

Announcer:

The Art of Leadership Network.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey leaders, before we jump into today's episode, I want to talk to you about a free mastermind that I am doing March 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. If you haven't yet registered, please do so. You can go to influencekickstarter.com. I'm going to talk about the art of online influence, something I really haven't taught on before, and you can bring your whole team. So whether it's you yourself trying to grow your online influence, your church, your business, trying to build an online presence can be intimidating, it can be discouraging, it can feel like you're taking a shot in the dark, but here's the thing, you got to get your message out because your influence determines how seriously people take that message. So on March 1st, 2nd and 3rd, I'm hosting a free mastermind on how to build an influential online presence. It doesn't have to be intimidating. It's not complicated. It doesn't have to be gimmicky, I hate gimmicks, and it doesn't have to ruin your integrity. Register for free today at influencekickstarter.com. So I'll see you on March 1st, 2nd and 3rd, go to influencekickstarter.com and we'll see you there.

Announcer:

Welcome to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership podcast, a podcast all about leadership, change and personal growth. The goal to help you lead like never before in your church or in your business. And now your host, Carey Nieuwhof.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, hey everybody and welcome to episode 477 of the podcast. It's Carey here. I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. And today I sit down with Jennie Allen and we have a great conversation. She is pretty raw and open about why relationships can be hard, because you keep hearing like I do how important relationships and yet, you know what happens, you get burned and friendships dissolve in flames. And we talk about it. We talk about the pain and the promise of friendship, what to do when you naturally resist community and how to find your people transparently. And we'll go there. This has been a challenge for me too. So Jennie and I have an honest conversation and I know we are not alone. Some of you are probably like, "Yep, I'm done with people." Well, you came to the right episode. And we want to thank our partners for bringing you this episode. Listeners of this podcast can receive a lifetime founders discount to their creative outreach platform, Creativo by going to creativo.org/Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And by The Unstuck Group, take their Unstuck Church assessment for free by going to theunstuckgroup.com/carey. And of course you spell Carey, C-A-R-E-Y. Well, Jennie and I are going to get into it. Jennie is a bestselling author. She's the founder and visionary behind If:Gathering as well as the New York Times bestselling author of Get Out of Your Head, Made for This, Anything, and Nothing to Prove. She's a frequent speaker at national events and conferences. She's a passionate leader following God's call in her life to catalyze a generation to live what they believe. She's earned a masters in biblical studies from Dallas Theological Seminary and well, we have a great conversation. So anybody who's been in leadership for more than 20 minutes, I think is going to benefit from this one. So question for you, are you a small or mid-sized organization looking for a new website and great social media content at an affordable price?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let me introduce you to Creativo. Creativo is a brand new all in one creative outreach platform designed to impact your audience and will be easily managed with drag and drop technology. With Creativo, you're going to look amazing online with a great website and social media content. You're going to save time by managing your social media and website in minutes, you'll save money. It's far less than a Starbucks a day and you'll utilize cross platform management in iPhone, Android, and desktop with the same experience. Creativo is great for churches, nonprofits, schools, and entrepreneurs to manage your social media in minutes each week. For new website and great social media in 2022, check out Creativo. Listeners of this podcast can receive a lifetime founders discount by going to creativo.org/carey. That's C-R-E-A-T-I-V-O.org/C-A-R-E-Y. And most organizations, as you know, they start, they grow, they thrive and then what happens? They lose momentum, then they decline and eventually they end, but that doesn't have to be your church's story.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you want to lead a healthy growing church that continually reaches new people and helps them take steps toward Christ, you need a clear vision, effective ministry strategy and a high-impact team. That's why I recommend The Unstuck Group. They've helped over 500 churches clarify their vision where God's calling them to go and their strategies, how they're going to get there. And I can say from experience at the time that I spent engaging with their process at Connexus Church was two of the best days of strategic planning I've ever done. And if you want to get a picture of where your church health is today, here's how to get started. Take their free Unstuck Church assessment. By going to theunstuckgroup.com/carey. It's a free assessment, go to theunstuckgroup.com/carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And as you know, things have changed a lot, even if you did it a few years ago, do it again because you're going to learn things about you, so theunstuckgroup.com/carey. And now let's have a conversation with Jennie Allen. I think you'll love this one. And just so you know too, we shot this at the If:Gathering studios in Dallas and they did a beautiful job. So thank you to the crew at If:Gathering and Jennie and her team. So if you want to check that on YouTube, it's also there. Jennie, it's just great to have you back on the podcast.

Jennie Allen:

Yes, it's so good to be here, Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you're hosting. Like here we are in Dallas, in your brand new studio.

Jennie Allen:

Yes. Thank you for coming all the way from Canada to Dallas, Texas.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's right. Flew down here. Do this interview. It's nice to be flying again.

Jennie Allen:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's nice to be here. And for those of you listening, we do have a YouTube channel. You can check it out. We got like three cameras going on this one. So this is pretty neat stuff.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. This is fancy. We're fancy at If:Gathering.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you've been on before. People will remember that interview. A lot a long time listeners leaders who remember that interview, your book exploded. And before we talk about your new book, which I absolutely love by the way, thanks for the advanced copy, your book just exploded last time. Any idea why get out of your head just took off like it did?

Jennie Allen:

I mean, I wish there was a recipe and we recreated, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I can't explain it.

Jennie Allen:

All of us would love that. I have been doing this a long time. I think it's always important for people to know this isn't like an overnight thing for me. That is probably, I think this was my fourth book. This was shocking to me. This book specifically had a unique story because I was supposed to write another book. I had mostly written another book.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. Okay.

Jennie Allen:

Still have it somewhere. So I should pull that out and make sure it's not more timely now, but I just wasn't passionate about it. It was kind of fulfilling a contract and I didn't want to do that. And I asked permission for my publisher if I could just wait another year. And so they said yes. And I said, really if I'm going to wait another year, I want to write the book that I'm thinking about all the time, which was Get Out of Your Head. I was reading about it, studying it, I just couldn't wait to write it. So I set that other book aside and I wrote, Get Out of Your Head, bought a year on my contract. And so when it came out in God's providence, it was one month before COVID and quarantine.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Jennie Allen:

So you can't script that kind of thing, right? Like God had to postpone the book I was writing, bugged me enough for me to listen, because you don't want to just set down 20,000 words or so that I'd written, you want to publish that. That's a lot of work, but I knew in my gut I was supposed to write this other

book. And so, I mean, when I say it's God, I don't mean that trite. I mean it like, he kept me from writing this book, had me wait a year and write this book and then had it released right before COVID. And the stories I've heard from it, I mean, honestly makes me tear up because I feel like I got to be a good friend to a lot of people through COVID and I didn't plan it, I didn't know, I had no premonition that this was going to happen. I just was obedient and God really steered the ship.

