

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 452 of the podcast. It's Carey here, and I hope our time together today helps you thrive in life and leadership. I got Erwin McManus back on the podcast. We go all over the place today, and today's episode is brought to you by Pro Media Fire. You can join me, Bob Goff, Nona Jones and Tim Timberlake for the free five-day Social Media Growth Challenge. Register today at socialmediachallenge.com and buy Remodel Health. Get 50% off their health benefits analysis and learn how much you can save your team by using the promo code, CAREY50 at remodelhealth.com/analysis.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, as you know, for those of you who are involved in the church or lead at a church, or for those of you who don't attend church for your own reasons, the church is in a really interesting season right now, and Erwin McManus and I talk about the future of the church, how to do evangelism more effectively. By the way, we make a reference here to a couple of episodes he did on the Lewis Howes show. Strongly recommend you head on over to the School of Greatness and listen to those. It's just fascinating. We'll link to them in the show notes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Then authenticity. Erwin, talks a lot about the criticism that he's endured in the church. So for those of you who have been pummeled and criticized over the last year, which is all a lot of you, I think you're going to really enjoy this episode. So Erwin McManus has committed his life to the study of genius. He's got a brand new book called *The Genius of Jesus* and he's committed to the pursuit of God. He never quite knew that one day the worlds would collide.

Carey Nieuwhof:

He is an iconoclast, an entrepreneur, a storyteller, fashion designer, filmmaker, cultural thought leader who's singular intention is to, he says, "Violate our view of reality." He's also the founder of Mosaic, a church movement based in the heart of Hollywood that spans the globe and the acclaimed author of *The Way of the Warrior*, *The Last Arrow*, and now *The Genius of Jesus*.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I think you're really going to appreciate this conversation. Would you like to help with growing your church or non-profit during this holiday season? If so, then I'd like you to come on over and join me for Pro Media Fire's free five-day Social Media Growth Challenge starting October 25th. In the Social Media Growth Challenge, you're going to learn how to turn your social media from frustrating into amazing social media content created in seven minutes, a day or less. You'll learn how to launch a simple social media initiative that will stop the scroll and drive growth this holiday season, and for churches and nonprofits that are growing online, you'll learn how to grow and scale through the power of a proven next step digital format.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So join me, Bob Goff, Nona Jones and Tim Timberlake, thousands of other mission-driven leaders for the Social Media Growth Challenge. This is a five-day learning experience. It's live this week and replays are available after if you're asking. Register for free at socialmediachallenge.com.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you remember back in the day how pension plans changed? Used to have like company pension plans then suddenly 401k showed up. Well, the same thing has been happening with health benefits over the last decade. It's something called managed individual, and that is replacing old group plans, just like 401k's replaced retirement plans, the traditional ones.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Our podcast listeners, listeners to this podcast alone have already saved \$2.5 million in just the past 18 months making the switch and their team have gotten a lot better coverage as a result. So that's pretty cool, but it wouldn't be possible without Remodel Health. They've been serving Christian organizations since 2016 and their risk-free health benefits analysis lets you get a full preview of what the change would look like for your team.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Normally, it costs \$35 per employee, but they're letting me give you a 50% discount. You can get it with the code, CAREY50 when you go to remodelhealth.com/analysis. Well, into my conversation now with Erwin McManus. Erwin, welcome back to the podcast. It's so good to see you again and be with you.

Erwin McManus:

It's so good to be with you man. It's been a long time, but I just see you everywhere. It's just exciting thing. Incredible amount of influence that you've gained over the last few years.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, thank you. It's a little crazy I'll tell you for a guy who works out of his basement. I continue to be amazed at what happens, but influence is an incredible thing. I mean, you look at your church and you have a global footprint. I know there's a lot of young leaders who are listening Erwin, so let's start here. How do you think influence works? Because it is part mystery, isn't it?

Erwin McManus:

It is. Well, I mean it works differently today than maybe it did even 10 years ago or 20 years ago. I think in the past influence worked so much more connected to actual productivity. So you had influence because you'd actually accomplish something significant. Especially before there was mass media, because your entire influence is based on word of mouth or through power and authority.

Erwin McManus:

Now influence is much more connected to fame. It's much more connected to celebrity. You can become world famous on TikTok. World famous on Instagram, world famous through social media by never having accomplished anything significant in your life. So I think that probably this area will create a new language for influence. Those who are influencers in the moments. And they're more like fireworks. People are really drawn to them. They have a short term celebrity status and then you'll have

people who have sustainable influence where it's not really about their personal celebrity, but the impact of their ideas, their actions, their commitments, shape culture, and really carve out a path for the future. So I do think we're in a moment where influence is actually becoming multilayered.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I think that really resonates because you're right. We do live in a world where you can be famous for being famous. You have that one video that went viral. You were dancing or you were skateboarding listening to Fleetwood Mac or something like that. And that's kind of your moment, but nobody could name that person a year later or six months later.

Carey Nieuwhof:

When you think about your own influence, because this is a subject that comes up and I realize it's a lace to poison. So you have to be so careful how you navigate it or how you even think about it. But when you think about the way that you've been able to make an impact over the last few decades, what do you think have been some of the factors in your own ability to sustain influence in what I would suggest as a healthy and helpful way?

Erwin McManus:

Well, I think there are, for me several factors. One, you have to realize, I'm 63 years old. So I am not a 33-year-old influencer. I don't have the weight of being in a sense trendy. I'm way past any trendy influence. It really now becomes whether you have anything that's timeless that you have to contribute that allows you to have sustainable influence. I made choices early on in my life that I would never hit the center of the bell curve. So if you think about influencer, or you think about the adopter categorization with 2.2% of people are innovators and then 12.4% or so like that are early adopters, then 34% are early majority, 30% late majority, 12% late adopters, and then 2% what they call laggards or nostalgics.

Erwin McManus:

Most influencers hit the big fat center of the bell curve. Even mega churches. Most really influential pastors or people in media. It's that 70% of the middle that gives you what's dramatic popular influence. I think a part of the reason I've had a sustained influence, but not what I would call a massive influence on a large cultural or popular scale is that my life has been focused on innovators and early adopters.

Erwin McManus:

So my influence has been targeted toward people who are pioneers, inventors, entrepreneurs, innovators, creators. I always knew that I would not be particularly influential or popular with the early and late majority. So having been now living six decades, I can tell you that ideas that I laid out there to the culture 30 years ago that were considered heretical then slowly get picked up by innovators and early adopters.

Erwin McManus:

They're the ones better postured to get it to the early majority and to the late majority. So I've lived long enough now to see ideas that had me blacklisted now become common thinking in the Christian world and in the second world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you give us an example of one of those ideas, Erwin?

Erwin McManus:

Sure. I can give you an exact one.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay.

Erwin McManus:

About 20 years ago, I was speaking. I'd be, I guess, real direct. I'm speaking at Catalyst in Atlanta. I did a message on Solomon was wrong and that Solomon was wrong when he said, "There's nothing new under the sun." And that this has been a pervasive Western mindset that there's nothing new under the sun. And it has in many ways, even been reinforced to Calvinism that believes in a deterministic future. So I did this whole message that Solomon was wrong.

Erwin McManus:

I even gave a contrast from the Bible. Solomon says, "There's nothing new under the sun." But in Isaiah 43, God says, "Put away the former things. Do not dwell on the past. Behold, I'm doing a new thing. Now it springs up, but will you even be aware of it?" So I said, "So who are you going to believe? Solomon on his worst day where everything is meaningless or God when he says that I'm constantly doing a new thing?"

Erwin McManus:

So I was basically blacklisted from Catalyst for the next decade. Then I was invited to speak at the Willow Creek Summit. I was going to do a different message, and I felt like God just ransacked my soul and told me to talk about Solomon being wrong. I did the exact same conceptual message at the Leadership Summit as the last talk. And after I was done, Bill...

