. We really just kind of by default turned that into a central theme of our teaching.

Scott Sauls:

The timing was pretty crazy because this was just when the outrage culture thing was starting to take off. It was around 2015. And here we are a few years later and it just seems like things are getting harder and harder and reasonable, sane voices like the two of you are becoming more and more necessary. And Mr. Rogers is popular again because we all want Mr. Rogers back, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. You both raised it. You talked about your kids, Sarah. And then Scott, you talked about generational. It's something I don't think gets enough air because people tend to think in monolithic terms. But do either of you have thoughts on whether so much of the partisanship or the anger is in-part generational? Do you think generations behave differently around this?

Sarah Anderson:

Yeah. I think they do. I see that in my own family. I think we've experienced that with my parents and my generation a little bit. I don't think it's that way for everybody, but I realized when I came out with this book last month that the number of people I've heard from who are buying it for their adult children, parents buying it for their adult children so they can begin to have civil conversations around these conflicting ideas again. I'm not sure why that is, but I think there's a tendency for the older generation to think that the younger generation's just kind of caved to culture. They've lost the plot, and I think there's a tendency for the younger generation to think that the older generation has stopped evolving and they're not willing to change.

Sarah Anderson:

I think there's kind of a default thinking there that isn't generous in their motives, but I don't know why it plays out that way. I think when we assume that of each other, we're not taking into account the different experiences our generations have had that have led them to believe the way they do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you've got an 8 and 10 year old going why are people so mean?

Sarah Anderson:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Scott, what's your take on the generations?

Scott Sauls:

Yeah, I think the older generations that critique the younger ones for caving to culture don't realize that they caved to culture, as well. It was just a different culture. There was the culture of the religious right and the moral majority movement. A failed project by every measure in terms of persuasive movement. That was a failed effort and that was a cave to a certain kind of culture. So you do have these differences in sensibilities and Barna and everybody else is saying, "Well, the reason why younger generations, particularly white evangelical younger generations, are drifting away from the institution of the local church, they'll say it's because our parents and grandparents generation conflated their right leaning politics with their faith. Now what younger generations are at risk of is conflating their left leaning politics with their faith and it's going to be interesting to see what their kids say in 15 years or so.

Scott Sauls:

Really I think what you've got is two generations that if everybody started by being quick to listen and slow to speak instead of the other way around, quick to speak and slow to listen, if they reversed that, if we all reversed that, I think there could be a really beautiful sharpening affect where younger people realize they can learn from the older generations and the older generations can learn that hey, I'm not done learning yet. There's a lot that our kids and grandkids can teach us.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I was going to ask the question and I don't know whether it's a good question, which generation is loudest? I wonder if it's that they're all kind of loud just in their own way and on their own channels. Is that fair or is that not fair?

Sarah Anderson:

Yeah, I would say that it is. I would say that's pretty accurate. I think there's almost something in every generation that's kind of being raised up. Everybody's rebelling against something. Everybody is living in reaction to whatever it was that was passed down to them. I think Scott's right that there's going to be some kind of balance we're going to have to figure out, but it almost is we over compensate. We move in the other direction. We got to figure out a way to kind of meet in the middle and balance out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is every generation loud in its own way, Scott?

Scott Sauls:

Absolutely. No doubt about it. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But my loud is right. I just want you to know that, okay?

Scott Sauls:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've got the correct loud.

Scott Sauls:

It's the Pharisee spirit that I think every human heart has to come to terms with at some point. Where it says in Luke 18:9, "There are those who trust in themselves that they're righteous and look down on other people with contempt." Self righteousness and contempt leads to a loud off putting proclamation. I think you're on to something, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sarah, I want to ask you about growing up because your dad ran for President. I want you to tell leaders about that. You were kind of raised in almost is it that moral majority poster child? You were the teenage poster child.

Scott Sauls:

Oh, whoops. Sorry, Sarah. Apologies to your dad. My bad. I didn't realize that. I'm so sorry about that.

Sarah Anderson:

Yeah. I was raised just outside Washington, D.C. in a very political family. My parents both loved politics. They moved to D.C. after college. Met working at the Republican National Committee. My dad worked on the Reagan campaign and then in the Reagan administration as under secretary of education and then chief domestic policy advisor to the President. And then in 1999 he ran for the Republican primary in the presidency himself. That world, that political world, was very much a part of our religious world as well. I'm not sure ... I want to be very careful because I don't think it was explicitly passed down to me that they were synonymous, but I think as a child you're only absorbing and observing what you know and what you see. So to me it felt synonymous, the Christianity and the faith and the Republican kind of morals. They were interchangeable terms to me. I didn't know that it was possible to be a Christ follower and a Democrat. Those seemed like mutually exclusive terms my whole life.

Sarah Anderson:

And it wasn't because I heard Democrats being talked badly about, necessarily, it was just kind of that was what we were surrounded with. So on one hand we had this very patriotic, love America, I had America themed birthday parties growing up. It was just like that was kind of our MO and then also the evangelical poster child of the True Love Waits ceremonies and the I Kissed Dating Goodbye. I tell the story in the book that my True Love Waits ceremony was filmed by a 60 Minutes news crew because my dad was being interviewed for the show at the time. So there was just kind of this weird interwoven idea. But they all seemed one in the same and it really wasn't until college where I realized it could be different, there was a different way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I was going to say, and then you went to college, right?

Sarah Anderson:

Well, interestingly, I went to a small, conservative, Christian college where 99% of us were Christian evangelicals and Republicans, but I saw a poster for the Democrats club and I thought, I didn't think we had Democrats here. It was crazy. And then the thing that got me was the sign that said Jesus loves Democrats too. And I thought, "Well, sure. But does He like them as much as Republicans?" Like, let's be honest.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Kind of like he loves tax collectors and prostitutes and things like that?

Sarah Anderson:

Exactly. All theoretical. But that really started this crack in my worldview, that there was a different way to follow Jesus that did not have to necessarily line up with the Republican party line.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Okay. I don't want to, this isn't a partisan podcast, but let's just say your views have shifted on a number of things. You talk about that in the book. Over the years. How do you see the world differently now at this stage as a mom of two young sons?

Sarah Anderson:

That's another reason why I got involved in this. My family has remained very political. My brother and sister have spent their entire professional careers in politics. So we haven't had the luxury of not having these conversations as we started to kind of diverge in different areas in our views and opinions. We couldn't not talk about it because it's how they all made a living. So it was kind of like this is going to come up regardless. We have to figure out a way to do it.

Sarah Anderson:

I would just say I think what I've seen is maybe more nuance in the world than I originally thought living in D.C. D.C. is such a bubble. It's such a tribal place. It's really easy to fall into that us versus them thinking and I saw that when my dad ran for President. I saw it when it was Republicans running against Republicans and the animosity between the two, right? It was so easy to make enemies out of anybody who would have normally been a friend.

Sarah Anderson:

I see that it's easy to fall into that way of thinking. Leaving Washington, I think, was a real gift to me and to our family to begin to see that there was a nuance. There was so many of these issues that I thought were so clear cut that when I just learned the stories of people on the other side made me realize that politics is personal. It's not all just legislation. That there's real people it affects on both sides and that's just a lot more complicated than we give it credit for. And any time it comes across as clear cut and black and white and very obvious, we're probably missing a large part of the story.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Now, Scott, you've lived all over the place. So you go from New York City and literally from Times Square almost in New York City, downtown Manhattan, to Nashville. What are some of the differences that you have seen between how New Yorkers think and what it's like in Nashville? What are some of the differences you've seen or anything from your own journey that would reflect a continued change in perspective?