Jennie Allen:

But because of the timing of the book and the subject matter of the book, I got to take care of people in the midst of an isolating time, in the midst of a lot of anxiety, in the midst of a lot of spinning. So many people that don't believe God have read my book. That's probably the most surprising thing. A lot of them have been offended and left bad reviews like, "I didn't know this was about God," and they're mad at me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So they're the one star, two star reviews.

Jennie Allen:

Yes, totally. But because it is about God and it is, I mean, that's my hope, that's my answer, right? But I think there were a lot of people that needed hope and needed an answer and they were open in this season.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm always interested in how ideas spread.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And as an author myself who sold some books and podcaster and that kind of thing, there are certain ideas that just take off and they spread. So when you look back on it, were there certain stories you keep hearing like... Because everybody, this is for every leader and we have so many people listening who produce content, you can market it, but it's not like every single day on your social it's like buy my new book, Get Out of Your Head. There's ideas that just spread. So any looking back on it clues that said, hey, this idea took off friends, told friends, do you have any insight on that?

Jennie Allen:

Well, I think doing the science with the Bible for sure. But the main story that I hear is I was so vulnerable. And I talk about... In that book, I talked about a season of doubt and so many people related to that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Jennie Allen:

And it was embarrassing candidly. I remember my editor said, "Jennie, if you talk about this, people might view you as a hypocrite because all the while, those 18 months that you write about, you were on stages talking about God. Are you comfortable really? Have you played this out?" And then the other thing was, I believe that was demonic. I think there was a lot of warfare around it and I was really candid about that. And I told stories that to me were going to keep me off New York Times, were going to keep me off of major mainstream media. So it was a very graphic, supernatural experience the book was, and I just thought, well, I'm going to give up on the mass market. I mean, no target, nothing like that. And the irony, right? Like that was... I mean, it was the most... Like Target sold next to Amazon the most books. So it's weird to me that that was the book because I thought even reading the audio right before... That's the last thing we do as authors is we read the audio.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And we'll be like, "Ooh, I wrote this, right?"

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. Well, and I candidly read that book out loud and I went home and cried the first night I was reading out loud just because I felt like it wasn't good and it wasn't strong and it was about to go out into the world. I know this is my head. I'm in my head. I needed the book. So it was interesting how well it did to me. I really was not prepared for it or could have imagined it. No.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And we talked last time and we'll link to it in the show notes, but about how you've mobilized a community and how ideas spread. Like the If:Gathering, the If community is a pretty cool thing. So I find a lot of leaders and I don't want to gender stereotype, but I bounced some of this off before we started recording, he said, "No, I don't think it's gender stereotyping." Like I find often guys try to draw a crowd like here's my idea, come and listen. And what I'm noticing about you and some other female writers that I've really appreciated, Lisa TerKeurst, Ann Voskamp and others just to name a few, there's a whole tribe who write in a very vulnerable, authentic way, but you have a group of people who you do community with and do battle with day in and day out. Can you explain just maybe underscore that a little bit for to refresh my memory, the memory of leaders, sort of about your approach to building a tribe, to building a community?

Jennie Allen:

Well, I would say it wasn't very thought out because for me, I wasn't a writer and I wasn't a founding visionary leader of an organization and I wasn't a podcaster. To me, I was a disciple maker and I look back at my whole life and beginning when I was saved at summer camp. When I was 17, I came home, even though I didn't have a model for this, I gathered a bunch of younger girls and I started teaching them the Bible. So I was always a disciple maker. And when I got to college Campus Crusade for Christ, that was the ministry I was as a part of. And Michelle Boast brought me into her living room and she would cook chocolate chip cookies and I would sit on the carpet of her floor and just learn.

Jennie Allen:

I mean, we read dorky books like Master Plan of Evangelism. In college, that wasn't cool but I was disciplined by her and it taught me how to do it. And so for me, it was always that. I was never as aspiring to all those things. I know that sounds crazy to people listening, because I think it looks like you wouldn't have this "empire" without aspiration. And certainly I have dreams, but I would say looking back,

discipleship was the thing. So when God gave me more, when God gave me a platform, which happened through my Bible studies. I would write Bible studies and people were asking me to print them and send them their way. I got tired of that. So I reached out, I went to a writer's retreat, got a publishing contract. That was the door for me.

Jennie Allen:

That was the only door I really pushed wide open. And even that God had to help because I didn't have a platform at the time. And yet Thomas Nelson signed me and it's just kind of a miracle. But I would say I knew why the doors were opening. I knew it was to help people to build tools for people to make disciples. I never was confused about my mission. So when I'm doing all these things, I'm not thinking to myself, I'm going to gather crowd or I'm going to try to sell out an event. It's more of, I'm going to equip people to make disciples wherever are. I'm going to build a tool they can use with their book club or their small group. I'm going to put something in their hands that they can gather around and have deeper conversations around God like If:Gathering.

Jennie Allen:

We're going to give them things that they are the heroes of that story. Right? All the time, the most of the people that come up to me anywhere I am that say hi, they tell me the story of their small group. They tell me the story of their unbelieving friends that they invited over to read my book and how they're all experiencing God now. They're telling me communal stories. They're not telling me stories about their own personal life change. They're telling me stories about how they've done something with the materials I've put in their hands and gathered people.

Jennie Allen:

And so because I always knew I wasn't the hero of the story that God was, but also they were, that they were going to be the ones to gather and to equip and disciple and I would just give them tools, I feel like it always gave... It put my work into perspective that I wasn't trying to sell the most books, I was trying to produce the most helpful books. And it's cool because I do think that has spread and people feel that from me, that I'm just trying to help them win and help them lead the people they love.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There is almost a sense and I sense it in your story. It's certainly been true for me that the things that I've ended up being successful at, I don't know whether you'd agree with this in your own life have almost been accidental.

Jennie Allen:

100%.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really? You see that too?

Jennie Allen:

100%.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Tell me about that. What's behind the accidental like yeah?

Jennie Allen:

People's jobs depend on me now, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Jennie Allen:

I have a staff, I have publishers that their jobs you want to do well so they do well. And so it's not that I don't work hard and it's not that we don't do everything we should, right? We're planning for this book launch and we'll do a lot of specific things strategically to make sure as many people as possible can get this book and know about it. But I do think you can do all that and not win. Like I fully expect that to be the case, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

It can fall flat at some point.

Jennie Allen:

It's like, I don't know that I'll ever have another thing like Get Out of Your Head. Get Out of Your Head maybe my best selling book of all time. I may write 20 more and none of them sell like that. I don't see this as an up into the right thing, I see this as a faithful thing. And when I do the thing that God has called me to do, and the next thing was always clear to me, it was to write a book about community because that was the greatest weapon we had in the war of our minds was, besides the word of God, the people around us that can help us fight. So I knew that was what I was supposed to write, because is this the most helpful next step? Do I think it's as marketable as Get Out of Your Head in the middle of COVID? I don't. So I think it's marketable, I think... But I'm not even thinking that way, I'm like I think it's a helpful tool and I think people are lonely and I think that could help them not be so lonely.