Erwin McManus:

I mean, Bill Hybels literally put his head down the moment I began speaking. You could feel the distress. Then when I finished, he got up and he said, "Well, that's it. Bye." And he didn't even... Cut. He just walked away. Then just to add to this, Bill Hybels and Jim Mellado did a Summit summary a month later of all the speakers. And I've never watched them, but I thought I should watch this one because I know that my talk did not go well.

Erwin McManus:

My poor wife is like, "Why did you have to do that?" So when they did the summary of that conference, they put clips of every speaker and talked about their messages except for mine. I was completely eliminated from the post-conference conversation, from the Global Leadership Summit.

Erwin McManus:

My brother who was watching said because he was watching to see what people would say, what they would say about me. He goes, "The worst thing happened to you that could happen to any controversial

figure." And I said, "What's that?" He goes, "You were completely ignored." Now what's interesting to me is that talk had tremendous momentum around the world, even with the GLS.

Erwin McManus:

Then about a decade later, when I was finally invited to go back to Catalyst, I point blank in an interview, they had three cameras and I was there in an interview and I said, "Hey, since you asked me this question, I have a question for you. Was I consciously banned from Catalyst because of my message?" And I was told yes.

Erwin McManus:

Then I actually said, "This interview will never see the light of day." A month later, they called me and said, "Hey, something happened to the camera, technological problems, and whole podcast was lost." I don't think I've ever told this whole story to someone.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow. I haven't heard of it.

Erwin McManus:

A great underground scoop. Then here's the crazy thing. 10 years later, when I'm speaking at Catalyst, Andy Stanley... See, I'm giving you, like, you can go back at all the details, does a message, almost right before I speak. I think it was this opening line because I love Andy and so I'm listening. Right? In his opening line, Andy says, "We've heard it's said that there's nothing new under the sun." Then he said, "We all know that's wrong." And the whole place applauded.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've heard Andy say that.

Erwin McManus:

Yes. So you see, by the time Andy says it, you know what's accepted as orthodoxy. But when I say it, you know it's going to be seen as heresy. I remember one thing, I told Brian Houston before I did his TV show was, "Today's heresy is tomorrow's orthodoxy." And Brian looked at me. He goes, "I hope not."

Erwin McManus:

And the reason I said that was, he was asking me a question. He said "Have you ever thought something about someone, and then when you got to know them, you realize that your perceptions are wrong?" I said, "Brian, I know exactly what you mean. You thought I was a heretic. And now that you've gotten to know me, you realize I'm not who you thought I was."

Erwin McManus:

I've lived with that for my 43 years as a follower of Christ. I can tell you that 40 years ago... No, sorry. That's just not right. 33 years ago, I was in the living room of our house or so about 30 years ago. I was in the living room, I said to my wife, "I don't know how long I can keep this silent. Solomon was wrong." Everywhere I traveled the world, everybody keeps saying, "There's nothing new under the sun."

Erwin McManus:

Every time I bring a new idea, every time I talk about innovation, every time I try to help create a different future, I'm told by Christian leaders, "Erwin, Erwin, Erwin," they would just pat me on the head, "there's nothing new under the sun." And I said, "Solomon was wrong. Solomon was wrong." And my wife said, "Honey, please don't ever say that publicly. Please never say that outside of this house." So for at least a decade, I never actually cited publicly because I was trying so hard to fit into the box of thinking of Christianity.

Erwin McManus:

The reality is that, Carey, my entire journey and the Christian faith has been people think I'm against Christianity. I'm actually for the church, but I'm not for mutually accepted delusion. I finally accepted that my role in this historic movement is that I'm here to violate your view of reality. I'm not here to be popular. I'm not here to be liked. I'm not here to be accepted. I'm not here to be on TikTok. I'm here to violate your view of reality and that's both for Christians and non-Christians.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Not to get into a big theological debate, but why was it important for you to point out that Solomon was wrong? What was the idea behind that claim?

Erwin McManus:

Because it creates a paralysis among people of faith and their engagements of the future. You see, when I would talk to people about making seismic changes that would impact the world, I would always get this response. "If God wants it to happen, it's going to happen. God is in charge of the future. God is in control the future. The future is out of our hands, Erwin. You just need to realize that God is in control, God is sovereign."

Erwin McManus:

I'm a really pragmatic person when it comes to the existential expression of our faith in real time and space. I go, "Evil men do not wait for permission from God to try to activate their will on the world."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's true.

Erwin McManus:

So they believe they have an impact, not only in the present, but the future. And then good people sit passively back going, "God, if God wants it to happen, it's going to happen." So what I find is that evil tends to have a proactivity and good tends to have a passivity. I want people to realize that the most spiritual activity that a human being ever engages in is choosing, and that the material from which the future is created is choice.

Erwin McManus:

So in *The Artisan Soul*, I don't know how many years ago, I actually laid out an anthropology. And a lot of my books actually have an anthropology underneath the theology that all human beings are creative. What makes humans different than every other species is that humans create the future, that humans create futures. Not a singular future, but many futures in the same way that bees create hives, and antiques create colonies.

Erwin McManus:

[inaudible 00:17:18] But we do it so naturally. It's so intrinsic to us that we don't even realize that we're creating futures while we're doing it. I wanted to destroy the mythology that the future was set, that the future was already determined, and that humans are just passively stepping into that future. By the way, that's the view of scientific determinism.

Erwin McManus:

So when you have a national conference of atheists and scientific determinism, they believe the future is set. They believe everything is mathematical. They believe in a sense, in a fatalistic future. And they also believe that creativity, spirituality, and choice are illusions. I'm going, "Wait a minute. Why is it that Christians believe the exact same thing that scientific deterministic atheists believe?" We should probably step back and ask ourselves, "Where did we get this?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

And to be fair, you point out other scriptures where God is doing a new thing. I mean, Isaiah, it says, "Behold, I'm doing a new thing. We have a new heaven, a new Earth, a renewed Heaven, a renewed Earth. The Kingdom of God arrives," et cetera, et cetera. So I don't want to create a whole debate in the comments on that, but well put.

Erwin McManus:

Every time God does something, new is attached to it. There is no new without God. There is no new without God. I think that what happens is that when we're trapped inside of the created order, there is nothing new under the sun. But when we reconnect to the creator of the universe, then everything becomes new because now we're a part of the creative order, not just a created order.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think we last sat down to have a conversation like this a couple of years ago. So it was pre-pandemic. So much has changed. One of the quotes in an earlier interview, I think this is round three with you, Erwin on the show, but it was either round one or round two. You said something I've quoted so many times and I'm paraphrasing it, "But to be a futurist in the church, you need to only understand the present clearly." Is that about the quote, Erwin?

Erwin McManus:

Pretty close. To be a futurist in the church, you only need to see the present. Clearly, because you don't have to see the future, you just need to see the present. Because the church for some reason seems to inherently live in the past. And the conversations that usually have with Christian leaders are not about a future that they're afraid of. It's actually a present that already exists.

Erwin McManus:

And it's really hard sometimes to help a person realize, "No, you don't get a choice about this change. It has already happened. And you're just living in the past, ignoring the reality of the present. We're not even talking about the future." It would be so exciting for the church to actually begin talking about the future. But [inaudible 00:19:59] if you don't have a clear understanding of how the future is created.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. We have been through so much in the last two years. The world has been turned upside down, the church, business. Everything's been turned upside down. What are you seeing in the future? I wanted to make sure I asked you that. Now, when you look ahead at the future, what do you see and what do you hope others will see?

Erwin McManus:

Yeah. There was a huge company that did one of the first virtual conferences at the beginning of the pandemic, when everything shut down. They had a huge conference scheduled, and so they went virtual. They asked me to speak and they asked me, "What do you see right now with this pandemic that's just emerging?" We didn't really realize the level of quarantine, how long we're going to be in this present situation.

Erwin McManus:

I tell him, I said, "What we're about to experience is the ice age for the church. And if you can't adapt and innovate and recreate, you will not survive this pandemic. I actually saw the last two years at the beginning of it as an ice age. What an ice age does is it basically brings a chapter to a close that will happen eventually, but it makes it happen sooner.

