

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:

Hey everybody, and welcome to episode 422 of the podcast. It's Carey here, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Well, there is only one guest in the history of this podcast that has two of the five most downloaded episodes and we're 422 episodes in, and that is today's guest, Gordon MacDonald. The way he resonates with leaders of every age, particularly with younger leaders, is amazing and you're going to hear more from Gordon. I'll explain in just a moment.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to thank our partners for this episode. You can go to BarnaCities.com/Carey to get Barna's latest research and tools to help you start connecting with the people in your city. And, it's brought to you by The Art of Better Reaching, it's a brand new online course Mark Clark and I put together that will give your church the strategies, insights and tools to get people passionate, engaged and contributing in 2021, reaching brand new people. You can go to TheArtofBetterReaching.com.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, Gordon and I are going to talk about the damage that driven leaders create, hitting the wall in leadership and how to get healthy. And, he wrote a book well in the 80s ... I remember reading it when I was a young leader. I think I was in law school actually when I read the book, and it's called *Ordering your Private World*. I reread it last summer, listened to the audio book, and I was just convicted about the whole section between being a driven person and a called person.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This applies to every leader, whether you're in ministry directly or not, if you're in the marketplace. But driven leaders do a lot of damage, and Gordon is very open about that. He talks about how his drivenness moved his first 40 years and how for the last 40 years ... He just turned 82 ... he has tried to be more focused on being called as I am trying to be.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think you're going to find this a really powerful episode. Gordon has been a pastor and author for more than five decades. He served as chancellor at Denver Seminary, editor-at-large for *Leadership Journal*. He speaks around the world still today at conferences. His books include *Ordering Your Private World*, *Building Below the Water Line*, *a Resilient Life* and so much more. And, he lives in New Hampshire with his wife Gail. Powerful conversation. Drop close. I think you'll be wanting to share this episode and thank you for everybody who subscribes, who shares, who leaves ratings and reviews.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We're so grateful for you. Hey, if you're like a lot of church leaders, you're navigating massive shifts in culture and technology. It's exhausting but there's hope. And this year, our friends at Barna & Gloo have worked very specifically to help people in particular cities in the US. Leaders in particular cities by launching Barna Cities. With Barna Cities, you get access to new local research from Barna. You'll join

other church leaders who will gather every single month to talk about how you can reach your city together.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And best of all, Barna & Gloop are giving away some of their premiere products bundled in the City Toolkit. That's thanks to generous donors. Here's what you'll get. If you join Barna Cities, you'll get full membership to Barna Access Plus. You'll get GloopConnect. That involves cooperate, always-on ads that run across your city to make it easier for people to discover your church and connect with it. And, you'll get access to Click to Connect. It's a four part course I did that is all inside BarnaCities.com.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, if you go to BarnaCities.com/Carey, you can sign up today. Speaking of courses, Mark Clark and I are back with a brand new course, and this one is for everybody. You can access it globally. You can access it in the US or Canada. We would love to see you inside something brand new called The Art of Better Reaching. A few years ago, Mark and I did a course called The Art of Better Preaching. We've been able to help thousands of leaders develop their communication and now we're back with The Art of Better Reaching.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, as you know, you've probably been working harder than ever and reaching fewer people than ever. That's because the culture is changing, so Mark and I want to give you the framework you need to understand how the culture is changing in post-Christian culture, what you can do ... And believe it or not, it's a course of hope. We give you some really practical strategies, some insights into how people are thinking, how to address your message so it actually communicates without watering it down. I cover fresh digital and in-person strategies inside the course.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And, we give you very practical ways to attract, engage and keep more new guests. That's all inside The Art of Better Reaching. It's open as of today, and if you act before June 11, 2021, you'll get the best introductory pricing, so go to TheArtofBetterReaching.com. Would love to see you inside our brand new course, The Art of Better Reaching. I'll be back at the end of the episode with some thoughts on what driven leaders do, and this is some self-reflection, but in the meantime, let's dive into the gold with the one and only, Gordon MacDonald.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Gordon, welcome back. I've been anxiously anticipating this conversation.

Gordon MacDonald:

Thank you, Carey. It's good to be with you again.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to go back, because we covered a lot of ground so far in your two previous podcast episodes, but I want to go back to the defining moment of your life ... One of the defining moments of your life ... the day you describe as the day you hit the wall. I think there are so many leaders listening who have hit the

wall, are hitting the wall, are about to hit the wall. What happened to you as a young leader the day you hit the wall?

Gordon MacDonald:

Well, I've always observed in my life and in the life of people I know fairly well that every seven to 10 years, there's an event that happens for a lot of us. It's hard to imagine what the event could be but it's one of those that really kicks the stool out from under you. A lot of times, we instantly say, "Oh, you fell into some kind of sin." Yeah, maybe but not always necessarily.

Gordon MacDonald:

The phrase that you're referring to I used in the book *Ordering Your Private World* to describe probably one of the first massive experiences I had in my adulthood where things happened that no one had ever told me might come. I was in my 29th year. I'd been a pastor for about four years in a fairly large church. Large in those days, several hundred people. That put you in the large category in those days.

Gordon MacDonald:

I'm 29. Life is really getting cranked up, and there was a period of time when, maybe six or eight weeks, I had several funerals, and the deaths of some of these people were just remarkable experiences. They had no meaning to them and there was a sense in which the death was tragic and meaningless. I had to come up with some funeral sermon for that. I had these funerals and then I said yes to far too many speaking situations and really I was shooting off the top of my head. I wasn't really doing either the intellectual or the spiritual preparation that one should do.

Gordon MacDonald:

Thirdly, we had some conflicts going with some of the leaders. So you get this whole hodgepodge of unsettling events which are coming at you from all over the place. Oh, and finally one more, I was going seven days a week probably 16 hours a day.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Gordon MacDonald:

It was just the life of a young woman or a young man who's exceedingly ambitious and you're just doing everything. In the middle of that came a Saturday morning and I came down for breakfast ... Well, I came down the stairs from our second floor to our home and I said to Gail, who was fixing breakfast, I said, "I'm not staying for breakfast." I said, "I got to get to the office. I got to start studying. I don't even know what I'm going to preach about tomorrow morning."

Gordon MacDonald:

I thought she'd admire me for this. She turned around and she said to me, "Do you realize how long it's been since you've spent any time with the children?" As she said that, the children were coming down the stairs and I was gripped by this question, which I couldn't answer because it was a question of truthfulness, and I was hearing those kids behind me and realizing I'd been ignoring them pretty badly.

Gordon MacDonald:

You know what I started to do? I've told this story a thousand times. I just broke into tears and started crying. In order to get out of the line of sight of the children, who were down at the main floor by now, I ducked out the kitchen and I went to the living room. I threw myself on the couch and I started weeping uncontrollably and that went on for four hours. I could not stop. I remember some of my thoughts during that time. Is this what they call a nervous breakdown? Is this God punishing me in some way? What the heck is going on here? I've never done this before.

Gordon MacDonald:

Gail was so wise. She got our kids off in the next minutes to the neighbor's house and she came to where I was and just held me in her arms and sat there with me that whole four hours. And, it was about noontime when I finally dried up. That then led to this question, what do I do about this? Gail said to me, she said, "Why don't you just stay here. I'll bring you something to eat. And, ask yourself the question for the afternoon, what's God saying to you?"