Jennie Allen:

So I see a need and I write to it and then if it succeeds, great, but I don't see my other books as failures. And some of them kind of were if I look back. Like even now I look at the numbers, I'm like, man, that one really underperformed, but I never felt that way in the midst. And maybe I will now that something succeeded so much, but I felt like they were so helpful. And if you read the reviews, people's lives were changed through those. So I've always made being helpful the goal rather than successful.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Did you have any hesitancy or did it spook you a little bit that because Get Out of Your Head did so well, you're like, oh, maybe I should just, this is it, we're done or was it hard to write something else after that?

Jennie Allen:

Oh, I just had the most miserable year of my life writing Find Your People. I've never had a harder time and it wasn't a personal pressure because of what I'm saying. I genuinely believe what I'm saying. I'm not being fake or giving you the right answer, I want it to be helpful. If it's helpful, yay. But there was an

outside pressure. And even today, we did a marketing call earlier today and there's just an outside pressure of here's the numbers we want to a hit. Now, there is an expectation where I got to blow everybody's expectations away on the last book.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. They thought here and you deliver here.

Jennie Allen:

Now it's like no and right. And now they're saying let's double. And I'm like, "Hey guys," and I'm saying it out loud. I'm not like, oh yeah, y'all-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Good for you.

Jennie Allen:

Let's double. I'm like, you know what? Okay. Like y'all can have that in your head, but I'm just going to tell you right now, we cannot necessarily hit those numbers. And I don't want everybody to be disappointed if, and when we don't, when a lot of people buy it and a lot of people are helped. So let's just bring it down a little. I don't think they really do on paper. I think they leave all their numbers alone, but I mean, I'm trying. And I just think it's a silly game because God knows who needs this. And I've seen him get it to people that are atheists, right? Like how do they get my book? And I just know he can get it to anybody. I remember a few weeks into the launch Cosmopolitan made it one of their top reads, which it was hysterical. It's not like my mark-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Cosmopolitan made it a top read.

Jennie Allen:

Yes. And it was like one of the best books of the year or something. And they had the funniest thing, they even cussed in it. They were like, it's like Jennie Allen knew the blank was going to hit the fan. I was like, I cannot even... Do they know. And they said it's about God. They were honest about what it was. I'm like, there had to be a Christian back there pulling those strings, but you can't make that happen. My PR people didn't send it to Cosmo. And so I'm like, God's favor is the marketer. When he wants it to get to people, it will get to people. And I really do believe that and trust that.

Jennie Allen:

Now on launch day this year, if we underperform, somebody will have to come from me and remind me that I said this, but I do believe that it's okay and I'll be fine. And I like my life. I've invested in my family. I know this is off topic here, but I love my marriage, I love my kids, I've got friends. If I fail as a writer and they don't let me ever do it again, I'm okay.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and thank you for continuing to write. It's that Steve Jobs thing, real artists ship. Like at the end of the day, you can get this paralysis where you're like, I'm not writing anything else, I'm not doing

anything else. And I think we've all been there and post COVID, I mean, almost every leader's there. Very few people are leading something bigger than they did two years ago.

Jennie Allen:

That's true.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so there's that fear that my best days are behind me. So that's a really good word, but about your new book, thank you for giving me an advanced copy. We arranged this fairly hastily, so I had a quick read through it, but man, you hooked me. That introduction, which you wrote after the book, you had me from the first line. And I've read a lot of books.

Jennie Allen:

It varies from the first line.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's so well, it's pretty transparent. It's really raw. And basically I don't spoiler alert. You're like-

Jennie Allen:

You can spoiler.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm not very good at community.

Jennie Allen:

Very good at it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You had full blown panic. You're writing a book about finding your people and the importance of community and you're like, I stink at this.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you had a panic attack after you wrote the book.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. I hadn't had a physical panic attack where I could not breathe in 10 years or more.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Jennie Allen:

Haven't had many in my life and the book was done and I'm on my closet floor and I can't barely get words out and I'm on all fours and I can't breathe. And it absolutely had to do with a series of events that I talk about in the book that led me to it, but mostly to do with feeling like a fraud that I was going to lose the community I'd just written a book about. And I was going to have to go on stages and on interviews. And I was going to have to talk about having your people and I will have lost every one of mine that was in the book. It felt like every relationship was in jeopardy. And I mean, it was dark.

Jennie Allen:

And I've learned to say out loud the thing I fear. And that's why I wrote the beginning of the book, because I thought, what if this doesn't get repaired or what if this happens again? I'm like, I'm just going to say that it could, because we all go into building relationship with friends and community with that knowledge that it could all fall apart. In fact that's why most of us guard ourselves from it. So it helps me to write it to just say, this is my fear and it didn't happen. Those relationships are all well and restored. It was a weird few weeks that they all just happened to be on the mind.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But you had a bunch of people mad at you personally.

Jennie Allen:

I had for different reasons community falling through that had been a lifeline for me for four years and then also just family members that I depend on that yes were angry. I mean, it was just kind of a series of letting a lot of people down.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So just to frame it, you'd written a book, finished the manuscript which is a major feat. It's like I got the bow on the book on finding your people and on community and your community starts to disintegrate overnight.

Jennie Allen:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Jennie Allen:

It was really, really scary.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you're very honest in the book, this has happened before. As it had just, I mean, that's happened in my life. I've had friendships dissolve. And if I really think about it, it's still painful. And as a leader, we'll get into this later, that's hard and a lot of leaders are lonely. So this has been like a lifelong struggle for you to find people that you feel close to? No?

Jennie Allen:

No. I actually used to be really good at it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really?

Jennie Allen:

I used to be... In fact, when my husband met me, the thing he knew about me before we met was that she's the most transparent girl I've ever met. I used to be very transparent and then life happened and I was a pastor's wife, I was a leader and people were looking at me. And my mom used to say in middle school, "Jennie, people aren't thinking about you as much as you think they're thinking about you." But then as the pastor's wife, they were and they had opinions about everything. And I think it was a slow build of a wall that I worked hard on. And I don't even go back that far necessarily in the book and explain all that, but there were a lot of reasons why I built a wall. And I do describe this, that I would peek out the window and be like, is it safe and hi and act kind of be transparent, but it was very controlled. And then I would duck back down.