Erwin McManus:

It also allows there to be a massive resurgence of adaptation and innovation in that sense. It's not that the strong survive, it's that the flexible survive, the adaptive survive. So I actually think that we're still coming out of that. We're mourning what has been lost. And a lot of people are trying to figure out how to reclaim it. One of the things I told our own leaders here at Mosaic is, "We're not going back. We're going forward. We're not going to reclaim what we had, we're going to let go of that and we're going to create what we've never had."

Erwin McManus:

I think if churches spent all their energy trying to get back what they've lost, they're not going to be postured for the future. I think you have to learn how to reinvent yourself in this new reality. And that is very exciting. I want to put myself in a particular category because I think a lot of people will put me in a category because of the way I think or express things of the same people who don't believe in the church. Because I've heard a lot of people go, "The church is an antiquated concept. It's an idea whose time has come to an end. The church cannot survive this new reality." I'm not in that camp.

Erwin McManus:

I actually think that the church is incredibly resilient and constantly reinvents herself. I'm convinced the church was Jesus' idea. I think that his ideas sustain time, because his ideas are transcendent. They come from maternity. So I'm really hopeful about the future of the church. I'm also convinced of the essential necessity of the church, that one of the things people do not know how to do, like if you just look at things objectively, even if you don't believe in God, even if you kind of hate Christianity. One of the things that no other institution organization has had to do is create community.

Erwin McManus:

If you eliminate the whole belief in God, Christianity is amazing at creating human community. Places where people belong, where they are loved, where they have family, and they have friendships, they

have extended tribe. I think that talent, that singular talent, that the church has is why the church not only will prevail, but must prevail. Humans need each other.

Erwin McManus:

If there is no human narrative of the importance of us walking and doing life together, the world is going to become more insulated, more segmented and more violent. Community is the greatest solution to violence.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What are you doing or what will you be doing at Mosaic that is different as a result of what's happened?

Erwin McManus:

Well, we're not doing almost anything the same yet. So you have to realize that. I know that. I have friends in Texas and in Florida and other places. They've been meeting for the last year.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It was like a blip, right? "Right back where we left off." But they're not seeing what they saw in 2019. They're not generally seeing the return that anybody you hoped for.

Erwin McManus:

I think it's because they jumped started, they were desperate to go back. So they didn't lose what they had. We haven't even gone back to anything resembling what was before at Mosaic at all. And that's been intentional. We already had shifted before the pandemic to moving things toward being highly focused on how do you communicate the message in a virtual world? How do you mentor people in the virtual world? How do you build up leaders in a virtual world? How do you expand in a virtual world? And always believing in the importance of gathering in person wherever it's possible, but not as a singular strategy for impacting the world.

Erwin McManus:

So one of the things we did is we opened up houses all over the world, because this has been true before the pandemic. We've had people in Berlin and in London and in Tokyo and all over the world saying, "Look, we now believe in Jesus and we really believe in the importance of the church, but we just can't find a community that reflects our frequency the way Mosaic does."

Erwin McManus:

So we basically opened up houses all over the world. I think we've had up to 400 houses that are Mosaic houses all over the world. And that's something we did during the pandemic. So we grew during the pandemic dramatically and actually formalized a lot of these places saying, "Hey, we see you. You belong to us. We belong to you." And that's been a huge part of who we are. At the same time, we turned our Hollywood location down into a production studio.

Erwin McManus:

We redesigned everything. We have our podcast space and we're filming space for messages. Right now we're using the space that was a former auditorium. We have a friend, Angela Davis who did one of my Genius of podcast. She has a company called Army, and they do like the soul cycling kind of bicycle stuff.

We transformed our auditorium, and during the week she's been doing a pop-up shop. All these people have been coming to Mosaic that would never come into our building to get fat and it's just absolutely extraordinary.

Erwin McManus:

We've just been looking at so many different ways to innovate, to integrate who we are with the world around us. I think this is an exciting time. I mean, it is a scary time for a lot of people. During the pandemic, we had people joining our church and started to give. We had people not only that gave one time people who became recurring givers.

Erwin McManus:

I would say that our top givers never walk into our building. By the way, that was true before the pandemic. I just talked to a pastor on the East Coast and he said, they did an analysis before the pandemic and they found that their most committed people only came once a month. I think that this idea that our most committed people are coming every week is actually an illusion that makes us feel like what we're doing is really valid.

Erwin McManus:

We probably have like an 80% turnover every week before the pandemic, and we realized that. So some of it is just trying to ask the question, "How do we engage into new domains of human experience?" So I would say right now, 80% of my time is where I'm out somewhere. Maybe 90% is in the business sector spending time with people who are in the business world, entrepreneurs, innovators, creators, and almost... Well, maybe almost 0% of my time.

Erwin McManus:

Do I spend any time in the kind of the Christian space right now? No. Actually, I'd say 100% of my time is in those other domains, because if you're going to, in a sense do evangelism in this new world, you better learn how to inhabit this new world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to go there. I just want to ask you, are you rethinking in-person gatherings and how they will be? Are you back yet in person on Sundays, or will you come back soon?

Erwin McManus:

We will come back in October when we launch The Genius Of Jesus series, connected to my book. But right now we do have in-person gatherings, but they've been mostly video worship and video messages. Then we just encourage everyone who's vulnerable or is immune compromised or is nervous just to keep joining us online. So we're not trying to create a two class system where the really committed Christian is the one who's coming and the one who's not coming online is not committed to Christian.

Erwin McManus:

We just realized that we have a very complex world in which we live in, and what we want people is to become just fully passionate followers of Jesus connecting people to him in whatever environment. I was just in Mexico City this past weekend. We have a campus there. We did our first gathering in almost two years because Mexico City was really locked down. We were in the middle of Polanco, which is like

the Beverly Hills kind of Mexico City. There's an outdoor arena venue that we rented and we had around a little over 1,400 people show up for the first gathering.

Erwin McManus:

So you cannot tell me, people are not hungry to come back together. I think this is something I used to teach before the pandemic, and I think I want to reemphasize. Gathering together is not a singular experience for the church. This is a human communal reality. Going to a soccer match. You have 120,000 people jammed into a stadium in Brazil or wherever it may be. Going to an NBA basketball game, 20,000 people jammed into an arena. I mean, why do people like the live experience where they can watch it on television, and it's a better visual experience?

Erwin McManus:

It's because humans long for that communal dynamic where you are the home team and you're experiencing this with other people and you're all cheering and chanting and oohing and awing together. There's a reason. Why would you go listen to Coldplay or U2 live in a concert with 25,000 sweating fans when you could just buy the album, and it's perfect? It's because humans don't need perfect experiences. They need authentic transparent human experiences.

Erwin McManus:

When people say, "Well, it's really the end of large gatherings of going." That will never be true. And not about the church. People want to pack the stadium. They want to pack the arena. They want to be with 50 other thousand people who love Bon Iver. Then some people will choose that intimate place where they're going to pay a lot more money to get to hear Bon Iver with only 200 people. And the reality is that some people will go to that soccer match, but they'll buy the suite because they just want to be with 20 people in the middle of 80,000 people.

Erwin McManus:

There are different kinds of humans. They have different kinds of wealth experiences, but the longing to celebrate with other people, something you are deeply passionate about. I don't think that's ever going to go away because I think it's a human experience. The problem is that the church takes for granted what kind of experience is necessary to create that kind of human dynamic, and we have to continually re-examine whether we're creating that well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How are you re-examining your in-person services? As you move forward in October and beyond, what are you thinking you might do differently? And what might you do the same?

Erwin McManus:

One of the things I am doing right now is I just started doing this is we record, we film our messages for our online community. But right now I'm speaking live in different spots, but I'm not releasing those talks.