Gordon MacDonald:

Now, that's not a question at the age of 29 I was used to asking. I was a person on the front side of this hitting of the wall. I had a lot of natural giftedness, like I suspect you do. We're just people who know how to operate under almost any circumstances. We think big. We think automatically and systematically. I had a lot of natural ability to speak compellingly. Words came easily to me. I could hold my own in any conversation. All that stuff, which what I would call external stuff ... That's the way I've been operating for the last four or five years.

Gordon MacDonald:

And you know what, Carey? It was working.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah.

Gordon MacDonald:

It was working. At the time, people thought I was terrific. And then comes this day and here I am in the afternoon, and Gail is saying, "See if you can hear what God is trying to say to you." I realized that's not a question I ask myself very often. I'm not practiced in knowing what God says. I've just lived out the externals, so I laid there for the whole afternoon and then around mid-afternoon ... I'm recreating this because this happened 50 plus years ago ... suddenly there comes a voice. And believe me, I'm not a person who claims that he hears the voice of God very often.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm with you on that one.

Gordon MacDonald:

So this is unique. I'm hearing a voice, and this is what the voice said and I've been repeating this for 55 years now. The voice said, "Now you know what it's like to live out of an empty soul." I didn't know I had a soul. I'd heard the word all of my life and church life, but tell me what a soul is. In those days, even in graduate school in seminary, we didn't talk much about the soul, at least to the extent that helped you to understand what it is and why it's there. "Now you know what it's like to live out of an empty soul."

And what I heard the voice in effect saying to me was, "You want to live like this, you're not going to last very much longer."

Gordon MacDonald:

With that, I got up from the couch and I started thinking through, "How am I going to figure this all out? And, how am I going to fill this soul that some voice says is empty?" You're going to ask me in another moment what was the logic of this, but the first thing I decided to do was go down to town and buy a notebook and bring it back and start writing a journal, and try to see if I could systematically begin to define what was life was like and what was going on in this soul thing that needed to be recorded so I could keep going back to it again and again and again.

Gordon MacDonald:

That's the way that day went, and by the end of the evening, I was pretty committed to the notion that if there's an interior life, I was going to explore it and I was going to play off that for the rest of my life if possible. So, that's a long answer to a short question but if I could add one thing to it, that's not the only time I've hit the wall. I have a theory, and you'll hear a lot of my theories, I have a theory that most people hit the wall about every seven to 10 years. It could be exhaustion. It could be a conflict of a type. It could be a massive catastrophic failure in what you're doing as a leader, or it could be what I went through that day where God finally says, "I'm not going to let you keep on going much longer if you don't make some changes."

Carey Nieuwhof:

What are some of the other walls you've hit since then?

Gordon MacDonald:

I went through a short period of time in those earlier years where I had a very baffling conflict with a coworker. If you were to say to me now what's that conflict about, I can't remember what it was about. All I know is that something got out of control in my soul, and it got out of control to the point where I hated this guy. I couldn't stand to even think about him. I'd wake up in the middle of the night and that was the first thing I thought about. I became more and more irritable at my wife and my children as I took out my irritability against this person to them.

Gordon MacDonald:

This went on for several weeks and it was really, really affecting my attitude, my mood, my sense that in any way God was operating in me or through me to other people. And, I began to wonder am I going to live like this? There came a weekend when I was on an airplane and again, a voice, although not as dramatic. And this time the question is, "Where are you going?" "Well, I'm going to such and such a place." "What are you going to do there?" "I'm going to preach for the weekend." "What are you going to preach about?" "I'm going to preach on the love of Christ." "Oh, the love of Christ? You know a lot about the love of Christ, don't you?" "Well, yeah, all except for this one person."

Gordon MacDonald:

I can't erase him from my mind. I can't get over this. I can't get above this. Then the word came, "You could try forgiving." "I thought I tried forgiving." "Well, you never asked me for the power to forgive." "Lord, I need the power to forgive this man. I need the power. I've got to preach this weekend and I'm in

no shape to do it." In that moment, Carey, I had this experience of something cutting a big hole in my chest. And out of the hole came some of the most awful liquid feelings that I could imagine, and this went on for a half hour. It only stopped about the plane's wheels touched the ground.

Gordon MacDonald:

I got off that plane and I was 50 pounds lighter. Something had changed within me, and God wiped that grudge holding, he wiped that fierce feeling, that hatred out of me and I thoroughly danced off that plane. Carey, I went off on that weekend to preach some of the most powerful sermons I have ever preached in my life. I was just a young man, but God seemed to give me a ... The old people called it an unction. When I got up into the pulpit that weekend and opened my Bible, the words flowed and the people were clearly listening very carefully. At the end of the Sunday, I just was breathless with what I had experienced by the Holy Spirit empowering me.

Gordon MacDonald:

The finish of the story is that late in the evening, the leaders of that church came to me where I was staying and they said, "You know that our church is looking for a senior pastor, and our searching, she calls to look for a person who's about 45 years of age. But you have shown us today a spirit that this church badly needs and our people are calling all over the place and asking us if we would talk with you about being our pastor." About eight or 10 weeks, I forget how long a period of time, Gail and I moved to that city. I became the pastor of that church and I had seven or eight years of just wonderful ministry.

Gordon MacDonald:

And, I say to myself when I think about this story, I think to myself, "What would life be like today if that event on the plane had not happened? Where would I have gone? Would I have met you? Would we be having this conversation? Would I even be in some form of Christian ministry?" You never know as you're crossing the pathways of the junctions of life hour after hour each day when God might direct you in some direction you never, ever considered and here, your whole life changes. That was a hitting of the wall moment, that whole weekend for me and the bad side and the good side.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it's funny how those are hinge points, right? Because at the time, that was probably some of the deepest pain you had been in, particularly when you were 29. That would have been one of the deepest valleys you'd ever experience and yet, it became the birth of something great. We're going to talk a lot in this conversation about public life, because almost everybody who listens to this podcast has some form of public leadership ... It's a leadership podcast, so preachers, business leaders, entrepreneurs, et cetera, et cetera versus the private life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And your book, which I read back when I was in law school, so that was a long time ago, was already a bestseller back in the 80s and 90s, or whenever it came out. Do you remember the year it was published *Ordering Your Private World*? Was it 80 ...

Gordon MacDonald:

The first edition came out around 1984.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, no kidding. I was in high school. Isn't that terrifying? I was in high school, Gordon, and I think I'd picked it up maybe a decade later when I was in law school. It was great. We read it. We were in a small group. We read it. It's just such a privilege to me that we've developed a friendship and I've actually gotten to know you, but I remember it being so impactful. Almost everybody here is public life. What was your private life like in your 20s before you hit the wall?

Gordon MacDonald:

I would like to think it was a wonderful private life. A large part of it was my wife Gail was an unusual woman in partnering with me in pastoral ministry. The people of the church loved Gail. They just absolutely loved her. I know sometimes it sounds like I'm being foolishly modest, but I felt sometimes like I was almost flying on the tail of her graciousness and her hospitality-

Carey Nieuwhof:

We want her but we're going to take you as well kind of thing?