Scott Sauls:

Yeah. Quite honestly, Carey, I see a lot more similarities than differences. I mean, Nashville's a lot more open, leafy, green space. Living quarters are much larger. You tend to own your home instead of rent. It's just life here is a lot more comfortable which has its pros and cons. We kind of love the grit and grind

of being in the city and living the pedestrian life and sweating like crazy every day no matter what we were doing. We loved sort of the international presence there of just having the whole globe in this concentrated space of this small island. But in terms of mindset, sensibility, if New York and Los Angeles got married, Nashville would be born. I think that's part of why New York and L.A. have had this sort of love affair with one another. There's a lot of moving back and forth. The Los Angeles Times and the New York Times have identified Nashville as what they call the third coast. So Nashville has sort of been co-opted in to that. Now there's a trinity of cities, I guess, for good or for ill.

Scott Sauls:

I think Nashville has the best and the worst of both New York and Los Angeles here kind of bundled up into one city. State government's here, arts and entertainment, higher education, major universities. It's the Silicon Valley of healthcare which we resent. We'd rather Silicon Valley be called the Nashville of Technology, but it is what it is. It's very much a culture making city so there was a lot of transferrable stuff with respect to how we did ministry. Now, I will say that the area of Nashville that we're in probably leans more red state than blue state in a similar proportion that the Redeemer Church community leaned maybe a little bit more blue state than red state, but politically diverse.

Scott Sauls:

To your point, Sarah, a minute ago, I became a Christian later in life like around age 20 and I thought that to be a Christian was to be a Republican and to be a Republican was to be a Christian. Over time though, what I've discovered is probably a lot of the things that you've discovered, that there are all kinds of justice issues in addition to, not instead of, but in addition to the unborn. There are all kinds of justice issues. Race, poverty, immigrant policy, refugees, et cetera, that ought to make comprehensively pro-life Christians think very carefully and nuanced about their positions and it also ought to make us pause to realize that you can have two churches in the same metropolitan area just in different zip codes. Both churches believe the Bible 100% from cover to cover. Most of the members over here are going to say it's hard for me to fathom being a Christian and a Democrat. And then most Christians over here would say also on our reading of the Bible tells us it's hard to imagine being a Christian and a Republican.

Scott Sauls:

So what that says is either this group doesn't know how to read the Bible and this group does. This group gets it all right, this group gets it all wrong or more likely, because this is in cities everywhere, more likely both groups have blind spots and both groups need one another in order to get a more comprehensive, full picture. I love what Michael Wear and Justin Giboney are doing with And Campaign and I think there are a lot more voices emerging in evangelical world and in Christian world that want to think in a more nuanced way and build more bridges. I hope that's the future.

Sarah Anderson:

One of the problems, I think, that came with associating a political party with our faith was it really eliminated the need for critical thinking because if you could just assign God as giving you permission to believe what your party believed then you didn't have to actually engage anybody on the other side because God was on your side. I think that led to a lot of us to reach a certain age and to be like, "Well, that doesn't make sense because the more I start to think about it and the more I start to realize the people on the other side aren't just this evil, wrong, wicked whatever, you realize there's a lot more

thinking I have to do with this." So it's an easy way out to assign God to a political party, but I think it actually hurts us long term and becoming critical thinkers and engaging culture in a nuanced way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, that is challenging. I mean, even for me and I don't share these publicly very often, but I have views. And if you have a different view, I'm also an Enneagram eight. I'll be like, "I don't know how any rational person can think that." But it's pretty clear that that's true. So I think that's human nature. Why have we gotten louder and why have we gotten angrier? I think because election year, no election year, and this will be playing out after the U.S. election, so who knows? As I was joking with you before, we may not have a planet. I don't know. Maybe this will never air. Who knows? But we just get loud about everything these days and we're so offendable. Why do you think it got louder and why do you think it's gotten angrier?

Scott Sauls:

I don't know if it has.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really?

Scott Sauls:

I just think that the noise has been amplified by devices. Aggression and outrage started in Genesis chapter three when Adam points his finger at God and says, "The woman you gave me, she's culpable for the fruit that I ate."

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:24:04]

Scott Sauls:

And then in the next chapter, the first pair of brothers we have, one of them kills the other out of envy and then we get all of Old Testament and New Testament history showing that people just can't seem to get along. And it goes back to that Pharisee spirit. And Kathy Keller says the natural religion of the human heart is self-righteousness. And we're always looking to put ourselves above. And this is what Darwin got right, that the strong want to eat the weak. Everybody without the Holy Spirit, without the intervening kindness and grace of God, we all want to dominate. We all want to be on top. We all want to win. And that leads us to compare and compete and put down and form communities around a common enemy. And so I think it's louder just because we have more ways of exposing ourselves to the noise.

Scott Sauls:

And the thing about the noise is just like kindness, outrage is contagious. If I start complaining, it probably won't be long before one or both of you start complaining. If I start rejoicing and catching somebody doing good instead of catching somebody doing wrong, it's probably not long before one, or both of you is going to start rejoicing with me, right? So this is contagious effect that we have on each other. And when outrage is everywhere, of course, it just feeds on itself.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sarah, what's your take? Louder and angrier.

Sarah Anderson:

I would say, I think we probably go in cycles of this. I've tried to pay attention to some social psychologists and economists. And one of the things I've heard them say is that more divisive cultures tend to come on the backend of financial crisis. And so when you look at when this kind of started to happen that 2007, 2008 and the financial crisis, and the reason is because once the financial recovery starts happening, the divide between the more affluent and the less affluent grows wider and gets people more angry.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Anderson:

And then around that same time, there is also the incorporation of the retweet button on Twitter and the like button on Facebook. And I think we saw that, yes, kindness is contagious for sure, but outrage, I think spreads a lot more quickly. And I think we saw that with the introduction of these social media platforms and being able to project our outrage so easily that it started to spread. And in a lot of ways, it became a version of a mob mentality. And what we know about a mob mentality is that there is a lower cognitive and moral threshold for a mob than an individual, right? So you get a lot of people saying the same kinds of things, hiding behind a screen, not even in a physical mob, but hiding behind a screen, you're going to have them doing a lot of things that they wouldn't necessarily be doing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Sarah Anderson:

So I think that all of these things kind of created this perfect storm in our culture. And I think we're seeing the results in that now I want to believe that enough people are paying attention to the way that outrage culture has fueled what shows up in our timelines and that the articles that we want to click on are there to keep us entertained and on the screen longer, more than they are there to inform us. So I think the more we start to pay attention to these things that we can start to change the narrative a little bit and at least begin to act more proactively and how we engage online and in person.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'd love to get your thoughts on the rise of Cancel Culture, because I think there is like a mob mentality that's out there. And as I was saying before we started recording, I'm all for accountability. I think that can be great and transparency. And you would hope that leaders have integrity. I would hope that I have some integrity, right? So I'm not talking about being held to account for things that you did wrong or being called out in those moments when you need to. But I think we all now would assume, we all would think, I think we've gone beyond that. We're in the Cancel Culture.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So do you want to give us like a working definition of, in your head of what Cancel Culture means to you? And then a theory on how we got here, because I'm just very anxious to find out what others have

to say about it. We haven't really done an episode on this, and yet I know it's something that a lot of leaders live in fear of, or are part of, to be honest with you, just like, "No, I'm going to jump on this person and they're gone. We're going to get rid of them." So thoughts on that. Scott, how about you?

Scott Sauls:

Man. I mean, it is a tenuous environment around the sort of Cancel Culture theme, for sure. I remember hearing Andy Stanley say a few years ago about pastors and this was before all this stuff started heating up. He said, "All I have to do is say five wrong words behind a microphone, and it will completely blow up everything I've ever done in ministry. Just five wrong words." And I think we've just, as we've gotten more and more heated as we've gotten more and more defensive in our posture, as we've gotten more afraid ourselves, we've just assumed this rival spirit and the Pharisees did it, right? I mean, what happens? Jesus calls a dead man out of a tomb, and what did the Pharisees want to do? They start plotting about how they're going to kill Lazarus.