Erwin McManus:

So people have been coming to me going, "Wait a minute, we heard the talk at the Rialto Theater. We heard the talk at Hollywood. Can we get that?" And I go, "No." In fact, I had this conversation with this

week. Multiple influencers. It might have been Lewis Howes. I can't remember. I think it was him because he came and I said, "No, these are one-time experiences." See, one of the things that social media and technology has done is it's diminished the wonder of the live experience because you can just watch it online.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Erwin McManus:

So I'm actually... And will continue to. I'm going to create live experiences that you cannot get any other way. So you can get something online that's really powerful and really crafted for you. But if you want to get what's happening live, you got to show up. I think those existential moments are pretty awesome where you go, "This moment doesn't exist past this moment."

Erwin McManus:

I used to have a friend who was an artist, but all of the sculptures were sand sculptures, and he was brilliant. I would ask him, I said, "Why don't you choose a different medium? Nothing you do lasts." And he said, "That's the beauty of my work is that nothing I do lasts." And that's when I started really thinking through about the eternal significance of temporary things.

Erwin McManus:

So I think we'll do more things. We're going to increase the quality of what we do online, because we want it to be the best in the world and we're going to increase the quality of what we do in person and make it exclusive and not necessarily make it available to anyone so that they both have a unique value.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, we could spend a lot more time on that. I'm going to leave that there because we have a lot of ground to cover, but I do want to talk about your friendship with Lewis Howes to the extent that you're comfortable. So a couple of years ago, first time you were on his podcast... So for those who don't know, Lewis, Lewis is a social media influencer, School of Greatness, has hundreds of millions of downloads. I've been a listener for a long time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

By the way, Lewis was on this podcast back in year one, back in the day. Anyway, you built a friendship with him. Lewis would, I don't like categorizing people, but be spiritually open, curious, but you built a friendship with him. You were on his podcast. I remember listening to that two and a half years ago, and I thought it was just a masterclass in influence. We'll link to that first interview.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Then you were just back on. So as we're recording this, he has not released part two of the second round of conversation with you, but it was pretty amazing because he had you on this podcast, and everybody from all kinds of diverse backgrounds is listening, probably not a predominantly Christian audience, and you basically just talked about Jesus for an hour and a half on his show with him.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you talk about cultivating influence with people like Lewis with the business connections you have? Because I really did in that first interview in particular thought that that was a masterclass in how to really build a dialogue with people who may not have the same worldview that you do.

Erwin McManus:

One, I love Lewis and he has become a very, very personal friend. And it is funny because I had him on my Genius Of podcast and I immediately got someone sending me a negative critique going, "How can you have Lewis Howes?" I think people don't understand that I'm not interested in spending my life with people who believe and who agree with me and who have already found faith.

Erwin McManus:

I think the tragedy sometimes is that we think holiness is irrelevance. I have to tell you, it was so much fun doing his podcast. And it was a kind of a domino effect. There's a business guy named, Joel Marion and he contacted me and asked me to do his podcast. So I did his podcast for his business community. And then he went and did Lewis's and he told Lewis, "You need to have this guy named Erwin McManus."

Erwin McManus:

So then Lewis reached out to me. Next thing I know I'm doing Lewis's podcast. We didn't know each other. We'd never met. We really didn't know much about each other at all. I'd never heard of Lewis. So I was going in point-blank and he'd never heard of me probably. So we began this conversation and I was told he was an atheist.

Erwin McManus:

Another friend had been talking to him and said he's... And they sent me some of their conversations in there. They were pretty tense. So I realized, okay, there's a lot of tension here in this faith conversation. And I think sometimes it's because we try to outsmart the other person.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sure.

Erwin McManus:

I don't ever feel a need to try to outsmart someone. I just really want to understand. I really believe that all the material to come to believe already exists inside of that person that you don't need to bring something to that person as much as you need to pull something out of that person. So the whole conversation where I'm just listening and we're having this great conversation and realized later, "Oh, wow. Lewis just did the most extraordinary thing." It was the most authentic thing a human can do. He allowed himself to be vulnerable and exposed in a conversation about faith.

Erwin McManus:

It's one of my favorite conversations I've ever had. But I think sometimes we misjudge people's openness. I did a podcast last year for a business man named Ed Mylett, and has millions of followers and incredibly influential. I think he has 30 companies or something. What I thought was fascinating is he told me recently that up to that point, that was his highest downloaded podcast.

Erwin McManus:

He had three and a half million downloads of our conversation. He said by then there'll be 6 million. So he has almost completely a business audience. And people don't follow him necessarily for faith. They follow him because they want to figure out how to become financially free or to become more affluent or to have more business success. He just told me recently now other than one interview he had with the guy who killed Osama bin Laden, our conversation is the most downloaded conversation he's ever had.

Erwin McManus:

See, I think we underestimate how open people are, and they just want to know you're real. They want to know your authentic. They want to know that you don't have an agenda that you're not, in a sense even trying to... I never walk into a room trying to convert someone. I walk into a room trying to understand someone to truly care about that person, to know their life and their story, and then to pay attention to where I can see the fingerprint of God all over their life.

Erwin McManus:

I just think it's one of the most enjoyable things in the world. I've been doing that privately for 40 years. I've been trying to help pastors and followers of Jesus understand how to do that. But it's very, very difficult because I'm never going to publicly expose someone I'm having a conversation with and say, "Okay, this is how you do it. This is how you have this meaningful conversation." And Lewis actually gave me that gift by inviting me on his podcast and then having that conversation together. I didn't know that's where it was going to go. I thought I was going to be more of a business conversation, but I was so happy to go there together.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I really like Lewis. I have so much respect for him and affection for him. And you can see, there's a very open heart in that, and a curious spirit in him. We will link to all of your conversations with Lewis, but particularly that first one. And then also the one with Ed Mylett in the show notes. So thank you for that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's talk a little bit about The Genius of Jesus. You've got a great new book out, and I don't usually ask this question, but I really want to ask you this question. Why The Genius of Jesus? People are always like, "Why'd you write the book?" But why did you write about The Genius of Jesus, because it's pretty, pretty fascinating?

Erwin McManus:

Yeah. I mean, there's several ways I could sort of slice what really motivated me to write the book, but what really began to form the conversation about the specific conversation in the book is I was in my back house during the quarantine and I was having a conversation with myself as I often do. I heard this like a little voice in my head say, "It's kind of odd that your entire life centers around a person who lived 2,000 years ago."

Erwin McManus:

Yeah, that's really weird that this is true. I had this moment of an angst going, "It's crazy that my life, everything, everything revolves around Jesus." Then I had this thought, "Well it makes sense if he's God.

But what if he isn't God?" And then the other voice said, "Well, you may be able to deny that Jesus is God, but you can't deny that he changed you."

Erwin McManus:

I thought, "Well, that's a weird place to be." Then it had this other thought that said, "Well, all right. You've either been changed. You can't deny that you've been changed by Jesus. So either you've been changed by the reality of who Jesus is as God or you've been changed by the idea of Jesus." This is the way my brain kind of works through things. Then I thought, "Wow, if that's true..." See, a lot of people would get nervous by that, but I actually find to be really compelling. So I go, "If that's true, this is a stroke of genius. What idea could change a person 2,000 years later?"

Erwin McManus:

So then I thought, This then is the genius of Jesus that somehow whatever it is about him actually changes people's lives thousands of years later. It changes governments. It changes the way we think of political systems and of justice, of equality, everything. The conversations have shifted because of his life." But then I looked at list of geniuses probably 40 years. I've never seen Jesus on a single list.

Erwin McManus:

So then the question came to mind, "Well, why isn't Jesus on a single list of geniuses if he is a genius?" So then I asked, "I know DaVinci is a genius." He's like one of the iconic people in my life. So much of my life early on, I was trying to emulate DaVinci and I was always been fascinated with Picasso and Mozart, Beethoven, Bobby Fischer, Einstein, hockey.