Gordon MacDonald:

That's what it sounds like, doesn't it? We both came out of broken families. We spent some good time in our engagement really thinking through the model of the marriage we wanted to pursue so that when we got married, I think we were ready to face all the surprises. If you had known us in those first eight or 10 years, I think you would have said, "This is a truly happily married couple." And, I think that would have been the truth. You come into our home, we didn't have much money. We didn't have an opulent home, but everybody felt welcome there. It was a place where the hand of God seemed often to be so ready to touch people.

Gordon MacDonald:

There was a lot of laughter in our home, and I think both of us were working hard to try to grow in whatever ways we felt God wanted to. So, for people in their 20s, I think things were going pretty well but that doesn't mean you can't hit some walls.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. So your private life, if people walked into your home, they would say, "Oh, this is pretty happy." But you make the point that your interior life, maybe that's the term I'm looking for ... what was going on inside you wasn't enough to sustain the public pressure and platform?

Gordon MacDonald:

You've got my mind running here now, but I think the good news and my bad news in my younger leadership years were that God had given me a real interesting package of natural gifts, and there's a lot of men and women in leadership who spend a lot of years coasting along on natural gifts.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes.

Gordon MacDonald:

The ability to speak compellingly, to think quickly on your feet ... I mentioned these a few moments ago ... the charm that makes everybody happy around you. You can be with old people, young people, and the results are both good. You can talk well off the top of your head. I know you must have been like this. You could do a sermon if you had 15 minutes notice.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Perhaps. Yeah. No, there's a lot of similarities there, Gordon. Natural gifting gets you far, but it only gets you so far.

Gordon MacDonald:

Well, that's the point. I think there's a lot of men and women who get into leadership and they move along for 10 years on their natural gift, but then they hit one of these walls often around 37 or 38 years of age. They hit a wall, and that's when you start seeing people leave leadership. Broken hearted, feeling like they're exhausted, they're bored or they've run out of ideas, and I meet a lot of young pastors who will come up around 37, 38 and they'll say, "I just don't know how much longer I can keep doing this. My wife doesn't like the ministry anymore. I don't know my kids. I'm running out of ideas for myself."

Gordon MacDonald:

It's about that point where the external life lets you down. That's what would have happened to me if it had been that particular Saturday morning.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The seven to 10 year framework is really interesting. I've thought about that a lot. We talked about it before, but you're right. I was in university from 19 to 31, which is crazy but three degrees. Long, circuitous route into ministry, history, law, theology, blah, blah, blah. But it was around the decade mark that I hit my wall, the burnout. I think you're right. A lot of that was natural gifting, natural charisma and for me, it was almost as abrupt as what it sounds like it was for you, Gordon.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thomas Holmes, and you write about this in *Ordering Your Private World*, talks about life change units or traumatic events. Can you explain that? How do life change units ... what are they and then how do they impact stress, fatigue and leadership?

Gordon MacDonald:

Thomas Holmes created something called the stress scale. We're not talking about something that's new. This is back about 30 years ago. It's held its weight and its credibility and I think there are people who still would applaud the stress scale of Thomas Holmes. What he did was he researched several thousand people who underwent physical or maybe even emotional breakdown and then he reversed engineered, he went back in their lives and he made a record of the kind of stress points in their lives over the five years before the breakdown.

Gordon MacDonald:

If I remember right, he locates about 150 samples of what you and I are calling wall hitting moments. And not all of them are negative or bad, but what he did is he looked at these and then he looked at the people who went through them up to the breakdown and he began to give point totals that would help

you to compare the stress of particular issues. To love a loved one in death, that is worth 100 points. Christmas is 12 points, because the stress of Christmas, you see-

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's stressful. It's wonderful and it's stressful. Yup.

Gordon MacDonald:

So what he did is very cleverly, he listed all of these different stresses, the negative and the positive. He gave them point totals that seemed to apply to the seriousness of the situation and his conclusion was you can live with 150 points in a year's time and they'll be no detrimental effect. You can go from 100 points to 300 points and now to the growth of those numbers, you will begin to face physical breakdowns and maybe even emotional breakdowns. If you go over 300 in one year, it's a miracle if you'll survive it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, and I think that's worked itself into the vernacular. I'm sure most leaders ... and, I didn't know Thomas Holmes until I reread the book, but sometimes I'll sit down with people and they're upset or whatever and I'm like, "What have you been through?" "Well, I did have a significant death in my family, we moved, I changed jobs." Sometimes people would say we're in financial trouble or my marriage isn't good or whatever it happens to be. And again, if you assign those all point totals, as he talks about, their stress is through the roof.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you had had all those funerals, which is certainly a big deal. You had a lot of stressors that just pushed you out of what your natural gifting could sustain.

Gordon MacDonald:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Wow.

Gordon MacDonald:

Now sometime open your Bible and see what you would do with the major biblical characters on a stress scale. Look at Paul. In 2 Corinthians 12 when he lists all of those things he's going through; "I was shipwrecked three times, I was beaten, I was starved." The list is endless and you say to yourself, "This guy had to be at 550 points." The worst of all the points, Holmes doesn't mention but when he gets to the end, he says, "And beside all these stress points, I've had the anxiety of the churches."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, Holmes didn't mention that, did he? No.

Gordon MacDonald:

It's a wonderful line, and Paul says, "He who suffers, I suffer with him." How many people was Paul suffering with? So, he must have had a remarkable uptick on the stress scale.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's so clarifying. Now, where I really want to drill down on today with you, because I listened to the audio book and then I reread the book-book ... by the way, it would have been great to have you narrate that audio book, so maybe for a summer project, you could narrate it for the publisher? I just love your voice. Anyway, that's an aside. That's an aside, Gordon.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You write about the difference between being driven and being called, and it was just so haunting for me. I felt like I saw my leadership life flash before my eyes. Let's start here. How can you spot a driven person? Because my guess is most of the people who listen to a show like this, their friends would say they're pretty driven. You don't listen to leadership podcasts in your spare time unless you have some degree of drive in you. How would you define ... How do you spot a driven person?

Gordon MacDonald:

I probably sound like I know more than I really do, but just a fool with an idea, I put drivenness over here at one end of the arc and I put called-ness on the other end of the arc. Maybe as time goes by, we're moving back and forth in these things. One of the words which comes to me about drivenness that helps me to understand it is addiction. I think the driven person is often addicted to certain kinds of needs that may grow up even from childhood. I feel like by nature, I'm a driven person, or was anyway when I was more organizationally active than I am-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Same. Same.

Gordon MacDonald:

But, I often when I was doing the book, I was asking myself the question, "So Gordon, you're a driven person. Assuming. Where'd it come from?" And the first place I would tell you it came from, it came from the fundamentalist theological background that I grew up in as a child. We were always trying to please people. To please the Sunday School teacher, to please my father, to please my mother. You could never do enough, so you grow up in those early years and that's where drivenness can really kick in as a child. I remember watching my father, he was a pastor in those days, and he and I did not make it well at all but I admired him, nevertheless. I was very much aware that people loved to hear him preach and they sat under his preaching with their open Bibles taking their notes and their colored pencils.

Gordon MacDonald:

I can remember at the age of five or six years of age saying, "I'd like to do that. I'd like to be that person up there like my father." I think the drivenness kicked in at that point. Then as the years go by, you find people praise you for doing certain things. "Oh, Gordon's 13 years of age and he's already being a preacher of the gospel. Isn't this wonderful?" And, you love to hear these things about you and you need to hear them more and more and more like the addict needs more whatever the trigger is that gets them going some direction.