Scott Sauls:

I mean, how insane is that? And they want to...they're plotting to how they want to kill Jesus. And I think behind the Cancel Behavior oftentimes is the feeling of being threatened, that if they win then we're going to lose. And so there's that, but then also think there's this safe spaces thing that emerged a few years ago on college campuses where now it was imperative. Not only that we keep students physically safe but also emotionally safe. In other words professors and administrators, the unpardonable sin is to make the student feel uncomfortable by sharing ideas or expressing ideas that don't match with their ideas. And what that's called is a non-education. And yet if you can't teach, the political commentator, Van Jones, I think puts it really well when he talks about safe spaces.

Scott Sauls:

He says, I want my kids to be safe physically, but I don't want them to be safe emotionally. I want them to be emotionally strong. I want them to have well-formed ideas in relationship with Enneagram 8's, like Carey, where they can freely exchange disagreements and be sharpened and be able to stand on their own convictions because they're well formed. But I think there's been a culture that's developed and the very liberal journalists, Nicholas Kristof has written about this and about academia and news outlets. He says, the unpardonable sin is to be a conservative. He says, we're all about tolerance as liberal elite thinkers and academics, unless you're conservative. And then all we want to do with you is shut you down.

Scott Sauls:

Now, this is Nicholas Kristof, who's very liberal. Kiersten Powers has done similar things in her work of saying, look we're actually a lot more conservative than conservatives are in terms of our intolerance for voices that don't agree with ours. And so I think it's important on the liberal conservative continuum to realize that everybody has capacity for self-righteousness. Everybody has the capacity to be over-sensitive and therefore everybody has the capacity to want to shut other people down. Now that's about ideas. And now I think Carey, you also talk about behaviors, which it's important to hold accountable. When powerful people are exploiting less powerful people and hurting and abusing less powerful people, because they're more powerful. That's a whole another conversation.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This is a whole other conversation. But I think Andy's point is very valid that you say five wrong words, and that can be the end or a major aberration. We see that almost daily. Sarah, any thoughts on the emergence of the rise of Cancel Culture and where that comes from? And what's your take on that?

Sarah Anderson:

Well, I think you hit the nail on the head when you said fear. And both of you are set talking about a fear. There's a fear of saying the wrong thing and then we've got over compensated and we're fearful of our kids being made uncomfortable, or our kids themselves don't want to feel uncomfortable. And we do that. We develop a lack of resilience, which is not good for anybody. And I think we're right in saying that the conflict is a good thing. And what Cancel Culture is eliminating is a lack of discourse and civil discourse. And we can't sharpen our ideas unless we're in conflict with one another. No one is going to arrive at the best idea on their own, right? I mean, it's a biblical principles, iron sharpens iron. So I think the rise of Cancel Culture is also the rise of a lack of intelligence in our conversation, culturally. Because we're not allowing ourselves to engage with people who think differently and to test out these ideas and to develop the critical thinking.

Sarah Anderson:

But I think the snapshot or kind of the definition that I would use for Cancel Culture, and the way I see it, is that it really is just taking a snapshot of someone's life and building their entire kind of reputation around that moment without taking into account how their past shaped them, or set them up for this good or bad, and without realizing the potential of their future. And I think that's just a dangerous road to go on. None of us want to be judged by a snapshot of one moment in our lives. But again, I think like we said, it stems from I think, good intentions of wanting to hold things accountable, but I think it was an overcorrection, again moving in that direction if we want to keep power for people in line, but now what we're doing is we're just shutting down conversation, shutting down any possibility for wrongdoing and then redemption on the backside of it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Both of you are right about this. I touched on a little bit in my last book, *Didn't See It Coming*, but I'm really concerned about the depth of conversation. I've had extensive conversation with Gordon MacDonald about that on this podcast, he sees it as a similar problem. He remembers more civil discourse, people asking questions. I would love to get your view on what are some of the hallmarks, cause we're all implicated in this, right? I mean, I'm not perfect behavior. Sometimes I shut people down. Sometimes I judge quickly, I'm perfectly capable of self-righteousness. What are some markers of healthy, respectful dialogue? And then the opposite of that too, where it's like, "No, when you start to venture into this territory, it's not really conversation." Sarah, what about you? You, you wrote quite, quite extensively on that. And so Scott, but what are some markers of healthy conversation? What are some markers of unhealthy shut down conversation?

Sarah Anderson:

Well, I think you're right. It's definitely dying. And I think what we're learning as it's dying is that civil conversation is a muscle that atrophy is without use. And we're seeing what has happened as a result of that. It's not like riding a bike where you can just pick it right back up and assume everything's going to go great. So I think some of the markers for civil conversation that we need to continue to practice, because it's not just going to show up and be great at the first time. I think it starts with a posture of humility and curiosity towards each other. And I think that, again, this is what I've learned in my own

family. They are so great at asking questions of me without just immediately trying to shut me down and vice versa. It's not just trying to change each other's minds.

Sarah Anderson:

I think the language that we've used around it sometimes is we're not trying to make each other in our own image. And I think that's when we realize conversation starts to go off the rails. When we are trying to engage with somebody in order to conform them into what we're thinking. But if we have a posture of curiosity towards one another, then it's to understand each other. And I think when we have the right goal, first of all, trying to change someone's mind, that's above our pay grade. Like we can't control that that's out of our hands, but being able to understand each other, we do have a role to play in that we can control that. And so I think that we need to realize what is it that we actually have power over? And I think we'd be a lot less frustrated if we just dropped the idea of trying to change each other's minds every time. And just start to learn and to ask questions about how somebody landed on this particular position instead of just immediately rushing into a judgment.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What do you think about good conversation guidelines, Scott and unhelpful ones?

Scott Sauls:

Well, I mean, go to the master himself, Jesus said, if you see a speck in somebody else's eye, deal with the log in your own eye first and then you'll be able to see clearly to remove the speck from the other person's eye. And he doesn't say, then you won't feel like you need to remove the speck from somebody else's eyes. He says, then you'll be able to. If there's a speck in my eye and you see it and you notice it and it's there, it's a mercy, it's a kindness for you to help me remove it. So I don't get an infection and go blind, right? So I can see clearly too. But I think that concept of going into, and it's counterintuitive, it's counter-cultural to think this way, but going into, especially conflict, disagreement, spirited, discussion, whatever we want to call it, assuming that I'm the biggest hypocrite in this conversation.

Scott Sauls:

And at least mentally assuming that even if emotionally, I think the other person is just full of hot air to at least have the mental discipline to assume that there are some things that I'm going to miss here. Tim Keller talks about his unfair critics, which public people have a lot of unfair critics. And Tim will tell you, he's written about this. He's gotten more criticized for views that have been attributed to him that he doesn't hold. Then he has his actual views and think all three of us can identify with that or relate to that on some level. But he says, even when that happens, it's important to be careful not to be completely dismissive of the critic, to hold them in contempt to call them an idiot. But to get in a private space and to consider, is there a kernel of truth in there even if 89% of it is completely off base. Is there a kernel of truth in there that I can learn from?

Scott Sauls:

And that'll be my starting point before I engage that person in conversation. Now Tim's a lot better at that than I am, but it is what Jesus taught that no matter who we are, imagine if we have two people in a conflict and they're both thinking that way, like I'm first a learner here. And then secondly, I'm a critic, but first the learner. Jesus was pretty smart. He doesn't get a credit, he gets credit for being loving and kind and sacrificial. We don't really talk a whole lot about how smart, how intelligent Jesus is just about human relationships. Remember, he's a wonderful counselor. Like he's the best therapist you'll ever

have for relationships. And just humble yourself on the sight of the Lord and in the sight of whoever you're encountering. And there'll be an uplifting of some sort. But I think we get into trouble though when we reverse it. And we act like the log is in that person's eye. And if I'd anything in my eyes, just a little speck.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sarah, you mentioned conversation and curiosity asking questions. I'm curious because there's a few years between you and me, you're at a different stage of life. So do you find that when you're out in social situations, that question asking is a natural discipline? My wife and I have noticed the decline over the years where we can go to an event for an hour and a half, and nobody asks us a single question and we'll be asking people about them. Tell us about the kids. How are you? How's Rodney? Oh, that's a really nice place. Like when did you get that redesigned or that kind of thing, but what do you discover with your generation?