Erwin McManus:

So my entire life, since I was young, I've been really drawn to the phenomenon of genius and geniuses. And I thought, "Why doesn't Jesus ever make it on a list? I mean, Buddha makes it on lists and Gandhi makes it on lists. And I've even seen lists where Muhammad is on the list." I thought, "Why is Jesus not on the list of geniuses?" So I thought, "Okay, if you extricate all the divinity, all the miracles of Jesus and just put them aside, like mythology, does the person, Jesus qualify as a genius?"

Erwin McManus:

That's how I began the book. So I began just try and look at again, as an anthropologist going, "Does Jesus of Nazareth qualify as historical genius? And if he does, what is his genius? And if he does have a particular genius, why has that genius been overlooked for 2,000 years? Why has no one in 2,000 years ever written about the genius of Jesus?"

Erwin McManus:

So that's how I wrote the book. In fact, my first draft of the book, I wrote it as if I did not believe. I basically put my own personal convictions, beliefs on the shelf and wrote this book as an analysis of what a genius actually is, if Jesus qualifies, and then what that genius is.

Erwin McManus:

What's really fascinating to me is that it actually made me admire Jesus more. And then I realized, "Oh, one of the frustrating things about genius is that it's not transferable." That if you could spend your life with Mozart, you would not become a great composer, or you spend your life with Fischer, you've not

become a master chess player. You spend your life with Picasso, he would not become a world-class painter.

Erwin McManus:

So one of the great frustrations with genius is it's not transferable. But here's the difference. The genius of Jesus is actually transferable that the genius that Jesus actually unwraps is about how to be fully human. And this is why his genius was overlooked because genius needs a canvas. It's almost not so much that you say a person is a genius, but they have a genius.

Erwin McManus:

So you look at the canvas. If Picasso is a genius, you listen to the composition. You know Mozart is a genius. You look at the board and you knew that Fischer was a genius. You look at the math, you know that Einstein is a genius. But where is Jesus's genius displayed? And you realize, "Oh, this is why it's so easily missed, because the canvas of the genius of Jesus is the human spirit. And the journey toward becoming fully human is actually the canvas from which his genius is actually demonstrated and displayed." And that for me became so fascinating.

Erwin McManus:

But after sending my first draft, my editor came back and said, "Hey, could you put back into the book that you actually believe, so that you don't trip up people who actually believe in Jesus now? They'll think you're a heretic." I actually thought the book had a unique elegance without my personal belief, because I think Jesus stands alone without my belief.

Erwin McManus:

I thought it was almost more compelling if I could write it from the outside looking in. And this is part of the frustration I have is sometimes with our own faith is it's so concrete. And so in many ways, almost like logistical that if you don't say A, B, C, then you're not one of us.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right, right. You didn't check all the boxes.

Erwin McManus:

Yeah. And I'm going, "This is why our best art doesn't exist and why our best narratives don't exist. This is why we're not great at communicating who Jesus is to the world, because we feel so much pressure to say things in a way that dogmatic Christians will say, 'Okay, you're acceptable,' rather than asking the question, 'How do I communicate to an unbelieving world?'" Jesus would never be accepted by the orthodoxy of modern Christianity.

Erwin McManus:

I mean, just the fact that he talks about wheat and talks about bread. He turns water into wine and he talks about water. He's just not using Deuteronomy or Exodus enough. He's just not using the law and the prophets enough. He's way, way, way too abstract in his use of just common materials. I actually think that Jesus' genius, by the way, goes so far beyond my book.

Erwin McManus:

I was afraid to write a book about Jesus, because I understand the dilemma. I mean, there's a book about Jesus. It's called the Bible. And that's the only book that in my estimation will ever be flawless and about who Jesus is. To write a book about Jesus is such a sacred thing, but I felt like it was so important to bring a new, fresh perspective on the person of Jesus that both helps the person who believes see the compelling argument of why this genius needs to be absorbed into their life, but also a compelling way of helping a person who does not believe in God or believe in Jesus, see Jesus from an entirely new vantage point.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I do want to jump into a couple of specifics, but I want to frame that because I think you're right. Your argument that genius doesn't transfer, except for Jesus. You're right. He could have been Picasso's next door neighbor or his younger brother and you wouldn't have been a great artist. You're right, the genius in Michelangelo or DaVinci, it lives in the past. It died when they died, right? So you get a painting in a museum, you get a sculpture. You get whatever you happen to get. With Einstein, the mind ended up in a jar. His brain literally ended up in a jar. That's a whole story for a whole other day. If you listen to Isaacson's biography of Einstein.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But anyway, Jesus, you make the argument, his genius transfers to every generation of followers so that we view empathy differently. We view power differently that his genius is transferable and lives in us, which is a fascinating argument. You've done quite a bit of research into genius. You make an argument that most of us are born with a level of genius that disappears over time. Do you want to talk about that?

Erwin McManus:

Sure. Yeah. I've been a part of a group and everyone has to run a company that minimally makes \$100 million a year. And all the participants pay \$100,000 just to be a part of it. I do not pay that. I get to-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. You got comped.

Erwin McManus:

I know. I go and speak, and go and mentor some of these men. So I'm having dinner with Walter O'Brien, who has the highest recorded IQ in the world. He was the inspiration of the TV show, Scorpion. So Walter speaks, I speak and then we're at dinner. He looked at me and he goes, "I was told this conversation was inevitable." And I said, "Interesting way to begin this conversation." Then he says to me, "I disagree with half of everything you said." I was speaking on genius. I'm an optimist, I'm going, "The guy with the highest IQ in the world agrees with half of everything I said, and that is huge."

Erwin McManus:

That was just in the first presentation. That wasn't even with the follow-up conversations. I knew I can take up another percentage here and there. Then he said because I can argue the facts because the facts are against you. I'm just so exhilarated and because he's right. You see the facts are against me because the facts always reaffirm the past.

Erwin McManus:

The facts do not affirm the future. Actually, the future oftentimes violates the facts because the facts were that the world was flat. And the facts were that the sun revolves around the earth. The facts were that matter and energy were different things. We know the facts. And one of the things that is important to me for people to realize is that I'm a minority voice right now. This book is seminal. It is a 1% conversation. And I would like Christianity to get there first. Because when you look at some of the studies, and there's been quite a few studies over the years around creativity and the human adaptability and genius.

Erwin McManus:

If I just give you an example that most people, most Americans say, they're not good at languages. I don't know if you would say that you're like a linguistic savant.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No. I speak English on a good day.

Erwin McManus:

And the reason Americans don't think they're good at languages is because they only had to learn one because when they were two years old, their environment told them that you only needed one language to survive and thrive. Spanish was my first language. I'm from El Salvador. I learned English when I came to the states at three, four, five years old, and English was easy.

Erwin McManus:

It's one of the most complex languages in the world, but it was easy. You know why? Not because I'm a linguistic savant, but because I was for it. See, being a genius is natural for a five-year-old. And what you find is that in certain studies that have reinforced this, and George Land did a study, and in his assessment of five-year-olds founded 98% of the children that were tested, came out geniuses.

Erwin McManus:

This genius assessment was put together by Nassau. And then the longitudinal study, five years later, they were 10 years old, only 30% of them were still testing as geniuses. And then five years later at the age of 15, only 12% of them tested out as geniuses. And then once they tested all entire mass of 31 year olds, only 2% of them tested out as geniuses.

Erwin McManus:

So my argument here is not that I can make you a genius, is that the world has unmade your genius. That whatever this human experience is in combination between parenting and education and environmental factors and conditioning, and I think this for me, when the Bible says, "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world." We always talk about sin when we read that passage. What about if we're conforming to a mediocrity, conforming to a status quo or conforming to an ordinary that is impressed upon us so that we fit better into society?

Erwin McManus:

And he says, "Then be transformed by the renewing of your minds." Maybe a part of what that passage is telling us is that there is a latent, inherent genius inside of all of us that has been lost when we

conformed to the pattern of this world and that what Jesus has called us to transform us, the renewing of our minds, so that inceptual, that original genius in us can actually be reawakened.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you remember from that study, what some of the qualities or characteristics of genius would be that you all found then?