Gordon MacDonald:

I could be very, very unfair in my observation but I think the majority of men and women who go into Christian leadership probably are taking a spirit of drivenness into it, which has to be flogged and excised as the early years of adulthood go. If they don't, they probably will not last a full lifetime.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, Gordon, I agree with you. I think you could apply that to most of leadership. If you think about it by definition, whether you're leading a church of 100 or a church of 10,000 or a company of 10, or a company of 10,000 employees, by definition, when you get to the C-Suite, when you get to the top, there's very few of you. And, I've always been a leader. I was the guy in high school where if something wasn't organized, I'd step in and organize it. If I go into a room and it's in chaos, I'll try to bring order. I think there's definitely a lot of drivenness inside me, so I think you're reading the mail of almost everybody who's listening to this podcast. There's a drivenness in that, and even if you're a person of faith, if you're a Christian, in our case you and me, there's still a drivenness there that needs some kind of redemption.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What are the downsides of being driven? What is the shadow side of being a driven leader?

Gordon MacDonald:

Driven people, this is not in priority order, driven people can be angry people. They want things to go their way, and when they don't, when someone puts a monkey wrench into the works, you can see anger. We've seen some big illustrations of leaders in the last several years who couldn't control their anger and it finally lost them their leadership in one way or the other. People finally said, "I'm not going to work with this guy anymore."

Gordon MacDonald:

I wrote down some other thoughts. People become obsessed about the symbols of leadership. They have to have the best office. They have to drive the nicest car. They have to be in charge. They have to sit at the head of the table. They are always reminding you that they're one step above you. They are people who are always addicted to expansion. No sooner have they finished one building program that they're beginning another.

Gordon MacDonald:

I recall a few years ago being invited to speak at one of our large megachurches in this country that had just finished a huge sanctuary building program. And before I went into the building for the first time, I walked around its circumference, which seemed like almost a mile of walking. But I looked at this whole thing now just a few months in existence and I thought, "What has this man done to himself? What has he done to his people? Who's going to pick this all up when he lays it down? What generation following this generation is going to pick up the payments to this place and maintain it?" They're happy if you want to build it, but they don't want to build it most of the time.

Gordon MacDonald:

It wasn't long after that that this guy was booted from his position. So there's a big monument out there. I think about that thing. I think driven people sometimes short cheat their integrity. They cut

corners to get people to do what they want to do. You pick it up, for example, in the truthfulness of their preaching and you see it in the way they manipulate people-

Carey Nieuwhof:

A little bit of exaggeration, a little bit of spin here and there.

Gordon MacDonald:

It works sometimes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It does work.

Gordon MacDonald:

I wrote down here that a lot of driven people have poor people skills. They're not really good at the one-on-one's. I think back sometimes in one of our previous conversations, I told you about my friend, Marilyn. She was a woman who had some mental issues, constantly medicated and I blew her off one day because I was talking to some important people and I blew her off. To this day, I'm haunted by the fact that the Marilyn came over and she put herself right between me and the other person and she said with her medicated voice, "Pastor Mac, you say hello, Marilyn, how are you? But you don't have time to find out. You're too busy with important people like others." I live with that rebuke to this day. She was right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I remember that story. I find it haunting as well. I think I've got some Marilyn's in my life.

Gordon MacDonald:

Those are the places where you see the drivenness. I think what they do is they burn their whole system out after a while and people become disillusioned working for them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Any other signs of a driven person or the damage they do, because I think this is good. I've got time. This is like free therapy, everybody. I'm taking notes. Gordon, anything else? I mean, your book is just so good on this stuff, and again, so haunting for me.

Gordon MacDonald:

I probably have given you as good a list.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I have this image, as I've been listening to your book, rereading it, preparing for this day ... and, I haven't tested this out on you, so if you don't think it works, you can just tell me. But when I think of a driven person, I think of a picture of myself or whatever, and they're running. They're running from something. They're not really running towards something. They're running away from something.

Gordon MacDonald:

That's a good point.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, do you think driven people run away from things? What are they running from or what are they running to? What is that chase about? It's got to be bigger. It's got to be better. It's got to be people are a means to an end. The ends justify the means. When you look back at your life, were you running away from anything?

Gordon MacDonald:

Yeah, to some extent I feel like in my early years, I was running away from getting too intimate with people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah.

Gordon MacDonald:

My darling wife was the person who used to call me on this all the time. She would say, "You know, you tell people you dearly love them but you disappear the minute the meeting is over." I would say to her, "I hate wedding receptions. I can't stand going to Sunday School picnics." Now, what do those two have in common? If you go to a Sunday School picnic or a wedding reception, you're at the mercy of anybody who wants to approach you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, you're right.

Gordon MacDonald:

That was me. I wanted out. Interestingly enough, and this is Meyers-Briggs language, Gail is an extrovert who feels ... If Gail has a drivenness in her, it's the drivenness to want to connect with everybody in the room. Carey, I can't begin to estimate to you how many times at the end of a morning worship service, after I had prayed for all the people and called them to Jesus and done all this nice stuff, the minute the amen was sounded, I was out the side door of the auditorium off to a distant parking lot to sit in my car until Gail came out from meeting all the people.

Gordon MacDonald:

Gail, she would say to me sometimes, "I don't understand you. People pay you to draw off your spiritual energy but you run from them. Tell me how that works. What's the logic behind that?" So, in some ways she felt a drivenness to make up for what I was leaving behind. And then when we learned Myers-Briggs for the first time, I began to understand who I was, why I ran from events like that where I was at the mercy of anybody who wanted to talk to me. Because I was an introvert in the best sense of the word, but I was running from people. I didn't want to get into all of those intimate conversations.

Gordon MacDonald:

I've noticed this in the last 10 or 15 years in my older years, the younger men and women who have built new churches, they're the people of the greenroom and more than once I've come into the city to speak on a Sunday and my minder will say to me, "We'd like to pick you up at 20 minutes of the hour."

You'll take 10 minutes to get to the church building. We'll take you into the greenroom. We've got your favorite snacks, your favorite kinds of carbonated beverages. We've got candy, we've got fruit. And then, when the congregation sings its third song, we'll take you out on the stage to speak."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, very common.

Gordon MacDonald:

I'll say to them, and I've done this every time, "Wait a minute. You don't understand. I'm a pastor. I want to get to the church 30 to 40 minutes before the service starts and I don't want to go to the greenroom. I want to go to the auditorium and I want to walk up and down the aisles and meet people. I want some people to say when I begin to preach, 'I met him.' And when the morning service is over, I don't want to go back to the greenroom. I want to stay up front, or in the back ... wherever you choose ... I want to meet people."

Gordon MacDonald:

Now that's the older Gordon. The younger Gordon would have loved the greenroom.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What flipped for you? What changed with that?

Gordon MacDonald:

That's an interesting question. I think just as I got older, I appreciated more and more the role of the pastor. Eugene Peterson's new biography, one of the things that startled me ... I should have known better ... Peterson keeps saying over and over again, down through the years of his public life, "I'm a pastor. I may write books. I may do this, I may teach in a classroom but I'm a pastor and anything I do, I do as a pastor." Well, as my life has gone on, I've realized yeah, I've written the books, I've taught in the classroom, I've run the organization but I've always done it as a pastor.