Jennie Allen:

I'd put a little bit out just so they think they knew me, but I wouldn't ever just cry with a friend about what was really going on with my life. I would posture it and come up with the answer. And I would say, "Carey, I'm still learning to do that." Like I did it this week. I was in small group and it was 10 o'clock at night and I wanted to go to bed and I was the last one to share. And I knew I had a choice and I have a lot going on right now. We've gone through a lot personally in the last six weeks that has been very difficult. And I was like if I share, I'm going to ball and I'm going to take up all the oxygen, right? I'm going to be needy. I'm going to all the things that we don't want to do as leaders or I could go to bed or I could give the little window appearance and be like, things have been hard, but we're okay.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We're going to make it. We're in your prayers.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. Which I'm really good at. I'm really good at fake vulnerability where you leave thinking, yeah, that was pretty vulnerable, but I was completely controlling it. Instead, this was two nights ago, I bawled my eyes out like snotty. Bawled my eyes out like bawling, crying and they were there for me. And for the last 48 hours, they've been able to tell me they're praying for me. They've been able... In fact, the next morning my friend said, "I just want you to know how close I feel to you and I'm so glad you shared that." And I wasn't a burden to them. That's the thing I've learned is when I go there, I don't disappoint them. I'm not surprisingly more broken than they thought, I'm human and it's helpful and it brings connection.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So let's talk about that. What is the fear? What is the fear of being really on the floor bawling, snotty, crying, because guy leaders have been there too. It's not just a male female thing, I've been there and I'm afraid to let people in.

Jennie Allen:

I think every leader, I think every human's there right now. It's the universal crisis, right? We're all together collectively burned out, exhausted, trying to do our lives post COVID or post quarantine in a way that feels difficult. Everything's changed. So we're all a little PTSD and that's real and scientific and people are starting to talk about it more. And I say that because I think everybody listening needs to come to terms with the fact that if they are not talking about how they feel, even if it feels small, then they are increasingly getting more unhealthy by the minute. You will not heal without people in your life. You will not heal alone in your head. Community was the next book for me because in Get Out of Your Head, it was the linchpin. It was when the moment of 18 months of spiritual attack and doubt changed for me. I was actually with Ann Voskamp.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Jennie Allen:

And then I also did it with my small group where it was the turning point. It was the moment where I said out loud what I've been going through and two people and then 10 people began to enter fast, pray with me and I was set free. So it is the moment. When you say out loud, this is what's hard, but the barriers to your question are two I believe and it sums up the many, right? We have lots, but shame and pain. Shame and pain are the two. So we feel embarrassed. We want to be better than we are. We don't want to be a burden. We don't want to take the oxygen out of the room. We don't want it to be about us. That's thoughts I've had. I have shame that I don't have a more spiritual answer for a lot of the problems that I'm facing.

Jennie Allen:

I feel shame that my problem isn't as bad as your problem, but yet it's causing me pain and tears. And there's all kinds of shame. There's shame that I don't want to share with you the things that are binding me because you'll judge it or there's mistakes in my past that I've never shared with anybody. And then pain is I've done it and I've gotten hurt. I've done it and this is true. I've done it, I've been vulnerable with someone, gone to them for help, shared the most painful, most vulnerable parts of myself and they used it against me and they shared it with other people. That's happened and that's real. And you cannot tell me it won't happen again. And so if I brave it and if I do it, then I'm trusting this person and trusting them with something to harm me. That's not natural.

Jennie Allen:

Like we don't want to do that. That's not something that we wake up and go, wouldn't that be nice? Like just to cry with somebody and tell them all my problems at risk that they're going to hurt me like a dozen other people have. I knew this book was needed specifically when I started posting things about it. And this was we're talking, this is five years ago that this book kind of came to me and that I knew one day I would write it. And I would post things about friendship and relationships and it was littered with comments. I rarely got more comments than when I posted about friendship. It was interesting. And the comments were, I have tried this and tried this and tried this and has not worked. I have been hurt over and over again and I've finally given up.

Jennie Allen:

I am not braving this again because you have no idea how much I have been hurt by other people. And the problem with it is people are the best parts of life and they're the worst parts of life. That's the problem is I'm asking people to do something in this deep way of connecting that is not easy, it's not something we want to do, it's brave work. And yet at our core, we are communal. It's not something we do, it's something we are and yet we don't think about it that way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So how do you... Because everybody watching, listening has been there. I've been there. And I remember a turning point in my life. It happened around my burnout 15 years ago where we had three or four critical inner friendships dissolve to the point at which now looking back on it, I own this, I own that, but some of it is mysterious. It was like still doesn't make a 100% sense. And I remember shriveling up into a relational ball and going nobody's getting in anymore. And then after a year I felt God saying, "Well, that's stupid, you need some friends. You're only 40. What are you doing?" And I've learned to trust again. But just transparently, I hired a performance coach, which is a nice word for therapist, earlier this year to help me make deeper friendships in my life. What allows you to go back and trust again, hope again, believe again, put yourself out there knowing that it's probably going to happen again, where somebody you trust is going to betray you?

Jennie Allen:

Well, one, it's a lot of fun to have friends.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. It is.

Jennie Allen:

I mean-

Carey Nieuwhof:

It is better.

Jennie Allen:

It is better. It's a richer life. I can't tell you how good it is. I love my friends. And when those friendships were threatened a few months ago, they weren't, by the way I went... Basically what had happened in my head is it had just grown and grown and grown and grown. Now there were some real conflicts I had to resolve that a lot of it was in my own head, in my own fear, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay.

Jennie Allen:

And so when I went to them to say this is what I feel, there was a little bit of laughter of like, you were not going anywhere. Like this is really hard right now, but we're not going anywhere. And so I think why it's worth it is there are those times where God is in the center of a relationship and it works. It still is hard and we still conflict and yet we still stay. And I think that's the hope is that there's a way to do relationship. And we talk about it in the book that there's five things that you can kind of pull from all of

history and see that there's a real way to do life and community that's beautiful. And it's transferable. Like it's actually something military people can do when they start over. Like it's something-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. That is true.

Jennie Allen:

... when that is when the research was done, it was like, okay, there's a model here. There's a thing. And I found it really encouraging that this is possible. It's not something ethereal like some people are good with people and some people have friends and some don't. It's like no, there's actually practices and things you can put in your life and make it happen. But I do think first you have to believe it's worth it. I personally, it's because it's fun and I believe it's a richer life. Some introverts are listening and not moved by that at all. And I would say to them, it's the conviction that we are one of the first generations that has ever lived this isolated and that should alarm us.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. You kind of talk about that, don't you? Where everybody knew... It was that trip to Italy, wasn't it?

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. Italy, Luanda, Uganda. And really, I go back through like all of the earth. Like when you look back at the history of mankind, we are the first few generations since the industrial revolution that has lived without a village-like existence. And village like existence is for all of time, they had to have each other to survive. There were gatherers, hunters, people that were doing different roles in a society. And they had to have each other to survive. Industrial revolution all of a sudden people are driving out of the city to work or to their homes and then coming back in and all of a sudden there was a real segregated life to rebuild.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We dislocated from each other.