Erwin McManus:

I don't, right off hand. But I do know that one of the larger distinctions is a difference between divergent and convergent thinking.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. Can you explain that?

Erwin McManus:

Yeah, sure. Divergent thinking. You look at an iron and they tell you, "What do you do with this?" And you can think of 27 different things to do with an iron. It's a paperweight. It's a placeholder. Convergent thinking is you look at the iron, you go, "You iron with it," because you need to fill in the blank properly. I remember early on about 35 years ago when I was first speaking and my wife said, "No one can understand what you're saying."

Erwin McManus:

Then we heard this really famous speaker and he had these fill in the blanks five points. You had a blank and you filled in the blank. So you knew that truth filled the blank. So then I tried that, but I would have 35 blanks. Then my leadership group, the elders that were there said, "Hey, could you stop doing that? Because you don't even tell us what it's in the blank."

Erwin McManus:

I realized that a part of the problem is that, and Christians want there to be a blank and they want one answer to fill the blank. That's convergent thinking. That's not just Christians, that's humans. Children don't know that there's one answer to one question. And divergent thinking is the ability to think outside the box, to think of endless possibilities, to be highly imaginative and creative.

Erwin McManus:

I mean, if the highest form of intelligence is creativity, then curiosity becomes the fuel of our genius. Children are inherently curious. Everything about human development is based on curiosity. The reason a child's neck gets stronger it's because it's so determined to look around. The reason a child actually begins to crawl is because it wants to go exploring. The reason a child begins to walk is because it wants to go to unknown lands.

Erwin McManus:

Everything about human development is fueled by human curiosity. If we were not curious, we would still be held by someone because we wouldn't want to go anywhere. We wouldn't want to know anything. We want to experience anything new. And isn't that the description of a lot of us as adults?

We don't want to experience anything new. We don't want to know anything new. We don't want to go anywhere new. We don't want even to try any new food or any new experiences or places.

Erwin McManus:

Our curiosity is essential to unlocking our genius. So I think that this divergent convergent thinking is really critical. I remember one day in an interview, someone asked me, "Erwin, what do you do? What are your practices or habits to think outside of the box?" I remember saying this was probably 20 years ago. I said, "You don't understand. I work extremely hard to think inside of the box, that when I became a follower of Jesus, I need to belong to the church."

Erwin McManus:

I wanted so bad to think like all the most influential Christians that I would actually try to learn how to think inside of the box. Most of the time when I said something outside of the box, it was an accident. I didn't know it was outside of the box. I didn't know it was wrong. I didn't know it was heretical. I didn't know it would create controversy.

Erwin McManus:

I think the one thing I'm really grateful for is that in all the different experiences I had growing up, my imagination remained unlocked. I think that they're part of the inherent creativity that God gave me. It wasn't something that made me special. It didn't make me different than other people. What makes me different is that I didn't lose it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Erwin, I've seen a similar thing and wondered about it non-scientifically. There's a wonder in a child's eyes. And at some point, sometimes it's four, sometimes it's age eight. It's almost always gone by 10. But that wonder just kind of disappears. And the same with trust. Kids are so naturally trusting. And then somewhere along the line, you can tell that they're hedging a little bit. They're worried. They're not as open. They're not as trusting. And I always think like, "What happened to that child?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

What story, what series of events? And it doesn't have to be big and traumatic, but life just kind of beats that out of us. Anything else about genius? What about Walter whose Scorpion was based on. What else did you notice about him or learn from him in that conversation?

Erwin McManus:

I mean, I've been around him a bit and he's really a brilliant guy, really inquisitive, really thoughtful. Actually almost always. Whenever I begin a new relationship, I'm more in the learning mode. I'm trying to learn from that person, I'm trying to grow from that person, and I just believe that every human being has something to teach me.

Erwin McManus:

So I was just fascinated. I'm just really grateful to even have him disagree with me. And to disagree with me at least means you gave me some consideration. Then it forces me to go back and re-examine it and ask, "Okay, is this something I have a deep conviction about? Is this something that I'm going to fight for?"

Erwin McManus:

It just gave me so much more resolve to be a person who advocates for the inherent essential genius in every human being. It doesn't mean everyone is a genius in that sense, like a Mozart, Picasso, but it means that everyone in some sense has a genius. When I look at the life of Jesus, I go, "Oh, we can at least all be geniuses in what it means to be fully human, and the way that we relate to each other, the way we invest in the value of relationships."

Erwin McManus:

And with these guys who are working in billions of dollars and one of the conversations I told them, I said, "Hey, look, the dumbest choices you will ever make will not cost you money. It will cost you people." And when you look back on your life, the genius you really want is the genius of building healthy, meaningful, lifelong relationships. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. So you cover the geniuses of empathy, power, grace, the good, the true, and the beautiful in the book. I'd love for you to pick one. Let's talk about power because we've got leaders listening to this podcast.

Erwin McManus:

Okay. Let me pick one. You just picked it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I picked it. I picked it. You get to pick the next one. Is that a good plan? Can we drill down on power a little bit? And then you pick one?

Erwin McManus:

Sure. I just think there's certain things that we talk about today. Conversations we have now that we, we almost make assumptions that we think have always been true. It could just be controversial just for a minute about like some social issues, right? During the pandemic, during the quarantine, we had the entire Black Lives Matter movement. I mean, we had probably 500 people who walked by our house because we live really close to the mayor.

Erwin McManus:

My son where he lived, his place was boarded up. We had National Guard here. I mean, LA was pretty intense. We had buildings set on fire and torn down. I have so many friends in the black community, and you may not know this, but I pastored a predominantly black church for many, many years.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I didn't know that.

Erwin McManus:

I did. So I would say like 70 to 80% of our congregation was black. And it was in a predominantly black community. And being an immigrant myself, this story is a part of my life story. And we start having

conversations about reparations. Reparations let's say for slavery or in New Zealand reparations to the Maori or in Australia reparations to the Aboriginal even for native indigenous American Indians.

Erwin McManus:

And this language is actually not a historic language. This is a language since Jesus. See, because Genghis Khan never worried about reparations. He never felt he had any moral responsibility to somehow make it right for all the women he raped and all the men he killed and all the families destroyed and all the villages he burned down. We have Caesar or Alexander, they never really had remorse for anything they conquered or anything they destroyed or any people whose lives they overthrew.

Erwin McManus:

This concept of justice of using power well is a concept that only emerges because Jesus lived 2,000 years ago. He revolutionized the entire understanding of power. The idea that a government should actually care about its citizens is really, it's not a historic human concept. This concept is infused by the ethics that Jesus brought to the understanding of power that it says when Jesus had all power and all authority, he ties a towel around his waist and he washes his disciples feet.

Erwin McManus:

This is a reinvention of power. This was not how power is understood by Caesar or by Rome or by any empire in human history. You can only take it back so far, right? Because then the Kiwis are trying to bring reparations for the Maori, but the Maoris when they traveled to other islands would actually eat the other tribes as a part of conquests. When you look back at human history, conquest, destruction, it was a natural part of the human story.

Erwin McManus:

And even if you go back to World War II, I mean, as horrific as that war was, and as devastating as dropping two bombs on Japan, which I think is horrific, and destroying Nagasaki and Hiroshima, but when you look at the American response to conquering Germany and conquering Japan, and how within a decade or two, both of them became two of the greatest economies in the world.

Erwin McManus:

But there's a difference between West and East Germany. And you get to see what happens when you're conquered in an atheistic world with East Germany. You get to see what happens when you're conquered from a Christian mindset world with West Germany. You realize that Japan becomes one of our greatest allies. That doesn't happen historically. You do not conquer a nation and then rebuild it to feel a moral obligation to re-establish that country better than it was before.