Gordon MacDonald:

And in my second half of life, more and more the instincts of the pastor gripped me and I found a wonderful calling in touching the cheek of an older widowed woman who's 85 years of age, or getting down on the floor on my knees eyeball to eyeball with a small child. When I was in my 50s and 60s, that really began to stir my soul to do those kinds of things. I would probably tell you it was the second half of my life that awakened me to what a pastor really does, and a pastor doesn't like a greenroom.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How did you reprogram your wiring? Or, is that a discipline? Did you just decide one day, "Okay, I'm going to do this whether I want to or not?" Or, did your heart end up following?

Gordon MacDonald:

Well yeah, that and a lot of stuff. I don't want to keep bringing Gail into this-

Carey Nieuwhof:

No problem there at all.

Gordon MacDonald:

But the fact of the matter is, Gail was the pastor and all I had to do was watch her and see how things should be done. I think in our second half of marriage ... We're celebrating our 60th anniversary pretty soon-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Congrats.

Gordon MacDonald:

She had a lot to teach me in terms of what pastoring really looks like. There was the biographical reading, reading people like the life of a Eugene Peterson and people of older generations in the 1700s and 1800s and seeing what a pastor did in those days. But, I became more and more restive in the second half of my life that how did people see Jesus and how could I bring them closer to a Jesus experience? And that's what a pastor does. So, I became much more comfortable with it as time went by.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thinking about drivenness, does insecurity sometimes play a role in being driven?

Gordon MacDonald:

Oh, sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, can we talk about that?

Gordon MacDonald:

Yeah. Can I help you on that one? When I think of that, every time you present a word like that, I'm saying to myself, "Yeah, I've been there."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah, no, insecurity has been part of my journey, too.

Gordon MacDonald:

I think my insecurity came from never feeling like I measured up to my father, and gee, I wanted to please him so badly. The interesting thing about our relationship was that there came a day when if you measured a person in terms of their effectiveness and efficiency, I passed him by. I could-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Where the son exceeded the father in terms of "success"? Accomplishment?

Gordon MacDonald:

And that's not unusual in this day and age for a leader to have that experience, but I did have insecurity about how do you please your father? I probably had an overactive imagination and I looked at all these other guys in my peer group, and I could think of every reason why they were better than me in everything that we did one by one. In that first half of life, I did lack a lot of self confidence, but around my mid-40s, I began to say this doesn't mean anything and I can talk about that in a moment, but my second half of life became really freeing. And then, when I had a catastrophic moment in life 35 years ago, that takes you down a long way and you're at the mercy of God and you're at the mercy of the people around you who put people in positions and don't ... I just learned what it was like to live on the dependency of the mercy of other people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'll keep recommending Rebuilding Your Broken World. I always get the title slightly wrong. Is that the book, Gordon?

Gordon MacDonald:

Rebuilding Your Broken World.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Such a good book.

Gordon MacDonald:

To this day, it continues to go because a lot of broken worlds keep getting broken.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, and your life is a hinge point, isn't it? From your early 40s to today? You just turned 82. Happy birthday, by the way. We talked last just before your birthday a couple weeks ago before this interview. Okay, so that is drivenness. And then, anything else on drivenness?

Gordon MacDonald:

Well, let me see. Did I write anything down that I wanted to talk to you about? Just that driven people produce shallow people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Ooh.

Gordon MacDonald:

A congregation, in the long run, rises no higher than the persons who are in charge of their spiritual journey up front. I'm sure you've experienced this, Carey. If you stay at a church for 12 years, people will start praying like you pray. We'll learn how to pray in the way the pastor prays. If your prayers are the prayers of the driven person, if your prayers are superficial, if your prayers are only time takers to get the band up on the stage, people are going to start praying like that. If you're a driven person, you're probably going to preach the Bible and all of its meaning in rather shallow ways. I'm not talking about honest simplicity, but I'm talking about amusing people-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, a superficiality.

Gordon MacDonald:

A driven person is going to leave a lot of shallow people behind him when he goes out the door. And finally I would say a driven person probably leaves a congregation when he goes out the door that really doesn't know who it is and where it's going, because he has not given them a deep sense of focus and perseverance that goes past his tenure. A called person, which would be the opposite of driven, would be a person who always leaves the congregation better than when they found it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that is really interesting. I think that's one of the reasons I so value our friendship. There are definite parallel points in our journey. I think it's almost to some extent a universal journey. Most people who get into leadership, that splinter of people who end up in the C-Suite on top of an organization, starting things, founding things, that kind of thing. We're a weird bunch, and I think drivenness gets us there, Gordon, right? And then, you're right, some people never get out of that. That's just their whole life. It's driven, driven, driven. Eventually you retire, whatever you do, but there's an alternative and that's called-ness. Called-ness.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I would love to know what does a called person look like?

Gordon MacDonald:

Well, let me get into that by just one step backwards for a second in saying Paul was probably a driven person. He had to get baptized out of that, and I think to his very last day there was drivenness in him that he had to constantly capture.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Why he has to write 2nd Corinthians to apologize for 1 Corinthians thing? Right?

Gordon MacDonald:

Wonderful example. I would never have thought of that one, but that's a beautiful example of Paul. Then when you get into the called person and if you've refreshed yourself on Ordering Your Private World, you know that I spent several pages with John the Baptizer. John was a guy, who if there was a life changer in my earlier years, John may have been it. I just really felt it to a point where I love that guy. He was as weird as anything, but there were qualities he brought to the table that I badly could relate to. One of my favorite paragraphs comes in John 3, when we watched Jesus, who's now come to where John is ... Jesus is baptized. He starts going away and people start following him. If you allow my imagination to work, here's John standing there and I imagine him looking as people are going over the hill and he's watching his crowd disappear.

Gordon MacDonald:

For nine months, he's been the talk of the town. For nine months, everybody in Judea and the surrounding area has been going out to hear him preach. Pharisees, Sadducee's, soldiers and everything, they're all out there and then one day, they start to dissipate, which is one of the most terrible fears of any leader. "My crowd is going to leave me." Some people come, and I've never really been sure

whether they were friends or critics or both, and in effect, they said to him, "You know, what are you going to do? The crowd has left you. They're going after him. What's going to happen to you?" In that moment, John gives us a four point outline, which I probably have preached more than any other text in the scripture-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay.

Gordon MacDonald:

The first thing he seems to be saying is, "Yeah, I preached for nine months to that crowd, but they were never mine. They were God's. He loaned them to me to give them something and if He wants to take them away, it's His right to do it so there they go." I've looked at that and I've thought, "Boy, as a pastor, do I own my congregation or do I manage it?" Because it's very easy to start talking about my church, my people and it's a good discipline to say, "No, this is His church. I'm just here managing it until He finds a better manager." This ministry belongs to Him. And that's something we need to teach every young woman and every young man who's going into leadership. This is not your work. It's God's work through you.