Jennie Allen:

And so we don't have the same 100 people in our life for our entire lives. Most people in all generations haven't lived more than 20 miles from where they were born. Their family members, their friends are the same, that 100 people. It's their problems that keep them up at night. It's not the world's problems. It's the 100 to 150 people in their village and they take care of each other. That's who they know is they're assigned to. Well, we've lost that assignment. We've lost our people to care for us and to care for them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I want to go there and I want to talk about the five things, but before we leave this, I want to go back to when you talked about being the pastor's wife and kind of peeking out from that little well, here I am vulnerable, whoop back under a lot of leaders can relate to that whether they're in the corporate space or the ministry space. One of the things that you do so beautifully in this book, and you did it in Get Out of Your Head as well, and you do it in your ministry is you talk very openly about, hey, I just wrote a

book on community and I had a full on panic attack and worried that my community was collapsing after I wrote a book on community, right?

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. And then I put it in the book, in the front.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then you put it in the book.

Jennie Allen:

It's embarrassing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you even name it that it's embarrassing and then you say perhaps this destroys my credibility.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. I've worried about that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And so to me it elevated your credibility. I don't know why it did when I read it, but I also know if I was you trying to share that I, as a leader, would think, well, this is going to destroy my credibility.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. Because I have a higher value than credibility I would say. And I think... I'm in therapy.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Are we all? I hope we are.

Jennie Allen:

And that's probably why I wrote that chapter because I think what I'm learning is I'd rather be free than important. And I'm okay if I'm not important. And if that goes away, I will have my family and I will have my friends and I will be free. And writing that chapter, it makes me cry because it does feel vulnerable. And I didn't... It's not fun to tell people that you want to respect you that you had a panic attack like last week, right? When I wrote it, it was a week earlier that I'd had it. That's not fun. But I do believe that in saying it out loud and writing it, the fear went away.

Jennie Allen:

I had been up at night enough to have a panic attack, which I hadn't had in 10 years. And I had lots of anxiety in my life, right? I mean, it started home. Like there's a lot of anxiety, lot of children, lots of ministry, lots of work. It was built. The enemy was using it and building it in my head every night to a level that I had a panic attack. And in writing the chapter, whether my editor said I could publish it or not, I got set free. And it was like the devil didn't have me anymore. There wasn't this fear growing inside of me that was paralyzing me. And I mean, I was miserable and it was building.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah. This wasn't like manufacturing.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. It was like over a month. It wasn't like one day I thought everybody was mad at me. It was like over a month strategic things happened in my life surrounding me from family to friends to long time friends that all happened within a month and I felt like a complete fraud. And I was playing out the future of being totally alone and talking about this book and I was paralyzed. So again, I care more about being free and I think that and then isn't it ironic that God would use it for good? Because I do think it is. I trust I wouldn't actually let it go to publish, to print unless I thought this is helpful for people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. This isn't a therapy session.

Jennie Allen:

Right. It wouldn't just be for my therapy. Right. In writing it, it was therapy, in releasing it, it's belief and trust that it will help people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and when you hear from people who have read your books or listened to your talks or accessed your content, I'm guessing it's those moments you hear about over and over and over again, is it?

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. I remember my editor looked at me and said, "Jennie..." Before I wrote the book, she said, "Remember that everybody's going to look at you and think you have a million friends and that your life is easy for you and friendships are easy for you." She just tucked that in in a conversation while we were outlining or something, right? And I held onto that and I was like, okay, this is going to be embarrassing top to bottom. And I remember some of my friends read it and they said, "You really weren't afraid to be self-deprecating. Like you showed..." Because it wasn't just that chapter, the whole book, like basically my friend failures.

Jennie Allen:

But I think it was more than that. It was, I wanted... We were talking before the podcast about, I want to be in the field with people. I want to be beside them and I want them to know I'm in the field. I don't want them... And I want them to think, oh, she's exaggerating that she's on the field. I'm like, no, it's really that hard. It's true that multiple people have quit me for the same reason as a friend. It is true. And I have shed multiple tears over that and I have not repaired all those friendships. And I wish I could, but they're not all repaired. And so there's a reality to this that doesn't have a bow.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you mind sharing one of those reason that you know as to why a friend will quit you?

Jennie Allen:

Yes. It's the main one and it happens over and over again. And I hate it because it's everything we're talking about. It's that I don't need them. And so they feel like the friendship is one way and they feel like I have it all together and I'm not needy. And that was interesting to me because I mean, it was hard for me to believe. And it wasn't even just hard for me to believe, it was hard for me to practice and change because it's awkward. Like that's not in those moment two nights ago isn't like, oh yay, that's so fun. It's like those aren't the moments, it's awkward. And even as I'm choosing to do it and looking back on it and it's happening, I'm cringing a little and it feels foolish. And I feel like a mess. Vulnerability is vulnerable, right? I mean, it should be. And I think living at that level with people, I wasn't practiced and I was more practiced at building walls and hiding and it was easier for me to get into their mess and their trouble than to get into mine.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So in other words, you were there-

Jennie Allen:

For them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But that's almost a pastor thing, I'm here to help you, but you go home depleted, but nobody sees that.

Jennie Allen:

I never consciously thought about it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sure.

Jennie Allen:

I don't like thinking about my own problems. I don't like talking about them. I didn't see a point until I did a lot of therapy. So I think that was just easier. And it wasn't something really intentional even. And I think probably a lot of people listening relate to that, that they're not purposely cutting people out. They're not purposely being not vulnerable. They just don't know where or how or when and I would just say, there's never a good time. Like you just have to awkwardly do it and it will change your life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you determine or do you have a filter for who you think you can trust in friendship?

Jennie Allen:

Oh yeah, I have a filter, time and I'll share a little and see how it goes. So with these newfound convictions, I don't just run around sharing my heart with everybody. It's a very, very small number of people that actually I would cry with and say all the things I said that night, but I don't think your circle and part of the book talks about this, that there's circles for different purposes. Part of the way you get to your inner circle that we're all craving, those few friends that are safe and we can do this with, what we're doing is we're skipping a village. We're skipping the other stages that lead to those four or five. We think they're just going to appear out of thin air, but the reality is they're going to come from Sunday school. They're going to come from standing by moms at a soccer game. They're going to come from

work. They're going to come from lots of places that we've got to start realizing and building in our own minds this is my village.

Jennie Allen:

It may not be a little bitty village out in Rwanda with huts, but you have one, you have a little village. And you may live in an urban setting, but there are certain people at your grocery store or on your block that you see regularly. And it's starting to see the village as a place to find the 45. Because if you just go out waiting for the perfect 45 to fall on your lap, it's never going to happen. And you're going to have to settle. I know this is really must sound funny to my good friends that are like, really, you settle for us really because we're awesome that's what they're going to say. But they're very confident humans, but I would just say all of us are settling to some degree because people are imperfect and they always let us down.