Erwin McManus:

Even what we've done historically has been informed by a Christian worldview. I'm not saying that England or United States or any Western nation is a Christian nation. What I'm saying is the conversations we're having are informed by Jesus's revolutionary, brilliant genius thoughts about power.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I heard you in your Lewis Howes interview talk about the Hebrew scriptures, Jesus teaching about turning the other cheek and going the extra mile, which in many ways, we've just kind of popularized into trivial ideas. But they had a pretty powerful origin. Do you mind sharing that, Erwin?

Erwin McManus:

Well, I don't want to be completely redundant and some of it's in the book. But I will say like, just one of those metaphors that Jesus uses because it's more than a metaphor. He says, "If they force you to carry their load for one mile, carry a for two miles." And what you find out historically is that the Roman soldiers were permitted to force a Hebrew man to carry the load from their horse, to get the horse a rest for up to a mile.

Erwin McManus:

So you could command that Hebrew would have to walk a mile. And I think a lot of times people realize that Jesus was born into slavery. And when I wrote that in a previous book, the publishers want me to change that. He said, "No, no. You can't say that." I said, "No, you can't see it," and this is where I have to say, "You can't see it because you're from a white Western mindset." And you've reinterpreted Jesus from this framework. But Jesus was actually born to slavery. The Roman empire conquered Israel and they were not free.

Erwin McManus:

They were actually a nation bound to another power. They were under them, and that he grew up in oppression. I think this is important because the Bible is written by people who experienced slavery. It's really important to understand that. They're not written by people "with political freedom." They're written by people who found the power of intrinsic freedom while they had oppression all around them.

Erwin McManus:

So when Jesus said, "Look, when they force you to carry that load for one mile, you are obligated to do that, or you'll be killed." It'll give the Roman an excuse to end you. But the way you can actually be more powerful than their oppression is that at the end of the mile, when he says, "Okay, you can put the pack back on my horse, you're free to go." And you say, "No, I'll try it a second mile."

Erwin McManus:

And in that moment, you experience a level of power and freedom that the Roman cannot understand because you should not be choosing to serve your enemy when you're now free. And the difference is you walk back after that one mile powerless, but you walk that second mile powerful. And Jesus is absolutely transforming their understanding of the use of power even under oppression.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. It's interesting. But in the cultural narrative, because I've heard people say, "Hey, this is the legacy of Christianity." Right? Even equality, it's easy to be called, "Well, we're oppressive. We're whatever, whatever." What do you think the church is missing in that power dynamic? Because I think it's a valid criticism of many in the church that we don't exercise power the way Jesus does that, that we are the conquerors without the reparations, that we are the oppressors at times. Any thoughts on that?

Erwin McManus:

Well, of course. I mean, sometimes we are just our worst enemies. I mean, for years I would tell Campus Crusade, "It's just a bad name." The Crusades were not our best moment. So sometimes I don't think we understand that. And that's what it means. Sometimes almost our inherent cultural filter, it hurts us. We don't realize what's normal to us, how it's interpreted by other people. I think one of the interesting dynamics is that I actually do believe in leadership.

Erwin McManus:

See, one of the great challenges like in Germany since Hitler was that leadership is seen only as a dark expression of human intention. So what ends up happening is you create room only for negative leadership, for dark leadership. You have to actually not give up on something that has been misused.

Erwin McManus:

You have to step into it with more ethic and more integrity and more honor and more nobility. So I actually do believe that there should be leadership in the church. I just think that we need to understand what leadership looks like and what it needs to be informed by. And I think one of the challenges is that if your entire identity is wrapped up in being a pastor, what's so funny to me is for the last 40 years, I've gotten a lot of criticisms because I've always worked outside of the church.

Erwin McManus:

I've been a fashion designer. I worked in the film industry and I write books. I work as a futurist. I work in the business sector. I've always done that and I always work well. And then people go, "Why is a pastor a fashion designer?" I'm going, "You should be more nervous about the person whose entire identity is wrapped up in being a pastor." Being a pastor is what I do because of my deep devotion and calling from Jesus. It's not what I need. It's not even my preferred vocation a lot of times.

Erwin McManus:

It's what my soul longs to contribute to the world. I think that this dynamic needs to be rethought. We actually, I think one realized that pastors are imperfect people and you can't expect perfection, but you can expect honesty.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Erwin McManus:

You don't expect a person to get it all right, but you do need to have a person who's transparent and authentic in that journey. I can tell you, the Christian culture is not really predisposed toward that. 20 years ago, when I first started talking about how, when I was 12 years old, I was in a psychiatric chair and struggled with real, like mental illness as a kid.

Erwin McManus:

People are like, "You can't talk about these things. You can't be this open about who you are." Or when I would say, "I really struggled with prayer." And then immediately I would get all this feedback, "Oh, you shouldn't even be the pastor because you're struggling with prayer." Then I realized, "Oh, the culture does not lend itself toward authenticity and transparency and true humanity."

Erwin McManus:

I mean, yesterday I was in a meeting with our team and I said, "Hey, guys. We're in a significant crisis right now." And my first mode of operation is I'm a problem solver. So I spent a week trying to solve these problems. And when I realized I couldn't solve them, then I felt a sense of desperation, which led me to prayer. And my wife was like, "No, don't say that. You should be telling everybody you needed to bless them with prayer first."

Carey Nieuwhof:

You should have started with the prayer.

Erwin McManus:

And I go, "I'm not a person who feels desperate very much." So when it says that, "The desperate prayers of a righteous man," I'll be honest with you, I have 40 years of experience in leading, 40 years as an entrepreneur, 40 years as a problem solver. My first mode is can I solve this? And it takes a little bit for me to get to a point where I'm going, "Oh, wow, God. This is so far out of my domain and capacity that I'm feeling a little desperate now and I really need you to intervene and give me wisdom or solve this outside of me."

Erwin McManus:

It isn't normative to talk like that when you're, I guess, the spiritual leader. I think that's a shame. I think a lot of pastors end up getting in a really bad place because they lived inauthentically because it's in a strange way, what was required of them.

Erwin McManus:

I think what's really great is that when you're reaching people who are without Jesus, people without Jesus don't hide their sin. They don't hide their brokenness. They don't hide their baggage. "Of course, I'm living with my girlfriend. Who doesn't? I mean, of course I'm doing that." They're just cussing everywhere and they're corrupt in some of their business dealings, and they're not hiding who they are.

Erwin McManus:

So when they come to faith, they're not hiding who they were. This is who I am and now I come to faith in the reality of this mess. I think when you grow up in the church and you have Christian parents, you're expected to be perfect from go. So you're five years old and you can't have a temper tantrum. Don't you love Jesus?

Erwin McManus:

You're eight years old. You can't hit the kid because they took your toy because you love Jesus. You're 11 or 12 or 13 and you can't be going through puberty and having sexual thoughts because you love Jesus. I think a huge part of the dilemma is when you grow up in church life, we suffocate people into pretension because they can't just be honest about what they're really going through and who they really are.

Erwin McManus:

I think a part of what we have to reclaim is the ability to create safe environments for people to be imperfect. And then you're going to have better pastors. And because they didn't learn how to fake it until, quote, "they made it."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thank you for your refreshing honesty. I really appreciate it. So you get to pick one now. Which genius do you want to talk about, Erwin?

Erwin McManus:

When I was writing it, I felt like this epiphany was the chapter on the good. In fact, when I was writing that chapter, my only real concern was I could not express effectively what was going through my mind because I feel like many times I have ideas and thoughts that I have not yet been able to translate it into language.

Erwin McManus:

As I was writing this chapter, it was the first time I felt like I ever put into writing my own moral compass. I've been a follower of Christ for 43 years and one of the things that the people who are close to me, will tell you is that I'm the same person. Anywhere you meet and on the platform, in my backyard, wherever I am, I'm just me.

Erwin McManus:

I've realized that I wasn't making decisions between good and evil and right and wrong. That early on that's all I heard and I know that's the Christian narrative. It's like, "The devil or God." I think that's actually a very primitive low-level of thinking that when you're thinking about good and evil and right and wrong, you're still at the basic level of thinking.