Gordon MacDonald:

The second thing John said is, "You've heard me say many times I am not the Christ, but I'm the one sent before him." John's just one step or two steps below the messianic label. I've often thought I wonder how many times John, on one of those spectacularly successful days, how many times did John lay in his tent and say to himself, "They really liked me today. If I was in charge, I could really do this. I could really do that." What leader doesn't have those fantasies? I wonder if John says to himself, "Well, somebody called me Elijah today. Somebody called me the great prophet that Moses predicted."

Carey Nieuwhof:

"I guess I really am pretty good, right? They're coming from miles." Yeah, you're right. I haven't thought about that.

Gordon MacDonald:

Then finally John says, "Well, maybe I am the Christ. Maybe I am him. They love me so much." So that when the crowds start to walk away, what protects John from that kind of dangerous thinking? It's the fact that he knew who he was and who he wasn't. I think that's something all the way through life, Carey, that you and I have to work on. We have to remember every day who we are and who we're not.

Gordon MacDonald:

Third thing, I have been called to be the one who introduces the groom. That's my job. You've done weddings. You know the best man is there to introduce the groom and the bride, not to take the attention to himself.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Gordon MacDonald:

John is saying, "I'm only the best man at the wedding." And then finally, that amazing phrase, "He must increase and I must decrease." That's what a rabbi would say, or a disciple would say about a rabbi. That paragraph has marked our ministry. In this house, we turn to that over and over and over again and consider that the straight edge about what call to ministry is about. That's the way called people see things and speak.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We're going to come back to called-ness in a moment, but I do want to go there because you hinted at it, and you and I have talked about just when we catch up. Obscurity. You're 82. And that's where every driven leader ends up, right? In obscurity. It's that idea can you name your great grandfather? 90% of people can't do it. We're in this space where it's like, "Why did I live this life?" How do you prepare for obscurity, Gordon?

Gordon MacDonald:

Well, first of all, you read a lot of biography. You know me well enough now that I can't go very far without talking about biography. I want to know the attitudes, the experiences and the failures of the great women and men that God has called into service over the centuries. You begin to pick up the theme of obscurity in a lot of biographers and how people live with it or didn't live with it. Secondly, I've known a lot of pastors who had to step down from doing anything organizationally at the age of 68 or 69, somewhere around there. And what's appalled me is how many of them have left their ministries bitter. They couldn't imagine that their people could let them go, and now they haven't thought about this so here they are at 70 years of age, and many of them are living on poor financial foundations.

Gordon MacDonald:

One of the things they discover is that very quickly after you leave a church, the people leave you because they start giving their love to the next person who's come along so it never was your work in the first place.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Gordon MacDonald:

Those are things that I hear from people and observe. And just plain pure logic said to me I don't want the last 20 yards of my life, to use a football term, the red zone of my life to be lived hanging on the esteem of people. I had my opportunity with them. They know me. Now it's time for them to get on to somebody else. So again, when I started planning for obscurity when we were in our early 60s, I determined that when I turned 60 years of age ... This is Gordon, not anybody else. That when I turned 60, I would step away from organizational leadership. That was a good decision. We marshaled all of our finances in that direction so that when the time came, theoretically we'd be able to pay for it.

Gordon MacDonald:

And, I would be able for the next many years of my life to do the things which I really felt were at the core of God's call in my life in basically building a younger generation. So, with that comes this notion I'm going to start doing things in life that not many people are going to clap about. They're not going to be calling me on the phone every morning so I might as well start getting used to it, and I had a wife who

helped me to get used to that. Feeling that I'm moving into obscurity rather quickly really hasn't bothered me much at all. I just keep looking back and saying, "I had 40 wonderful years of that, 10 years of this. It's been great. It doesn't last forever and now I get to live in a quieter side of life."

Gordon MacDonald:

And you know what, by the way? I'm learning how to meet my neighbors. I'm meeting neighbors I haven't met for a long, long time and we like each other.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Gordon, there's such a joy and such a lightness in these conversations. I'm just so delighted. I've shared this with you and I'll share it with the listeners, but we're 400 and some odd episodes into this podcast and 17 million downloads or whatever, but you are the only leader ... And again, anyone under 40 maybe is new to you, but these episodes, the two that we've done prior to that, you're the only leader I've interviewed that have two in the top five of all the episodes I've ever done. So, I think you're leaving a huge deposit in the next generation and I'm just so grateful for that. I've been thinking, because you and I have talked offline and online about obscurity, and I'm ready for that day. I always joke with my current team who does this podcast and writing and books and all that like, "Hey, there's going to be a day where there aren't 17 million downloads. There's going to be a day where nobody calls. There's going to be a day where nobody invites you to speak. There's going to be a day ..."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And, you got to get ready for that day now and know that you've been a steward of that season while it lasted and it doesn't last forever, and you're right. You told me when I was stepping permanently off staff at Connexus, it's like, "Don't worry, they forget you quickly." And, you're right. They forget you quickly and that's okay. That's okay. There's a joy in that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That does tear at calling. What are some qualities and characteristics of a called person as opposed to a driven person?

Gordon MacDonald:

Well, a called person ... Again, this is not in priority order ... puts a huge premium on personal growth. I don't think it's wrong to say in effect as best is in me as possible every day, I will learn something new that can be useful in God's work. I feel the importance of growing. Secondly, a called person is very, very passionate about developing the people around them. They're always asking themselves the question, "What has God been speaking to me about and showing me that if I shared it with you, you might enjoy even more than I do?" Or, "What is it that I can give in whatever way that's possible?"

Gordon MacDonald:

We had a family here for lunch just a few hours ago, and they brought four children with them that are just beautiful. I find children like that, you want to make them feel welcomed into your home. Even a child is an important person, and Jesus made that clear. Don't stop the children from coming. We had children here, and the question was how and whatever way could we make them feel valued? I think called people try to think like that. Called people are very, very humble in the sense that they're very

willing to speak to their own brokenness. If I can tell you something about me that will help you to work through these issues, that's important to be able to do.

Gordon MacDonald:

I did write some other things down here.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah. By all means.

Gordon MacDonald:

I would just finally say I wrote down the word Christian character. I long to meet men and women who really show the fruits of Christ's presence in their life, who when you leave them, you're saying to yourself, "I just want to love and revere Jesus more than I've ever done before because of their influence." I think those are the ways called people think. And then, they emulate of course the things you and I said about John the Baptist.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Here's another theory, because perhaps there's still drivenness that haunts me on a daily basis, but I'm hoping I'm moving to more of a called existence than a driven one, I remember that moment in my life ... And, I hit a wall too at 40 with my burnout and I remember working through that with friends, counselors and prayer, Toni, my wife, and family members, and I remember being deathly afraid that the things that made me successful, my drivenness, would all be taken away and I would have almost instant obscurity. There was that sense success is a trap. Once you've been successful, it's really hard not to want more of that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But one of the things that ... and this is a theory, so feel free to disagree, Gordon ... is that actually drivenness is not all bad. It needs to be redeemed. In other words, that ambition. Ambition can be selfish, or it can be a stewardship. The drive to reach more people can be selfishly motivated or it can actually be a stewardship of my goodness, I hope 100,000 people hear this interview, not 1,000. That kind of thing. If there a redemptive ... did you become an entirely different person or were just some of the things that made you a driven leader, did they get refined to the point where they became more of a calling thing?