Sarah Anderson:

I would agree with that, actually. We've had conversations in our family about, we'll go do the same thing and come home and be like I learned everything about them. I don't think they learned a single thing about us and that's fine. I'm not like ready to-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's not the goal.

Sarah Anderson:

But the point is, there's a lack of a social connection because it's all one way. And when we talk about raising our boys, we're literally trying to teach them to ask us, how was your day? You start with that question before you immediately start to unload what your day was like, there's an exchange there. So I think you're right. I don't know if that has to do with social media and just our willingness to just project our life online and assuming everybody wants to hear about it and so we think the same thing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. That is exactly my completely untested theory with zero data behind it. But it's been about the last decade. And what do we do? We post about, "Oh, I'm interviewing Scott and Sarah, I'm doing this, I'm doing that." And I just assume in real life that you're interested in every trivial detail of my life without reciprocity, right? Like I find the most life-giving relationships to be mutual relationships where maybe some days it's not 50, 50, right? You're going through really tough times. Scott's going through a really tough time. And I do 90% of the listening, 10% of the talking. There's not a lot of questions back, but in a normal exchange, it's got to come out somewhere in the middle where I'm as interested in you as you are in me. And that actually defines healthy human relationship. But you're seeing that absent in your social circles as well.

Sarah Anderson:

And I think you're right. I think it's interesting. You said the most life-giving relationships are the ones where there is a back and forth. It's not that we're, it's people who agree with you and everything you say-

Carey Nieuwhof:

No.

Sarah Anderson:

There's dialogue back and forth and-

Carey Nieuwhof:

People who are actually interested in you.

Sarah Anderson:

Yes. And I think my generation is saying, "You need to be like me to have community and a relationship."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then we can all agree with each other in our agreement circle.

Sarah Anderson:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Interesting. Scott, love your take on it.

Scott Sauls:

Have you ever heard that little skit that Groucho Marx did with another character and he's just going on and on about himself? You should know a thing about me, one more thing about me and there's also this about me. And then he stops, he has this moment of clarity and awakening. And he says, "Oh my goodness. I have been talking about me this entire time. I'm so sorry. Let's talk about you. What do you think about me?" And I just can't get that out of my head as I'm hearing both of you talk, but I mean you're professional question asker, Carey. And so, I mean, you have a way of sort of drawing people in just by the way that you show such interest. And so I could see why somebody might just get kind of swept up in that. But I mean, we've come home from I mean, even this past month, I can think of three different times where we've had dinner with some people and either Patti or I would ask the other, "Did we tell them anything about ourselves or was this just us interviewing them about their lives?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know.

Scott Sauls:

And we wonder, are we that a couple sometimes? Or am I that person sometimes maybe.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've asked that question too. Sometimes I play experiments too, depending on how well it's like, I'm just going to ask questions and see how long people can go. And one guy just, I didn't even ask a question, talk about himself for 28 minutes.

Scott Sauls:

Without stopping.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I eventually got my watch out. I'm like, okay, I got-

Scott Sauls:

That's a sermon.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It was 28 minutes without a break, all about him.

Scott Sauls:

That's a sermon at Connexus Church. You should capture that and put it on video.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know I should have had my phone like strategically positioned. And I wonder it's this symbiotic thing where we're online, we're in real life. And I think your observation, Sarah, that, I just want to find people who agree with me, who think like me, who dress like me, who vote like me. And then we're all going to tell everybody else how wrong they are. But it really makes for awkward social dynamics. Scott, I mean, we're a little similar, more similar in age. Have you noticed a de-evolution of conversation over the years or not so?

Scott Sauls:

I'm not a sociologist. I haven't examined generations closely enough, but I wonder if there's something in there related to the shift in parenting philosophies. Parents now, I think make their kids the center of their universe a lot more than they did when I was growing up, where it's child centered everything. I mean, parents are following their kids in and out of this, that, or the other. I mean, you probably have this dynamic at your churches where people will disappear for three months and they'll show up and they say, well, this was soccer season. And I'm like soccer season, for your seven-year-old. I mean, I can see, maybe if your kid was 16 and a college prospect or something, this is for your seven year old who is not even athletic.

Scott Sauls:

And you just hit pause on some of the most important aspects of your life because your seven year old wanted to do travel sports. And make sure they're really good before you make those kinds of life-changing decisions for the whole family. But the theme being whatever the kids want, we don't want our kids to not like us. It sort of feels like that's become a parenting philosophy that everything revolves around our kids liking. And so, when actually the best kind of parenting is like the best kind of leadership. People need to struggle with your leadership and your parenting sometimes. Otherwise who's leading who? And so I think it's sort of created possibly this just narcissistic assumption that everything we do and therefore everything the world does is about me.

Scott Sauls:

I'm the hero of this story. I'm the center of the story. And everybody else is a supporting actor, in my story. I think there are a lot of parents that behave like supporting actors in their kid's story, rather than as the healthiest home, fall trap and all the great parenting experts would say the healthiest homes are the marriage-centered homes not the kid-centered. And you put the kid in the middle. It's like putting planet earth in the middle of the solar system and trying to turn the sun into a planet, it'll throw everything off. But then I think these little guys, these devices and the way that we have, and I don't know the answer to this because it's really hard when your kid is going to be socially isolated in their social world if they don't become a phone addict

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Scott Sauls:

If they don't become a phone addict, the cost of that is they will have fewer friends and less social life. And so, it's this terrible catch 22 that leads our kids to either be lonely or narcissistic, take your pick, make your choice. But those are armchair observations by a non-expert.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So Sarah, you spend a lot of time in the child education space. That's kind of your day job as well, in addition to being a mom. What's your take on that? What do you think? Do you see a connection? Any thoughts, any revisions to that idea?

Sarah Anderson:

Yeah, I think it's probably true. I think we're having conversations like this all the time with my husband and I, for our kids' future. What does this look like when it comes to devices and all the research? The phones have been around long enough to know, the research is coming out, that we know it's not good for developmentally, still developing teenagers to have access, immediate access, to a social media world. So it's not just the phones. I think it's the social media platforms that are even more of a problem. And I've heard social scientists say that they think that middle school principals need to be saying, your kids should not have a phone. Right now, we're just kind of ambiguous about it and every parent kind of makes their own decision, but we're seeing developmentally, this is not good. There's a sharp increase when it comes to decline in mental health, rise of suicide, especially in girls, but in boys as well.

Sarah Anderson:

And the rise in these mental health issues is directly connected to a little object that can tell us in an instant what our reputation is and whether people like us or don't like us, or what they don't like about us. And, that's hard for adults to handle. I know that as a middle schooler, there's no way I would've been able to handle that well. So I'm nervous about what that means for the generation. And I'm nervous for the parents who want to do it a different way. But like you said, Scott, there's just, it takes a lot of people to turn the ship and you don't want to be the only family that makes that decision and then hurt your kids in the process. But you're right, I think it is that making that decision between, do I want a mentally healthy child who is socially isolated or do I want someone who is connected, but what kind of connection is it really? Is it to actual relationships and people, or is it just to these platforms and what kind of kids are we creating in the process?

Scott Sauls:

Have you guys seen The Social Dilemma on Netflix? I'm curious what your thoughts are on that as a child development expert?