Erwin McManus:

It's not that it's not true, it's that it's not everything. So in that chapter, I talk about how Jesus shifts, because the Pharisees were all about right and wrong. Is it right to heal on the Sabbath? Or is it wrong? Is it right to do good or is it wrong? The religious leaders were all about right and wrong. I think right and wrong gets you into a moralistic dilemma.

Erwin McManus:

It's about who's more right and who's more wrong. What Jesus actually did is he changed the compass. He said, "You're asking about whether something's right and wrong. What you should be asking about, whether it's good. Because God is good. So he's not making a choice between right and wrong. He's making choices between the right and the good. Because God is never choosing between the right and the wrong, because God is never tempted by the wrong.

Erwin McManus:

He's actually trying to elevate us. Once we get to the right, we're just getting started to the good. So I don't wake up in the morning thinking, "Am I going to rob a bank?" Although the television series from Spain, La Casa de Papel is one of my favorite. I think it's called Money Heist in English. It sounds so fascinating to rob the bank of Spain.

Erwin McManus:

But I don't wake up in the morning going, "I'm not going to rob a bank or am I going to try to do good today?" I'm not making moral decisions the way I was when I was 20 and before I met Jesus, and even as I came to know Jesus, I was making a lot of early moral decisions between right and wrong, right and wrong, right and wrong. Then one day I was making decisions really between right and right, and right, and right.

Erwin McManus:

Then eventually what clicked into my mind was if you're only making decisions between right and wrong, you're not elevating to the genius of Jesus, which is choosing the good. So I began making decisions in my life, "What's the most good I can do? And how do I actualize that good through my life, into the world? And if I can make choices on the good, I'm actually elevating my level of thinking."

Carey Nieuwhof:

I love that thought. That's actually very convicting and very challenging. So last question. Is there any question no one is asking you that you wish someone would ask you?

Erwin McManus:

Wow. That's a great question. I don't know if there's a question that I'm not being asked that I wish people would ask me. Probably questions are not being asked that I'm glad people don't ask.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We all have a few of those, don't we?

Erwin McManus:

I guess the thing that really, for me, I don't know if this answers that question, but I think I've written 11 books and they all have meaning to me, and they're all really important. I wouldn't write them if I didn't think they were. But I do think this is the most important book I've ever written. I've never actually even tried to sell a book. It just hasn't been my thing. Publishers get upset with me and my friends do.

Erwin McManus:

Bill Hybels has asked me once, "Why do you even write books? You don't even care about selling them." I realized that I liked the creative process. I don't really like the process that is demanded for selling something. But frankly, I'll do anything humanly possible within ethics and integrity to get this book out to the world because I think it's the most important message I've ever put out into the world.

Erwin McManus:

So maybe the question that people aren't asking me is, "Why do I think someone should spend \$25 to buy a book by maybe an ordinary human being?" To me, I think that I've spent my life... I feel like my life for me has been a personal experiment. I'm trying to figure out whether you could actually live a transcendent life, whether you could live a life that's more spirit than flesh, whether you could live outside of the trappings of simply a material world. But to live from the vantage point of eternity.

Erwin McManus:

I failed at this experiment so many times, but I wrote the book asking the question, "You can't deny that your life has been changed by Jesus. How do you explain it?" I come to the end of the book going, "It would be so much easier for my life if I could extricate Jesus from the equation in so many different arenas." Except that I can't even conceptualize life outside of Jesus anymore.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. I'm in the same camp.

Erwin McManus:

You know what I mean? It's like, I don't even know how a person breathes without Jesus. I don't know how you don't suffocate without Jesus. I'm so frustrated that we've made Jesus a moralistic narrative of how to get out of trouble because you've done bad things. I think we've demeaned the beauty and wonder of who Jesus is. And Jesus is a Mona Lisa. He is that work of art that even if you don't understand the genius of DaVinci, you know you're seeing something that you almost don't deserve to look at.

Erwin McManus:

I mean, I really hope against hope that with all the imperfection of my skill and talent, that people will be astonished at the beauty of who Jesus is and be overwhelmed by his genius and be compelled by it. So for me, this is a really important moment, and I hope that I've left something behind that will have an impact for hundreds of years.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Erwin, I'll tell you, you stretch me every time we have a conversation. I know you've done that for thousands of leaders today as well. I just want to thank you for everything you're doing. The book is called *The Genius of Jesus: The Man Who Changed Everything*. It's available anywhere you can get books. Is there a particular website you would direct people to, or to where people can find you online?

Erwin McManus:

I think you can go to erwinmcmanus.com. I have a really fun podcast called *The Genius Of* where I'm interviewing friends like Ed Mylett, Lewis Howes, and Jon Gordon, and Angela Davis, and so many others. Then my son and I had this podcast that I just love called *Battle Ready*. Ever since when I survived cancer, he said, "Dad, I have so many questions you've not answered. Could I ask you those questions?" And we've turned it into a podcast.

Erwin McManus:

So *Battle Ready* becomes our cultural conversation about everything in life, and it's been so much fun. I just encourage people to go to erwinmcmanus.com and they can access all that stuff.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Fantastic. Erwin, thank you so much. I appreciate you.

Erwin McManus:

Thank you so much, Carey. God bless.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I hope you enjoyed that conversation with Erwin. It is never a dull moment when you talk to Erwin. We have show notes for you guys. You can head on over to careynieuwhof.com/episode452. And next episode, we've got something really, really fun. We talk about gift giving and how a lot of people and a lot of companies, and a lot of churches get it wrong. John Ruhlin the founder of Giftology is my guest. And here's an excerpt.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's talk about swag because given what I do with this podcast and the other stuff I do, I get a lot of swag. So I get t-shirts. I get mugs. And you're right, 99% of the time they have the logo of the sending organization on them. What is the challenge or the problem with that?

John Ruhlin:

Well, a gift by its very nature is recipient-focused. Like you'd never go to your best friend's wedding and on the Tiffany's box "Compliments of RE/MAX" or "Compliments of Morgan Stanley" or Ernst & Young. That feels tacky. We'd never do that in our personal lives, but in business we do it because, what we're really trying to do is manipulate the situation. We're trying to turn that other person into a billboard for us. We're trying to get them to advertise for us, which is not a gift. That's a manipulation.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's coming up next time on the podcast. Hey, if you enjoy these episodes, please subscribe and leave us a rating and a review. We read every single one of them, and I'm so grateful for your support. We're just in record territory with this podcast. You are getting the word out to person after person, and if it's making a difference for you, we hope and pray it makes a difference to other people. Also coming up, Scott O'Neil from the Philadelphia 76ers, Jessica Jackley, Dave Hollis. Nicky Gumbel is going to jump back on.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Ian Cron, who is a frequent flyer here will be back on early in the new year. Mark Sayers, Mark Batterson, and a whole lot more. Very excited to bring you those episodes. Thank you to our partners. Hey, if you're not in on the five-day free Social Media Growth Challenge, register today before it's too late. I'll be there. Bob Goff, Nona Jones, Tim Timberlake, socialmediachallenge.com.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And why not get better healthcare for your team next year? You can get 50% off the health benefits analysis right now by going to remodelhealth.com/analysis. Use the coupon code, CAREY50. Listeners of this podcast have saved two and a half million dollars.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And by the way, I do an awful lot over at my website, careynieuwhof.com. That's where I do a lot of writing on a weekly basis. My writing alone is accessed over 600,000 times a month. And every day, we send a little nugget of goodness to about 80,000 leaders and they get a short little daily email. If you're interested in that, I would love to help you with more than just this podcast. That's all over at careynieuwhof.com if you want to sign up for the email list. I think it's about 83,000 people now, careynieuwhof.com/email. Anyway, thank you so much, everybody. I hope you had a great day and we

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will catch you next time on the podcast. I hope our time together today has helped you thrive in life and leadership.

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.