Jennie Allen:

The facts are, I will let you down, you will let me down and God will not let us down. And that is our hope and that makes it okay. Right? That we can disappoint each other because of God. I just watched this with two of my friends, they went through a season where they were in conflict and they did not want to make amends. And I was devastated because they're two of my very best friends. And I did not know if they could and it was months. It wasn't weeks, it was months. And they were both like, "I want to quit. I want to quit." And then the most amazing thing happened. One of them called me and said, "I want to quit, but I was reading my Bible this morning and I don't think God's going to let me."

Carey Nieuwhof:

I want to quit the friendship.

Jennie Allen:

I want to quit... Right. The person. "And I don't think God's going to let me, and I've been forgiven so much and I can do this and I can forgive." And then they called that person. And again, it was awkward for a while and now they're great. It's just this is, nobody does that awkward stuff. They don't do the awkward stuff on the front end, they don't do the awkward stuff in the middle. When it gets hard, everybody bails. This disappointed me so I'm going to walk away. Everybody's going to disappoint you. It's a fact, know it. It helps you in life. Like they will all disappoint you, what are you going to do with that and are you really going to just say, I'm going to be lonely for the rest of my life? No, I don't think.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This might be like something that you can dismiss out of hand, but I have a pretty long pre-digital memory. The iPhone and social media has only been around for decade and a half or so.

Jennie Allen:

Such a gift.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Such a gift. But I wonder when we didn't have a lot of options pre-digital, it was the people around you, the people in your school, the people in your college class, the people in your neighborhood and it took work to be related. And now we can see the lives, the perfectly curated lives of millions of people. I

wonder, does that contribute to this ideal of friendship, this manicured friendship myth that we have in our heads?

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. You think everybody else has friends, right? You think everybody else has, but yet the numbers and the statistics say pre COVID, three and five admitted to feeling lonely of humans. So I would imagine post COVID it's four and a half people. That's what I think, four and a half people out of five. So I think we have an epidemic which the comfort of that is we aren't alone, that we're alone, which means that other people need friends too. And so even the curated think sure social... There's no... We could talk about that all day, social media messed it all up and jacked up our lives? Yes. Matter of fact, all of it, relationships, self-esteem, mental health, all of it, yes. However, we can make other choices on a day. We can choose a different way to do life. And that's what I'm believing.

Jennie Allen:

I mean, I'm releasing a book that basically says our couple generations have it completely wrong compared to the rest of the world, our society in the West has it completely wrong compared to even most of the world today. 80% of people today live in a village. So a lot of the world still lives this way. Like we are in a very small number of people on earth that has ever lived this lonely.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Trying to do it and it's not going well.

Jennie Allen:

And then add technology and social media, add COVID. I mean, it's bad. However, so yes, very grim. However, I think people are craving it more than they ever have. I think people are wanting to put their phones down at the table and connect. My two older kids, it's so precious, they both completely limit their social media. They're barely on it. Why? Because we were first generation money. Right? We were the people that got the money and let's go spend it, right? Social media. We were the people that didn't know what to do with it. We just burned right through it. And we were... I remember somebody said once that our maturity with technology is as old as technology. So we're 10 year olds, we're about to be whatever. Whatever the iPhone is.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's true.

Jennie Allen:

So we're barely...

Carey Nieuwhof:

We're middle schoolers.

Jennie Allen:

Right. We're middle schoolers now. So I would say that my kids are doing it more wisely than me. They desire to be outdoors. They choose to be with their friends. They put their phones down. I can't get

ahold of them sometimes because they've turned their phones off. They want to be present in their lives because they've seen the damage it can cause.

Carey Nieuwhof:

My kids are the same way. Fascinating.

Jennie Allen:

I think this next generation's going to do it better than us. I do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Jennie Allen:

I think they want this.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So three, four years ago, five years ago, you moved from Austin to Dallas.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a big move. It's only a few hours away, but you uproot everything, you start over again and you got to build a whole new tribe. You're going to keep a few of those friendships and you make the same argument I do in my book *At Your Best*. And I base this on research as well. And you can basically have three to five close friends, that's it. And then you have your tribe or your friends or your village and then you have acquaintances on the outside. When you moved, that was a pretty disruptive change and you're starting over again, how did you build new friendships in a new city?

Jennie Allen:

Well, it was really painful and awkward and hard. And I was more concerned about my kids. I had four kids. I was moving into a public school that needed friends and didn't have any. So four kids like each one of their little hearts and off to know this crazy environment. And so I was very worried about them the first year. And after they started to thrive and make friends, I kind of noticed, hey, I don't really have any, and so I need to do this. And so I had to take a lot of leaps and a lot of awkward steps to have friends. And I had to think bigger about community than just those two to three or three to five. I had to start with like, I really want a network of people in my life that surround our family.

Jennie Allen:

And that was everything from an SMU babysitter who's in the studio today, Caroline, who has continued to do life with us and work with us who's like another daughter. People think she is my daughter. And she came in our life and just started doing laundry, started taking care of our kids, helped me do my life. And I never would've thought like I'm going to be friends with a college student from SMU that's my babysitter. But we did so much life together that eventually she felt like a friend and she felt like a safe

place. And I think I had to change my view of friendships having exactly my life stage, exactly everything the same as me and start to think out of the box about where community would come from for me. And it was such a fuller, richer experience because I love having... Like right now out I'm disciplining a whole living room full of younger girls that are in their 20s.

Jennie Allen:

And they inspire me in such beautiful and unique ways. And Gigi Hornsberger, who was 15 years older than me, she was ahead of me with launching kids to college and she helped me with things. And I began to see a richer experience with life when my community wasn't all these three to five people that were just like me and we all thought the same and got along and everything was the same. And I just wanted that diversity in my life and I was open to it.

Jennie Allen:

And so I think it's a beautiful thing to start from scratch because you really do get to decide like, gosh, this is what I want to value, this is what I want to do. And for me, it started with, I'm going to pray that God brings me five friends in five miles. That was my specific prayer. And it happened. We do have those five friends in five miles but we have lots of friends outside of those five miles, lots, really good ones. But I wanted to see them at the grocery store. I wanted to go walking in the morning without a lot of work or pre-planning. I wanted to run dinner over last minute because I heard that they needed it. I just wanted to live life in proximity.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you make the argument that friendship is disruptive and you say, hey, if you really want friends be prepared to have your house interrupted, your shopping patterns change, you need a friend who can just show up with pizza and paper plates because they're just going to barge in for dinner, that kind of thing. Can you talk about that because we do live such curated lives, where everything is scheduled by appointment and you do dinner parties, but like a lot of people don't have that kind of intimacy where people just come on over.

Jennie Allen:

Drop in. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Drop in.