Sarah Anderson:

Oh, well, I wouldn't call myself an expert, but yeah, yeah, yeah. No, I think, it's exactly right in a lot of ways. I loved the connections it was making politically to a lot of things that these echo chambers we've started to live in that before, it used to be that we would kind of choose to live in these echo chambers, but now the algorithms are creating echo chambers for us and that we're living in these spaces without even realizing it. So, yeah, I think it's always interesting when the people who have created something are making the decisions to not expose their own children to a product or to a platform. That, to me, is very telling about what the kind of long-term effects are on this, but it just, it's so difficult because social media is still very new, but it's old enough to know it's not moving in a great direction, but it's far enough along we don't, it's hard to correct course at this point.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and there's an argument when it comes into Cancel Culture and everything. And I want to come back to even shaming, because that's a big issue if you're raising kids and they're on social media, group shaming is a big deal and that's kind of what Cancel Culture is, at its heart. It's just, we're going to assassinate you and shame you in that. But, on The Social Dilemma, it's a really hard thing. First of all, I'm not a teenager or middle middle-schooler, so I'm an adult who has a long pre-digital memory. That I think is a blessing right now. I lived, I've always been technological, but it's sort of the last quarter of my life, not half my life or three quarters of my life. So I have a long pre-digital memory, but it's a debate.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We have this on my team all the time. Here we are doing this podcast and you're in Atlanta and Nashville and Toronto, and we're able to do this and we're bringing it to leaders around the world using the very thing that we're debating. So, I was having this conversation this week. Do I just go with my manual typewriter into a cabin in the woods, off the grid, and write books for obscurity and never market them? I mean, it's almost like saying the church isn't allowed to use the printing press, or we're not allowed to use the phone, or we're not allowed to use the car, right? You almost become Amish in your approach. And this is, you can look at the history of the Industrial Revolution, everything, I think it was in The Social Dilemma. They didn't say it in these words, but a similar quote would be, "We are technology's parent, but we're also its child."

Carey Nieuwhof:

We don't know what it's doing to us. And so what we try to do in this company is, we try to be a place for good people on the internet to gather. We try to moderate the conversation. I try to have life giving conversations like this, that recalibrate people going, "Oh, that's the crazy that's going on? Yeah, I was involved in online shaming. Okay, I probably don't want to do that in the future." Or, whatever. But yeah, it's a really tough dilemma. And with kids, my answer is thank goodness mine are in their twenties. We kind of dodged that bullet. It was still dial up when they were super young and the age was basically high school. And, I still think there was issues there, but it wasn't like the eight year old who wants an iPhone for Christmas or the ten-year-old.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's talk about shaming. You've got a whole section in your book, Scott. I'd love to know, from your biblical perspective, both of you, Jesus taught in an honor shame culture and there seems to be a lot of bullying and a lot of shaming happening online. What are your thoughts on that, Sarah?

Sarah Anderson:

Yeah. Well, I think the idea of shaming is, to me, it's connected to that idea of contempt, which there's been a lot of research around relationships that marriages that go the distance, contempt is the number one contributing factor.

Carey Nieuwhof:

John Gottman, yep.

Sarah Anderson:

Yes, exactly.

Scott Sauls:

Oh, yeah.

Sarah Anderson:

So I think what they have in common is, we're talking about the essence of a person and not what they've done. And so I think what cancel culture has turned into, we're not making a snap decision or snap judgment on what somebody did. We're saying you are bad. I don't want to just cancel this action that you did, I have contempt for who you are. And so there's a way I think that anger, in a way, is healthier towards what people sometimes do or have done wrongly because it's saying, I believed you are better than that and you disappointed me.

Sarah Anderson:

So anger is telling me, there was a bar that I thought you could have reached and you didn't reach it and so I'm disappointed, I'm frustrated about that. Contempt is saying, there's no hope for you. There's no chance to kind of fix this. And I think that that's the really dangerous message because when we look at the theology of Jesus, how Jesus interacted with people, he was never writing the end of people's stories for them. He was always leaving room for restoration and redemption and resurrection. And so when we write the stories, the end of people's stories by saying, there's no chance for you to recover, this is just who you are, I think we're eliminating any incentive to be better. Why would we want to improve ourselves when we can't ever be accepted back into the community? So I think that's a big deal culturally, but for Christians especially, that's a really big deal. That's the antithesis of what Jesus represented. So I don't think we can give into that and expect things to reflect well on the church if we do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. What about shame? That's a really good insight. What about you, Scott? What do you think?

Scott Sauls:

So I'll talk about it from the recipient and the aggressor's standpoint. The recipient, it can potentially be demoralizing. You mentioned the rise in suicides, especially among teens, but not only teens. I've got

two pastor friends who are very active on social media, that took their own lives in the last year. And not saying that social media was necessarily at the center of those tragic irreversible decisions, but shame is such a powerful demoralizer, as you've described it. Because like you said, it's the message of, 'There's no hope for you.'

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Scott Sauls:

You are hopeless. There is no climbing out of this because of who you are and because of who you always will be. That's just horrible. But then, you flip it. You've talked beautifully and thoughtfully about sort of the receiver experience, but the aggressor of shaming, there's a psychology to that as well. There's a psychology to contempt. People who tend to act with the most contempt toward others are also those who feel the most self-contempt. And it's a deflection strategy. It's a, I don't have to deal with me as long as I can deal with him or her. I don't have to deal with me, which of course traces back to a deficit in awareness of the resource that Christ has given for us to look the worst in ourselves square in the face and not feel threatened and not be threatened, because Christ has exposed us completely and not rejected us.

Scott Sauls:

He knows us to the bottom of the recesses of who we are and loves us completely and chooses us again and again and again at the beginning of the end and at the end of our very best and our very worst days. And David, after the Bathsheba event, what's the message that comes from the prophet after the prophet confronts him and exposes him? "You're not going to die. You deserve to, but you're not going to. Instead, you're going to write half the songs and you're going to be a great leader." And I'm going to, I mean, can you imagine what had to happen in Bathsheba's heart to end up marrying David after all of that, right? And having Solomon with him, whose name meant peace and beloved of God, right? And, Saul of Tarsus, who's presiding over the first Christian martyrdom of Stephen and on his way to actively destroy the people of Jesus and that's when Jesus says, "You're my instrument for the Gentiles."

Scott Sauls:

And if we lose sight of how significant and sizeable the grace of God is, and not only this, but how immediate our access is to that, the only thing left is self-contempt, because we're never going to forget living up to what God expects of us. We're never going to live up to our own expectations of us, right? Like Pink says in that song, "I'm a hazard to myself. Don't let me get me. I'm my own worst enemy. I don't want to be my friend no more." And when we have self-contempt, we will either self-destruct in one way, shape, or form, or another, or we will try to destroy somebody else through character assassination, or maybe even actual assassination, who knows? So there's terrible psychology on both sides of it. It's so destructive.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, not picking on a particular case, because unfortunately there's been so many of them, but pick a headline any headline, whether it's a politician, a preacher, a leader who's fallen and clearly done something outside the bounds. Has breached trust, whether that's sexual impropriety or financial impropriety, or some addiction that they lied about, or even lying or something that causes them, perhaps it's a no, you're not in leadership for a season, or for a long time kind of offense. What is the

better process? Because there is so much blaming and shaming. It is that mob mentality that you've hinted at. It's that we want this person gone, boom, they're gone, the board fired them. What is an alternative scenario or is it just nope, you got canceled and you're done?

Sarah Anderson:

Yeah. Well, I think that the shaming, I think it's tempting to do. But on a practical level, I don't think the mob mentality and the public shaming and removal is ever going to lead to the real lasting change. We might get a public repentance or public groveling, but I think we're in church world, we know that shame does not lead to actual behavior change and health and human and decision making, long-term healthy decision-making. So, to me, I just, I don't think the idea of public accountability, I don't think that's really realistic to do. I don't think public accountability is it. I think you can call someone out, but accountability is meant to be done in person in close relationship. I think that's where we've got to lean into. I don't think that we're looking to excuse behaviors, I think we need to be able to say this was wrong.

Sarah Anderson:

But we need to be able to leave it up to the people who are in an actual relationship close enough to the actual person, close enough to this scenario, to be walking alongside them, to make the determination of how they get back into the community or leadership or whatever that looks like. But that's not, that's above our pay grade as well. When it comes to the social media platforms, that's not for us to decide.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Scott, what's your take?

Scott Sauls:

Yeah, I agree. I mean, public accountability is gross, because it's toxic. It doesn't require... It's like pornography.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Ooh.