Gordon MacDonald:

Yeah, I have to be careful with myself because I don't want to puff myself. People who know me well have often said to me, "We've known two Gordons in your lifetime. We've known the Gordon who made it up to the age of 42 or 43, and that Gordon was nice to have around. We loved him, but he could come across as very arrogant and know-it-all and maybe even a little bit feelings of superiority over other people. We knew that Gordon, and we were willing to live with him. But something changed around 42 or 43, and now there's a new Gordon. His voice is quieter. He thinks a lot more. He listens. He doesn't always have to have the last word. That's the second Gordon." And, if someone is willing to say those things because they've known me a little bit at this part of life, I just want to raise hands and say, "Thank you, God."

Gordon MacDonald:

In my hitting of the wall on a number of occasions, now I can see Jesus was just crashing down all that old stuff that I thought was so great when I was a young man, and He's quieted me. I don't always have to be in charge anymore. I don't have to be the biggest and best. I'm not going to be anyway if I wanted to. That's a brief outline. The thought that people would say, "You're quieter and we detect a humble spirit," that profoundly moves me because how many years back on this other Gordon did I never hear that? And for me to hear this now says, "Well, Jesus finally did get into your interior life and made something of a difference." That's what you want to hear from people. You want to hear that second half of life.

Gordon MacDonald:

And hardly a week goes by that I don't tell somebody, "You probably got 25 to 30 more good years in you if you're 50 years of age. People are living longer. These are not going to be just sitting on a park bench watching kids play softball. These are going to be the most powerful years of your life because you're going to take your experience, your wisdom, your authenticity as it's growing, it's all going to come together and it's going to produce wisdom and maturity. Your life in your 60s and 70s are likely to be the very, very best years of your life. Plan on it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is such a good word. As someone who's in the middle of my 50s, that comes ... I agree. There's a lot of life left. It's crazy when your kids grow up and they leave home, and you're like, "Oh, there's still life left." Weird question, maybe a bad one, but I want to ask it. How do you see the old Gordon? The pre-age 42. Have you made peace with him? Is it important to make peace with him? Do you have regrets? I have regrets, I'm sure. But yeah, how do you relate to your former self?

Gordon MacDonald:

I don't feel that that's a problem for me. I was telling somebody yesterday about something I'd done when I was around 28 or 29. As I told the story, I was really embarrassed. I felt this flush of embarrassment. As I told the story, I thought to myself, "I didn't really do that, did I?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's right.

Gordon MacDonald:

Or, "That was really stupid or that was immature." Or, another way you say it is, "Blessed be the people who were willing to listen to all that stuff and not kick you out the front door."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I know.

Gordon MacDonald:

I look at my first half of life and I have a very vivid imagination and memory. I can recall my life almost month by month up through the years. I enjoy my own personal history, but it's nothing in comparison with the second half. It's put on the shelf like a museum piece. That's my history. If I need some mercy, God give it to me. Those were wonderful years of learning. Gail and I were reading about a trip I made

back in 1973 or '74 to the jungles of the Amazon and I had forgotten so much of that experience, but it was a treat to look back and reimagine times when God gave me privileges that a lot of other people didn't get in those days.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, there are a number of leaders listening right now who are like, "Oh wow, I'm in the first half of that life. I'm driven. I'm convicted. I don't even know whether I like what I see right now. I see a bit of an alternative." What advice would you give them?

Gordon MacDonald:

Well, the first thing I'd be saying to any person under the age of 50 today is, "Boy, how fortunate you are if you're a servant of the Lord to be alive today." I can't help but believe in the next 10 to 15 years, we're going to see a change in the Christian movement that we could never imagine in a lifetime. Those men and women who are going to be at the steering wheel during the next 15 or 20 years, they get to play a role in this. I think it's going to be some of the most massive changes that we've seen in 300 years.

Gordon MacDonald:

You ask me where did I get 300 from? It's just a nice round number. Would you have enjoyed living in Luther's day? Would you have enjoyed living in John Wesley's day? Would have it been really fun to watch the modern missionary movement come alive and be a part of that? Because something of that magnitude is about to break on us. It may mean going through a period of time where the church shrinks a little bit and we have some real conflict, but out of it is going to come something beautiful. I wish I was young enough that I could watch all that happen and perhaps even help encourage it.

Gordon MacDonald:

I don't expect to see it happen, but I'm positive it's going to.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What makes you say that?

Gordon MacDonald:

Well, when you're 82 ... I open the obituary column in The New York Times every morning, and you know what? Almost everybody dies before 83.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But what makes you say the bit about the church? It's nice to get a message of hope. What makes you think we're poised for a breakthrough?

Gordon MacDonald:

I think first of all we're going to have to reform how we present the gospel to the new generations. God bless, Billy Graham, he was a moderate friend. I love him, but that kind of thing is not going to work anymore. It has to be a new kind of evangelism. It's not just the method of evangelism but it's the content of how we present the saving work of Christ to one another. This new generation is dealing with a whole new set of issues I never even heard of when I got into the ministry.

Gordon MacDonald:

So, I think it's likely that the church is going to shrink a bit because of the pandemic. Already people are beginning to imagine that maybe one-third of the people will not come back. Is there a good news or bad news to that? Maybe the pastor gets freed for a period of time of having to cater to a group of people who were never going to do anything anyway.

Gordon MacDonald:

You've heard me say this, that probably the new pastor is going to be a trainer more important than being a preacher. I just feel that in my gut that we're going to have to look at the pastoral ministry and compare it to a rabbinical ministry such as Jesus, and that's going to change the church. That's going to change it immensely.

Gordon MacDonald:

The theologians are going to have to give us a new fresh way of presenting the saving work of Christ. Those things come to me with force.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, so your advice was we started at, "Hey, it's great to be alive and what a privilege is you're 50 to be leading in this moment." Any other advice for driven leaders either in ministry or in the business space who would say, "Wow, I got convicted by the description of the driven person as well."

Gordon MacDonald:

If I was with a group of pastors tonight and they were saying, "What's most truly important?", I would put right at the top two things. Your family comes first. The cultivation of your marriage cannot be ignored in any way, shape or form. What you discover when you leave a church is how much people have been watching you in the private side of your life. They watch the way you treat your spouse. They watch the way you honor your children. They watch the way you spend time with them, the way you talk about them. And if you talk in a demeaning way about your spouse in a sermon, people pick that up real quick.

Gordon MacDonald:

The other side is we've got to have a new fresh approach to what it means to fill this inner space that you and I started out talking about an hour ago. Our devotional life cannot be kept as shallow as it often is. We've got to cut down on our business. I look for the megachurch organization to maybe shrink a little bit and for there to be a whole new emphasis upon how you train men and women to pastor people in groups of 20 or 25.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a good word. That's a really good word. Well, I had a lot of other questions but I just feel like we have done what we're called to do today, and that means we'll have to leave the door open for more again if you're open to that.

Gordon MacDonald:

You said some very kind things to me and I want to make sure I thank you before we say goodbye. You're always lifting people up and I admire that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you're always lifting me up and I know that you bless so many leaders who continue to listen to this show, and Gordon, it's just such a great joy in my life to have gotten to know you over the last few years, to have a genuine friendship, an email friendship, a Zoom friendship and one day they'll open the borders and we'll see each other face-to-face again. I just want to thank you for pouring into this next generation. Ordering Your Private World, as well as a trove of other books that Gordon has authored are available everywhere books are sold. You can find them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's amazing that all these years later, they're all pretty much still in print. Isn't that wonderful.