Jennie Allen:

And again, you can't do that with 100 people. You can't do that with... But you can with 15. You can say, "Hey, you have free..." And we have to say it. So last night we had some new friends over and I really like them. They're younger than us, but I'm energized by them. I enjoy time with them. And we had the greatest conversation. Well, when they got there, I was like, "Here's the house rules, I'm not necessarily going to offer you stuff. You help yourself to everything. Here's where everything is. You walk in like if we're... Just come in. You don't knock, we don't do that and sit down. This is how we do life." And because they were real formal at first. We're older. We're older.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Everybody is. Everybody is.

Jennie Allen:

They don't know what to expect. And I'm like, "Listen, this is how we roll." So I have to say it like, this is who we are, this is how we do life. And I mean, it's so funny. My house, we built these bunk beds in the back of our house in an old garage that now we don't have a garage, but whatever, it wasn't very functional, good garage anyway. And so we put bunk beds up there and a big sofa and I will look back in my house and there's people's feedback there that I have no idea who they are. Like there's just people sleeping back there. And my kids have invited friends over and they stayed late and they slept over. Like we run a place where it's like, you are welcome and we love that you're here and join our family.

Jennie Allen:

And it's so fun. And it's very rarely our house is empty, very rarely is it quiet, but I love that. And I think that has brought that village-like experience to the middle of a suburb. I mean, not suburb, a big city. We live in the middle of the city. And I love living that way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can you walk us through the five?

Jennie Allen:

Sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. That'd be great.

Jennie Allen:

So proximity is the first one.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So that's a five miles like people who are close.

Jennie Allen:

Yep. And let me say this, you don't have to have all five to have good friends, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Jennie Allen:

But you probably need three to four is what I say. So maybe some of your best friends are far away. Right now I'm in group therapy with some of my favorite people on earth and we're doing it at Zoom and we could not be closer. Now, we are not able to run that casserole over. Ann Voskamp is part of it as well. It's always killed me that if Ann's going through something, I cannot take her food. It is a physical pain that I could not take her something and hug her and be on her front porch. And so that proximity piece isn't essential, but it is really helpful.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And some people have friends far away, but nobody close.

Jennie Allen:

And you need that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Jennie Allen:

I would just say I have a lot of friends far away. Some of my best friends are far away, but this was actually a book about building friends in proximity because I didn't have that. And I thought it was important and it is. So you can have both, but proximity is the first one. And then vulnerability, which we've talked a lot about. Accountability, which you see throughout history in villages that there's tribal elders, that there are abuelas and grandmothers. In lots of Hispanic communities, abuelas will even just, they basically are grandmothers of the kids and you can watch the movie In The Heights. But I heard that from other people as well. You can see in India that there are mothers and fathers of a community and they come for wisdom and truth. So it doesn't have to be somebody older, all those examples were, but I think you've got to have somebody that'll grab you by the collar and say, "Hey, you can't do that."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right. Right.

Jennie Allen:

Right. I think that's important in life. Some of my favorite friends do that a lot to me. So accountability and then mission. I think you need something to care about besides each other and having a good time. I think if you don't care about the world, about other people, friendships get stale.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what would that look like?

Jennie Allen:

I think it can look like anything. My mom is bridge club. She loves bridge. And she goes probably five times a week, four times a week. She knows everybody there. There's all kinds of people there that love God and there's all kinds of people that don't. But they love her and they play bridge together. It's something to do together that doesn't put so much pressure on the relationship, if that makes sense.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Jennie Allen:

And so I think you need missions and for some people you already have it, you are raising kids together. For some people it's... But ultimately believers, we have a great mission and that we're supposed to give God to the world together. And so I think thinking of ways to do that with your friends, I just think there

needs to be a purpose to friendship. C.S. Lewis talks about it, that I don't care if you roll dice or I need to get the quote exact, but basically I don't care what activity you do, but the best friendships revolve around common interest in doing things together.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. You're right, my favorite definition of intimacy is intimacy is shared experiences. It's either John Ortberg or Dallas Willard, I'll get that right at some point. And I think you're right, because it does take pressure. If it's all conversation, that can get very heavy sometimes. And it's like, no, let's go shopping or let's play golf or let's hang out or let's play crib or bridge or whatever.

Jennie Allen:

Well, but it also gives... Like my mom is on mission there, right? So it's not about the bridge. It's that she's there and she's causing trouble and she's loving people that don't know God and she's... So I think there's also just a purpose. And I think that always enriches friendships. If:Gathering contains a lot of my best friends, like my office. And we're all different ages, all different life stages, but we all feel so close because we're on mission together.

Jennie Allen:

There's something really bonding about mission. And then the last thing is consistency that you stay, that you don't quit when it gets hard. And I'm not saying there's never a time to quit. There's certainly toxic relationships that cannot be healed. I love the verse that says as much as it concerns, you live at peace with all men. It means you may not be able to fix the problem. You could as much as you can try to live at peace and the other person doesn't want to. So it's sometimes not possible or it's just toxic or it needs boundaries. But I think we've gotten too good at boundaries and not good enough at good friendships. And we really need to be careful that we're not setting boundaries around healthy relationships.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So on that note, it's funny. We were connecting with some friends recently, some really good friends who, well, we live in the middle of nowhere, so we can't do five miles, but it's within 15 minutes of where we live. We're hanging out in our backyard and we got fairly vulnerable and just said it feels like we're initiating a lot of the contact with certain people that we knew together.

Jennie Allen:

I'm so glad you're bringing this up.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Are you?

Jennie Allen:

It's probably the number one thing people say is they initiate too much.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. Well, let's... I initiate too much, I'm waiting for it to be mutual.

Jennie Allen:

Mutual. It won't be.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. So let's go there.

Jennie Allen:

Get over it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Get over it. Okay.

Jennie Allen:

I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to everybody. I'm talking to myself. If you want friends, you will initiate. If you don't, don't initiate, but don't expect anybody to initiate with you. We live in a world where this is the lost art. So if you have the energy to do it, you better do it because... And as a byproduct, a lot of your friends may have friends because you initiate. Great, bonus. But it's just, I mean, there's a few lucky people that don't initiate and everybody initiates towards them, I've never really met any. I think everybody that has friends initiates and keeps doing it because there's a lot of reasons why, the shame, the pain, the time, the busyness, I mean, there's a lot of reasons why. But I think it doesn't really matter. I'm like, I don't really care that you have to... Not you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. But really no, it's personal.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. I'm really trying not to be mean to you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It is personal.

Jennie Allen:

But it's a lot easier to be mean to like an audience or in a book, not to Carey, I don't want to be mean to you. But I just I'm like, yeah, it's a problem. But it's everybody. And it's not just you. And I think that's where you have to go. I mean, do they not want to be your friend? They'll say no. They won't come. So that's not the issue. So then it's like, do I just not want to give this energy? Do I want the energy in return? Yes. We all want the energy in return, but we may not get it. And we're not here long. So it's like, let's just keep initiating.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And everybody lives busy lives. And what we discovered in that conversation is they felt like they were the ones who were initiating with their friends. And we kind of said, well, the invitations that don't work out, are they welcome? They're like, they're life giving. So we are sitting there going, okay, we've initiated a couple times and we're not keeping score. There's no ledger, but in your mind, you're like,

okay, we've asked three or four times, I wonder if that's a hint. And they're like, no, those are life giving. It's just we got four kids and we're running this direction and I wonder if so many people are sitting there going, no, this is like us too. We feel like we're initiating.