Scott Sauls:

What does pornography do? It objectifies a human being, taking their personhood away from them. It's after the experience of a personal rush that costs you nothing and costs them their dignity. Costs them something significant, right? And the outrage, public outrage and shame without reciprocal accountability works just like pornography, emotionally and psychologically and socially. And I just, I can't think of anything good to say about it and not to mention that the information is usually inaccurate. And so you're holding somebody accountable for something that they probably didn't even actually say, or do, or think, or feel.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Or perhaps not in the same way that you believe that they did, said, yeah.

Scott Sauls:

It's crazy you guys. Sometimes if my publisher would let me, I'd get off Twitter entirely, because it's just so striking how there are people out there and you gave me the whole, don't wrestle with pigs thing, Carey-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Scott Sauls:

... Talk about that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We both get dirty.

Scott Sauls:

But, it's striking that people who live 15 states away, hiding behind some anonymous Twitter account, talk like they know you better than your wife does. Like, I've got you all figured out based on this 18 character tweet that you put out there three days ago. I know people and it's just like, yeah, come on you guys. But I don't know.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, what happens when there's a Harvey Weinstein or that kind of thing? Is it better to just not comment? Is it, you could argue that some people who needed to be brought to account, were brought to account?

Scott Sauls:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you navigate that? Because, I get asked from time to time, not a lot, great, great leaders following, but sometimes I'll get a direct message that's like, a pastor falls and it's, "When are you going to talk about that?" And I'm always left, first of all, with profound sadness for the victims, for the congregation, for the people involved. And actually, for the leader, usually I feel profound sadness and usually one of helplessness. It's like, "I don't actually know this leader well. I don't know the facts. I don't know the background." I don't know, and I'll be reasonably well read, but I don't know how I'm going to help with this conversation. I just don't know. And I think if we're really honest, you both hinted at that, that's where we are on most of this stuff. It's like-

Scott Sauls:

That's right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... I can't really help. I don't know what to do. And I don't know. And if I do, sometimes I'll walk with a leader after a problem, and then I'm not going to talk about it publicly. That is something that I am doing privately to help a friend or I'm part of a circle of accountability or something for that person. Or

hopefully, I'm part of whatever the long road is. And that's not frequent, but when that has happened, it's like, that's not for blog posts. I don't know. Any thoughts on that? What is the constructive role of our public profiles in a time like this?

Sarah Anderson:

Yeah, I'm not sure that there is a one size fits all. I mean, I think you've hinted at when I think we run into the same problem with the Harvey Weinsteins of the world, are not the same as, I can't even think of an example, but there are layers.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There are grades and layers and yeah, different responses.

Sarah Anderson:

I can't take a one size fits all approach to it. But I just, listening to you all talk, I'm going, I wish more people were willing to say, that's not my place to speak into it. But we have a culture. I think we have it politically. We're talking about things we know nothing about, but we haven't learned anything about, we're willing to die on every hill, even though we're not as informed as we should be to die on that hill.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Or, we're ready to die on it today and then tomorrow something else that got our attention, right?

Sarah Anderson:

But at some point I think what we don't realize is, we're losing our influence, because we're becoming white noise when everything is a hill to die on, or when everything is something to comment on, then nothing's important anymore. So I think we need to be more methodical about the things that we do decide to speak out on because we're losing our influence on the things that actually matter.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's such a good point, trying to be influential actually makes you lose your influence. If you're trying to leverage your influence every time there's some thing... And honestly, some of it is trend jacking, right? I'm just, because I know this will get a lot of clicks or I know it'll get a lot of retweets or a lot of likes, but right, over leveraging your influence makes you lose influence.

Sarah Anderson:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Scott, what do you do in a case like that? Like where do you, where's the line where you step in? And I know there's no clear answer. I'd just love your take on it.

Scott Sauls:

Trend jacking, I've never heard that phrase before.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah, sorry. Maybe I picked that up somewhere, but that is-

Scott Sauls:

That's great.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... That's where you just find a hashtag and you're jumping on the social media mob and then maybe you get all the retweets. We try not to do that around here.

Scott Sauls:

Yeah. So, I mean, this probably happens to you more than it does to me, Carey, because of all the different circles you're in. But yeah, something will happen where a pastor in the Midwest or on the West or East coast who I may have never met, a story breaks about some behind the scenes mishandling of this or that. And let's talk about the stories that are actually really complicated, where it really does require people who are in that community and maybe an outside organization to come in and look at things objectively and talk to all the relevant parties. And I tend to try to do what you do, like I don't know this situation, it's not mine to speak to, but you know what comes after that? "Well, you have a public voice and you should be calling this out and you have no impulse for justice."

Scott Sauls:

And I'm like, I don't know what justice is in this situation. And so you're kind of darned if you do, darned if you don't. So don't, because you're going to be darned either way. And if I'm not a necessary part of the problem, a central part of the problem or a necessary part of the solution, then it's somebody else's problem to fix and to comment on. And if they comment on it, in most cases, it probably shouldn't be done publicly because it's none of the public's business. It's the community's business. If you're talking about a church scandal, for instance.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And the times, and I haven't done this in a few years, but go back five years and in the times where there was a resignation or problem, if I didn't name someone, I would often run it by that person ahead of time, just to say... And the filter I run things through is, is it helpful? Is it helpful? And sometimes, on the question of racial justice, I've entered that dialogue very willingly, with some apprehension being a white male, but I'm like, "No, this is something I should not be silent on." This is something I should loan, whatever I can, my influence to help some friends, people I really care about, justice issues I believe are biblical and theological. And then there are other times where I'm like, "I just don't know how I can help with this one," and so I don't.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Question for you, because this is a real life situation for a lot of people. And don't think in terms of public influence, think of the local pastor, who's got a troll, or the local business person who has a rival, who's just always harassing him or her on social. Do you have any criteria for when you block or unfollow? Or how do you navigate that part of your life? I've probably unfollowed more people in 2020 than at any other time of my life. And mine is like, I don't need that drama in my daily feed. I just, you guys, you just, I don't know what it is, but you feel you need to harangue somebody everyday or some

issue and I just, it's not helping me. So I will unfollow and I have criteria for blocking too, but I'd love to know where you sit on that. Scott, how about you?

Scott Sauls:

I mean, there's a certain tolerance of it. I actually try not to block people unless it just feels like it's gotten to be absolutely necessary because it's just starting to feel poison, because I don't want to cancel people, even annoying people. I don't want to just cancel them. But sometimes, for instance, the person who, this happened to me a couple of weeks ago where a person just took over the feed on one of my posts, I think on Instagram, and just started talking about a political issue. Just an essay about a political issue, post after post, after post, after post that had nothing to do with the actual thing that I posted on. They just went in to my-

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's called trend jacking. Trend jacking, Scott.

Scott Sauls:

Trend jacking? Okay. And so I just, I deleted some of the comments just kind of quietly and they called me out for deleting their comments and then left more. And then I'm like, you know what? I just need to just click the block button. Maybe I'll unblock in a couple of weeks or something. And then, they went on another social media platform and talked about how I blocked them. So, it just felt like, you're invading.

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Scott Sauls:

I wouldn't want you to come into my home and start talking about it to my children about this. And you're kind of coming into my space here. And talking about something that really doesn't have anything to do with... But it's really subjective. That's the short answer.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And I would say it's very rare on my platform. I rarely block somebody, but I will sometimes unfollow for 30 days. Or mute a little bit if they keep... You know, again, they're not controlling that. The algorithm is. One of the things I actively try to do is break the algorithm. I don't know that I'm successful. What about you, Sarah?

Sarah Anderson:

Well, you guys have much larger followings than I do, so I'm not sure that I've experienced it personally enough to be able to speak that well into it. But I would say, I think the danger, it's this double-edged sword, right? Because there is definitely this poison that can come from these kinds of conversations. But on the other hand, I don't want us to forget how to engage people who don't see eye to eye with us. So I do feel like there is, you've got to be able to determine what's a bid to communicate and converse and dialogue. And what's a bid to entertain or just push your buttons, like all that kind of thing. But I do think I try to, it's not even necessarily engaging as much as following people on Twitter or Instagram that I know I would disagree with, but they're thoughtful.