Gordon MacDonald:

I'm very thankful. And thank you for you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thank you, Gordon.

Gordon MacDonald:

Bye, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Bye.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah. There are just some people who really, really make a deep difference and Gordon is one of them. I'm so grateful for the friendship we've developed and also to be able to bring him back and offer episodes like this. If this has meant something to you, would you let us know online? Share it with a friend. When we see it, we love to repost what you are sharing as well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, I'm Carey Nieuwhof on Instagram. You can also find me on Facebook and Twitter, and most of the usual channels. We have a version of this on YouTube, as well, and of course, we want to bring you everything we possibly can, so all the links to what Gordon and I covered including Ordering Your Private World are available in the show notes for free to you. You can go to CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode422 for more of that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, we have an all star lineup this year. Next episode, we have Greg McKeown on. He is the author of Essentialism, and his brand new book which immediately became a New York Times bestseller, Effortless. And, we went off the beaten path. I thought we were going to talk about Essentialism and Effortless, which we did, but man, we ended up going all over the place.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Here's an excerpt from what I think will be a fascinating and different kind of conversation with the one and only Greg McKeown.

Greg McKeown:

Wouldn't you love to work for a boss that was light and easy? Still making progress, but it's light and easy. It's not always burdensome and heavy and "Well, we need to get better results and we got to work harder." What if it was, "Hey, we need to get better results. Let's find a smarter way of doing it. Let's find an easier way of doing it. How can we build something that will make these results flow to us instead of only through grinding effort?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, that's next time. Subscribers, you know that that will show up automatically, and I just subscribed to Greg's podcast because I've been reading his books but not his podcast, so if you're new, welcome and do make sure that you subscribe to this one.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Who else have we got coming up? We've got David Nurse, Derwin Gray, Chris Hodges, Jean Twenge, Pete Scazzero is coming back. We have Chris McChesney from the Covey Group and The Four Disciplines of Execution. Amy Porterfield is going to be on, and so many more. So excited for this year on the podcast.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And it's time for What I'm Thinking About. This is brought to you by Barna Cities, would love for you to check out what Barna Cities has for you. See if your city qualifies by going to BarnaCities.com/Carey and sign up today, and buy my brand new course, The Art of Better Reaching. You can check that out. Mark Clark and I have something brand new for you. It's TheArtofBetterReaching.com. And if you secure your spot before June 11th, you will get the very best introductory pricing we can offer.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So Mark and I are really committed to reaching unchurched people, and by the grace of God, we've been able to reach thousands every weekend in a very post-Christian country. Now one of the challenges, and I want to go back to something that Gordon said, is the difference between being driven and being called. We've been really fortunate to see great results, both at Connexus Church and Village Church, where Mark leads, but I want to just be transparent and say I have to constantly sift my motives to make sure that I am really living at a place of being called rather than just being driven.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And the good news is we've reached a lot of people. The hard news is it's been a constant journey for me to, almost on a daily basis, bring my motives before God to make sure that they're pure. And that was true when I was leading a church for two decades. It's true now that I'm doing this full-time. I want to make sure. I'm excited about reaching more people, but how do I know whether I'm driven or whether I'm called?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to share with you in these closing moments of podcast just seven phrases that driven leaders use, I used most of these over the years, and I think they really frustrate your team. Have you ever said these things? You're disappointed by attendance, you're disappointed by the results of some initiative you've launched and you're like, "These numbers can't be right." Oh, gosh. I've said that way too many times. Just because you don't like the numbers you see doesn't mean the numbers are inaccurate.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Now once in a while they are. It's like, "Oh actually, we made a rounding error. We made a mistake." That's great, but I've done that too many times and I think that's a sign of a driven leader so call an inaudible on that one. How about this one? How hard can that be? I've said that here. I'm a visionary and at 30,000 feet, everything looks easy. You want to launch a new location? Simple. Just do it. You want to change everything? Start right now. You want to write a book? Piece of cake says everybody who hasn't written a book. Anyway, how hard that can be. Apparently, it's quite hard and what happens is when you underestimate how difficult something is, that can demoralize your team.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But when you know, "Hey, this is going to be hard, guys. This is going to be a challenge. We're going to go into the city. We're going to launch a location. It's going to take something from all of us, and I'm going to work hard, too." That's a much better place to be.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Another thing that I've done particularly in my early days is I just think things don't take time. That's not going to take a lot of time at all. One of my long time staff members, Sarah, who served for years as my assistant, she would say, "Carey, do you know how long this is going to take? You think it's going to take 10 minutes. It's going to take two hours." It's like, "Yeah, that's fair." You got to check in with your team and go, "Do you need more time? Is your workload realistic? Is there anything I can do to help?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

But minimizing the workload your team is facing maximizes their frustration with you, so that's another thing driven leaders do you got to cross off your list. Okay, number four. Wait, didn't I just say that? You love to be the one with the ideas, except you're not. And sometimes your team will come back with an idea that you think, "Wait a minute, I taught you that a year ago," and you want to claim credit for it. Don't. Just let them own the ideas. You don't need to be the hero of every story.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And, the leader who tries to steal someone else's thunder ends up creating a whole new set of storms. So don't try to steal credit or claim credit for ideas. Even if you did come up with it first, give someone else the spotlight for a moment. I think that's a difference between being driven and being called.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Another thing, and this happens a lot, I try to avoid this, is to say, "Well, that's exactly what I was thinking." Now once in a while that's super healthy. It's like, "Wow, that was a great idea. You know what? I agree." But sometimes what you're doing, again, is you're stealing thunder. Instead of saying, "Well, that's exactly what I was thinking," why don't you just say, "That was a great idea." Just shut up. Swallow your insecurity and celebrate the other person's idea sincerely and deeply.

Carey Nieuwhof:

A couple more really quick. Sometimes your team is tired and you say things like, "You know what? I thought you just got back from vacation. Did we not just have a weekend off? Did you not just have a week at the beach? How can you be tired now?" You see, you want to make sure that your team is living in a sustainable pace. We'll say a lot more about that this fall, but you bring, and your team brings who they are into everything you do, so don't disparage days off and vacation. Applaud them. A rested team is a better team, so don't make it seem like the only value is found at work.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then the final thing driven leaders say is, "You have to." Right? "You have to." Nobody has to do anything. Sure, your staff get paid but they don't have to work with you. In a sense, we live in an age where everybody's a volunteer, even your paid staff. And as soon as you start to use authority to coerce people, I just don't think that's a really good approach.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And what I've discovered is when you give people an out, they lean in. Rather than saying, "You have to do this," sometimes I'll ask my team, "Hey, would it be possible for you to do X? If not, I completely understand." I almost never have anyone who says no and on the rare occasion that they do, we can drill down and see why something is difficult for them to do in the moment and adjust but the principle under this, when you give people an out, they often lean in.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Those are some things I'm trying to actively get rid of in terms of my own drivenness and move to a place of healthier called leadership.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hope you enjoyed this episode as much as I have. Gordon's a favorite. Greg McKeown next time and a whole bunch in the future that I think you're going to love. Thanks so much for listening and I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before.

Announcer:

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