Sarah Anderson:

So I'm fine engaging in conversation if I know it's actual conversation, and they're not looking for somebody to misspeak or nod. But I just think when we start to eliminate the differences, and the people who have differences from us, or who pushed us to see a different side of things, and immediately start to dehumanize them, that makes us worse as well. So I just think it's really complicated. I think it's constantly having to take every situation into account. But I think you guys both alluded to this earlier, anonymous Twitter. If you're not showing me a real picture of you, or just letters and numbers by your handle, then it's hard for me to think there's an actual person on the other side who wants to, so that to me, is it kind of a good indication.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I would say that's the way the vast majority of the blocking happens is some bot account or some weirdness. And very rarely will I block another human being and it's under circumstances similar to you. And usually there's been an exchange. My rule is if it was a dinner party at my house, you're free to disagree. Let me ask questions. You don't have to agree with me. If I have to call the police, then that's another category, right? Like if you're threatening to assault me or someone at the dinner table, or you're insulting my wife and I'm asking you to leave, that's a whole other level, rarely does that happen, but yeah. That's-

Scott Sauls:

You ever talked to Bob Goff about this question, Carey?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I have actually. Yeah. Have you had that conversation?

Scott Sauls:

Yeah. I mean but , go ahead-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, what was the answer he gave you? Because I'm curious. I remember very clearly what he told me.

Scott Sauls:

He'll go onto their profile. He'll scroll through their stuff, just to see if he can learn something about him, pray for him. If he can find their address, he'll send them a cake pop in the mail. Sometimes, if they keep being a nuisance, so they'll just hit the block button-

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's what he said.

Scott Sauls:

But he tries to find a gracious way to respond.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And that's one of the reasons I asked him the question, he wrote Love Everybody Always. And I'm like, "Well, everybody? Always?" And he's like, No, sometimes exactly that. You scroll on the profile, try

to find common ground. But you realize in the universe, there are one star review people, right? These are people who are just against everything and everybody. And that's what they do all day long. And it's really hard. It's like, "Hey, you can do that, but it's just not going to be on this channel." Because I got people who want to have a conversation. And we got a model that, okay, this has been a rich, long convo. I would love to know just a couple of quick guidelines that you think would help make everybody better if you're like in real life and in the world and kind of get us out of this bad moment that we all seem to be in. What would you recommend people do that something they could start today or this week?

Sarah Anderson:

I think I would start with staying engaged with people who think differently. I know I've kind of hinted at that before, but one of the things that I wrote about in the book that my husband and I were able to experience as we went and said Northern Ireland several years ago, and we kind of learned a little bit more about the history of Northern Ireland and the troubles and the peace walls that they built. And it was just so fascinating to me to see that here was this territory that was trying to decide its constitutional status, whether its stay connected to the United Kingdom or join the Republic of Ireland. And there was civil unrest and violence erupting, and the government thought that if they built these peace walls, it would keep keeping each other from one another, that it would help the problem.

Sarah Anderson:

And it was actually the exact opposite. Refusing to keep these parts of the neighborhoods where sides were divided and keeping them apart from each other did not call the violence. It actually contributed to it. And I just think that we are on the verge of being either literally or metaphorically raising these walls where we are dehumanizing the people on the other side of them, because we're not engaging with them. And we see that in these studies where we talk about sustained eye contact with a person triggers these empathetic responses in both people's brains.

Sarah Anderson:

When we have put up these walls between people who we don't agree with, I think the opposite is true. We're turning off the empathetic centers in our brain. So I would think to be able to move forward in civil conversation is to be able to willingly put ourselves out there and to have conversations that make us uncomfortable and to not shy away from them, because there is something really rich that comes from learning other people's experiences, looking them in the eye and seeing that there's a human on the other side of that position, even though you don't understand the position that they hold.

Sarah Anderson:

Well, I would say I think we should also be humble. And we've touched on this a lot and let go of certainty. We've talked a little bit about that posture and the humility of going into conversations, thinking that we might have something to learn from people. I think that there's this TED talk. I think her name's Kathryn Schulz, where she does this talk about when you realize you're wrong and she asks the audience, "What does it feel like to be wrong?" And they throw out words like, "It's embarrassing." Or, "It's humiliating." And she goes, "No, that's what it feels like when you realize you're wrong. When you're wrong, it feels like being right." Like none of us are holding positions that we think are wrong. We all arrived at those conclusions legitimately in some way.

Sarah Anderson:

And so if we could go into conversation believing I might not have this all figured out, I'm willing to learn from you. And even from a spiritual standpoint, I believe you're made in the image of God. I'm made in the image of God and you've got something and you're displaying something about him that I haven't yet encountered. I have something to learn about God from you, not just your worldview. And so just having that kind of posture of, I might have to change my mind on this. I don't know enough to draw a conclusion, steadfastly letting go of that idea of certainty in some form or fashion. But I think that that curiosity, the willingness to stay engaged are probably the two top things that I would say.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's great. What about you, Scott? Any final words for leaders who want to restore a more civil, curious, reciprocal tone to discourse?

Scott Sauls:

Yeah. I don't have much to add to all the great things that Sarah just said, except to remember that every single person is under encouraged and overwhelmed on some level, and it doesn't matter what the exterior looks like. There is a scarcity of encouragement. There's a scarcity of kindness. There's a scarcity of all the things that the human heart longs for relationally and just hopefully approach, especially conversations that involve potential conflict, trying to keep in mind a posture of empathy, a posture of the fact that this other person has their own pair of shoes. And part of my goal in this conversation needs to be to learn how to walk in those shoes.

Scott Sauls:

Otherwise, civility, kindness, seeking mutual understanding become really, really difficult if empathy is taken off the table. One of our pastors, Mika Edmondson just came onto our team. He says, he's African-American and so he's the lead voice in and he and his wife both in racial reconciliation and justice conversations. And he says, he thinks that the biggest problem that American society has right now is that there's a war on empathy. There's a war against empathy. And if we could all wave the white flag and surrender in that war maybe we would start to get somewhere.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's good. Wow. Well, this has been really rich. Tell us both about your book. So Scott, get a new one. Your latest is called A Gentle Answer. And what can readers expect when they pick it up?

Scott Sauls:

it didn't start out this way, Carey, but it's ended up becoming sort of a prequel to my first book, Jesus Outside the Lines, which is more of a field guide, an attempt at a field guide to engage the different contested issues in culture in a thoughtful gracious way it's sort of more of a practical book. But this one is more about nurturing the inner life and the heart so that we're actually able spiritually, emotionally and dispositionally to go out and try to be a force for good, where there's so much fighting. And so the first part of the book is about just coming to terms with the gentleness of Christ toward you. He is gentle and humble in heart.

Scott Sauls:

He wants to give us rest and that's our starting point for them figuring out, okay, what does it mean for the spirit of gentleness to be cultivated in my own life? And you have some great examples from John

Perkins. The unusual, unlikely friendship between Jerry Falwell's, speaking of moral majority movement and Larry Flint who founded hustler magazine the pornographer. And like, there's a, I don't know if you guys know that story, but there's some great stories that I poached from, but anyway, yeah, so you can go to Amazon or wherever to find that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's great. And Sarah, your first solo book. So tell us about it.

Scott Sauls:

Yeah. It's called The Space Between Us: How Jesus Teaches Us to Live Together When Politics and Religion Pull Us Apart. And it's part memoir, just part discovery in my own personal life, how I was raised, how things started to change for me, what I've kind of learned in the process in parenting and church world. And just kind of exposure to different worldviews and trying to see things differently. And the whole idea is that we know that the center is vacating when it comes to politics and religion and people are moving toward the fringes and that's not necessarily a bad thing, but it's a bad thing when the relational space starts to grow as well. And so just figuring out a way to engage with one another, to change our posture towards one another to really love, like Jesus instructed us to love and have those one-on-one relationships more than getting caught up in these theory and big ideas. And just really engage that way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And there's a great recipe at the beginning of the book too.

Sarah Anderson:

That's true.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We'll let people figure that out. When they get there. But I'm so grateful. And where can people find your stuff, obviously, Amazon, but do you have a website?

Sarah Anderson:

Yes, sarahbanderson.com is my website. Amazon and barnesandnoble.com has the book.

Carey Nieuwhof:

All right. Well, Scott, Sarah, so grateful for you. Thank you so much for being our little panel. And hopefully we rediscovered some civility and some calm and some sanity and some Christlikeness as a result of this. So thank you.

Scott Sauls:

Thanks, Carey.

Sarah Anderson:

Thanks.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I love conversations like that. When I get together with my friends and we sit down, we often talk about stuff like that. That is really fascinating to me. If you want more, including links to Scott's book, Sarah's book, you can go to [careynieuwhof.com/episode381](http://careynieuwhof.com/episode381). You'll find everything right there. And yeah, I think this was a really helpful conversation and hopefully it just moved the needle a little bit. I think we have to learn how to be more civil heading into the future. Particularly if you're involved in church leadership. I mean, we just lose so much ground so often otherwise. We've got some fresh episodes coming up. I'm pretty excited about the lineup. Next time, you're going to hear from William Vanderbloemen and we're going to talk all about what he is seeing in the world of search and succession and church leadership.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also coming up, Mark Batterson, Bob Westfall, Kayla Stoecklein, powerful conversation about mental health, suicide and leadership. Let's see Alli Worthington, Andy Stanley, Jon Acuff is back. Yeah. And Patrick Lencioni, Rachel Cruze, Rob Pelinka, the general manager of the LA Lakers and so many others. I am so excited to do this with you. If you haven't subscribed yet, please do that. If you would be so kind as to leave us a rating and review, I would be really grateful. And now it's time for What I'm Thinking About. And I'm thinking about why do we hate each other so much?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Like what is going on? And this is brought to you by Pro Media Fire. You can book your free digital strategy session today at [promediafire.com/churchgrowth](http://promediafire.com/churchgrowth). And by ICM, check out this amazing report, Five Ways Churches Transform Communities by going to [icm.org/transformcommunities](http://icm.org/transformcommunities).

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what has happened over the last few years? Why is anger the new epidemic? And I kind of wish like I'm a Christian. So I kind of wish Christians were exempt from the trend toward anger, outrage and division online. I think these days we're fueling it. It's almost as though if you're not outraged, like you can't have an opinion. And before I say anything else, I just want to say, look, this is something we all struggle with. Okay. I love what Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said. He said, "The dividing line between good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being."

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think he's a 100% accurate on that. So, why are we so combative online? Well, I think the algorithms involved, we talked about that before, but here's a couple of thoughts that can get us maybe a little more focused. And I hope build on what we heard from Sarah and from Scott today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Number one, you're naturally more aggressive online than you are in person. So, I've been thinking about this a lot. I remember reading years ago that one of the reasons soldiers wear uniforms is it is much easier to shoot a uniform than it is to shoot a human being. And if you see just the uniform, it's like, "Oh, that's the enemy." And even think back to tribal times, right? What did tribal people do? They put on war paint. Why? Well, that identified them. It's like, "Don't shoot me, shoot that person." But secondly, it dehumanized them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've never been in the military. So I don't do that. And I haven't been in a war, but think about how you behave in your car, right? Like, I am a little more aggressive in my car than I would be in person. And I might like zip by somebody and try to cut them off or something. If they made me mad and what have I got? I got a 3,000 pound armored vehicle. That's what I have. or even the supermarket. Right? If you get a shopping cart in front of you and you're like a little, you just kind of push past, because you got a little bit of a padding there. Distance between people, desensitizes people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's easier to be aggressive when I can't see you. And that is true online too. Right? If you are just having a conversation with someone and all you see is their avatar, you don't even look at that. And you're just like, "You're an idiot," right? It's just a lot easier. I read an email in my inbox, the public inbox today, and the guy simply said, "You're an idiot." Guess what I did. I didn't respond. Anyway, thank you for that love. Appreciate it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Secondly, this is just true. Hate generates more clicks than love. We live in an attention economy. And if you want to get people to read what you're saying and to follow you be a little bit outraged. Outrage spreads faster than something that is not outraged. That's what's Tristan Harris from The Social Dilemma says, I think he's right. I hate just generates more clicks than love. And if you are caught up in like becoming famous or well-known or gaining traction online, hate is a good way to do it. It always makes the news. I don't think that's a really good legacy to leave, but that's just true. I'm not saying it's good. I'm just saying it's true.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Third. Any attention can feel better than no attention. A lot of us are lonely these days. And thanks to technology, we've never been more connected than we are today and we've never felt more alone. And sometimes lonely people will settle for any attention they can get. And when you feel nothing, a click, a like, or a comment can make you feel something. So I think a lot of people who are just stuck online, it's like their life isn't very exciting in real life. So it's like, this is where I get my kicks, and that isn't good. I'm not saying it's good. I'm just trying to explain it. And it's like, when I see this stuff in me, I'm like, "Oh, I got to pay attention to that because that's not the life I want to live. That's not the legacy I want to leave."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Another one and I'll leave it here, anger can get you heard even when you have nothing to say. Most people would say the opposite of love isn't actually hate it's indifference. And I think that's true, but sadly, anger can get you heard, even when you have nothing to say. So, you can just say, "Okay, no, one's paying attention to me. I want to be heard. So I'm just going to take this guy on, or I'm going to try to take this person down or I'm going to try to cancel this person." And I guess the big question is, do we really want to be like that? Like, is this the world you want to live in? Is this the world you want your kids to grow up in? Is this what you want to be known for?

Carey Nieuwhof:

At your funeral, you want people standing around you going, "Well, if he was one thing, he was angry." I mean, I don't want that. And I feel those impulses too sometimes. So here's some questions to ask the next time you post, write, respond, comment, shoot that email, send that text. Ask yourself, what's my real motive? And what's my real motive. Am I trying to help? Am I trying to hurt someone? Because if you're trying to hurt someone that's kind of evil. Or am I trying to just get noticed? And it can be really interesting. It's like, "Oh, I want to be noticed." Okay, well, that's your real motive now, you know, now, you know? Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then ask this question. This is a big one. And I think about this for every episode. That's why I wanted to make this a constructive episode about a difficult subject, but are people better off or worse off for reading what I posted or for listening to what I've shared? So you've listened for good hour plus, are you better off? I hope so. That was the goal. If not, I need to do better.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But I want, when you read something I wrote, when you see something online, when you watch a video that I filmed, when you listen to a podcast that I did, I want you to be better off. I want you to be better educated. I want you to feel encouraged. I want you to feel inspired. And yeah, that doesn't mean you have to, it's not all gumdrops and sunshine. That's a bad expression, but anyway, we deal with really tough issues, but hopefully in a way that make things better, not worse. And then how about this? Am I calling out the worst in people or attempting to bring out the best? That's a great question. Am I just being really difficult and calling out the worst or my attempting to bring the best out of you?

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's what this episode is about. We're trying to bring out the best in you. And then finally, here's a great question. If the person I'm responding to or communicating with was in the room, looking me in the eye, would I say the same thing in the same way? If you're actually there, no uniform, no car, no online, no avatar. You're just actually talking to another human being. How would you interact with that human being? And then why don't you just behave that way online? That would be, I think a good thing. So I hope that helps. I also take the time to process privately and help publicly. So I get mad too, but hopefully I deal with that in my prayer time with the counselor, et cetera, et cetera. And then I try to help publicly. Anyway, try to make the dialogue better. That's what this episode was about. We're back next time with a fresh one, really appreciate you in leadership. Hang in there. And I hope our time together today has helped you lead, like never before.

Announcer:

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

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:33:09]