Jennie Allen:

And I would say, people get rejected, right? I want to commend you because that conversation needs to happen more of rather than just walking away and assuming, right? Assuming that they don't want to be a friend and never calling again, you brought it up. You're like, "Hey, are we annoying you basically?" Because it's a really vulnerable thing to do. And I think we need to have more conversations like that with people before we walk away or quit. But I do think that there is real rejection. There are people that are rejecting you. And I think that's why I feel the need to say and keep initiating because I've watched how many people are wounded and it's like this isn't working, this isn't working. And I would say, if it's broken four times, do it a fifth. If you've initiated with four people and gotten rejected, do it a fifth.

Jennie Allen:

And that's hard to say, and if it happens eight times you have to... It's hard work and you will face rejection. And I'm just saying you can't live without it so you're going to have to do that. Like that's what you have to decide in your head and I hope this book causes people to feel is, gosh, I don't have an option here. Like I have to face rejection. I have to face pain. I have to face my shame because I don't have an option. God built me to live this way. I might be miserable unless I do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So this is a leadership podcast. One of the things that I was reflecting getting ready for this interview is I started with very small churches when you have a couple dozen people you know everybody and their uncle and their dog's name and their cat's name and everything. And then things get busy and bigger. And I remember when we passed 200 people and you know this in ministry, I had to start setting up boundaries. Otherwise, my whole life would be consumed. And a lot of leaders listening would say, they have been really good at boundaries. They've set up the walls. There's a system, not everybody has their cell number. You got to go through an assistant. And I always thought that was so stupid. And then you eventually reach enough people that you're like, okay, no, I can't just be an open book to everybody. But I think behind that is a lot of loneliness. And I think affluence does the same.

Jennie Allen:

It's true.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Affluence and power.

Jennie Allen:

It's true.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... really insulate you. I'd love for you... I'd love your thoughts on that and feel free to disagree.

Jennie Allen:

Absolutely not. I won't disagree with that a bit.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay.

Jennie Allen:

Because I think boundaries are needed and there's times for them, but I think we've gotten too good at them and we built them too tightly and I had. And it wasn't even about my ministry or role. It was just, I'd been hurt and I was weary and I did have to give a lot of output everywhere. So I just saved "my resources". So like I'm conserving your resources.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You're tired, you cocoon. You withdraw.

Jennie Allen:

Right. And so I think I didn't give margin time to people because I thought, gosh, I need to watch Netflix and rest, I don't know. But then I started saying yes and I started going to these dinners because I had to start from scratch. So I had to say yes to things. So that year I kind of was like, if people invite me somewhere, I'm going to go, I'm just going to go.

Carey Nieuwhof:

My wife and I did the same thing.

Jennie Allen:

And it just, I have to make friends.

Carey Nieuwhof:

In default years.

Jennie Allen:

I got to meet people to even know who I want to be friends with. So I would just go in the beginning and that was fun. And I'd been a no person for like 10 years. So it was like, oh wow, this is kind of new and cool. And I'm meeting all these new people. And so I think there's seasons and all that, but I would say boundaries are meant to keep you healthy. And I would say you're not a very healthy person if in those walls you've isolated yourself. So you can keep your boundaries, but you better invite about five to 10 people inside of them or you're just going to be really lonely with your lovely boundaries.

Jennie Allen:

So I think we've got to be careful that we have not isolated ourselves as leaders, as humans that nobody knows us and nobody can check on us and nobody can grab us by the collar. I've got so many people that grab me by the collar. Sometimes I'm like, I've already been called out, okay? Like you don't have to do it. I've already been called out three times this week. Like I've put all these people in that are very hostile. But it's kept me healthy and I don't know, I like it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So we're pushing up on time and you've been so generous, but I got one more question for you if you have time.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. So in leadership, everybody wants a piece of you, right? Everybody wants to know Jennie Allen of If:Gathering and you've got like tens of thousands of people who follow you. And I think every pastor, every leader feels that way. How can you tell if someone really is a friend? Because there'll be a day where you're not doing the if stuff anymore.

Jennie Allen:

Sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Maybe a day where you stop doing and where I will and like who's left be because I find that some people, one of the things Gordon MacDonald, who's been on this podcast a lot... I got ready to step out of pretty much all leadership at Connexus Church, even dropping the teaching role about a year ago. And I went to mentors and I asked for advice and Gordon told me, and I'm comfortable sharing this, he just said, "Oh, don't worry. They forget you pretty quickly."

Jennie Allen:

Sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And that's true.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There's a handful of people that we talk with every week, but it's amazing how much of that was related to the office I held not the person I was. And I wonder if you have any advice on that.

Jennie Allen:

That's a hard one.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm not saying that in a bitter way. I'm not saying that in a bitter way.

Jennie Allen:

That's a hard one. And I think it strikes at the disappointment that people do bring into our lives, right? Because I don't know if there's a way to guard against people's motives. I don't know that we can see people's motives and I'm one to usually trust their motives rather than to fear them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Me too. I'm an optimist.

Jennie Allen:

And so I've operated with belief that the people closest to me feel safe to me and aren't trying use me or are friends with me because I do this or that. But I know that there probably are those people out there, but I think one thing I did when I moved to Dallas, because somebody said to me it might be hard to move to Dallas, a lot of people know you here where Austin was a little more secular and just many people read question books.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wasn't about the bells.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. And so I was nervous and they were kind of making me nervous about that. And I remember thinking the first time like I went to the mall or was in public and somebody recognized me, I remember thinking, oh no. I remember just kind of being paralyzed and like, oh no and how am I going to make friends if... How am I going to know the difference?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. If they realize it's Jennie Allen.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. It's not like I'm making friends. All my friends in Austin were my friends before I wrote. And so this was just a whole new experience. And I remember my daughter knows that when people would come up to me and they would tell me things, it was always so dear. It was like, you helped me with this problem. And I was like that's really what friendship is anyway. And if I keep my head about me that ultimately maybe they want something, but probably they've been blessed by we probably feel like friends anyway and just through my podcast and books, I probably would be friends with them. And I just had to take off this really fake view of what I might appear as and just be like, you know what? I helped them through a problem and I bet they could help me through a problem if I had one. And I'm sure we'd be good friends.

Jennie Allen:

And I have felt that way. Every time I meet someone, it's like, gosh, I'm sure we'd be really good friends if we had time. There's a time problem, but I think most people are just trying to get through life and like you, they really appreciate people that can help them. And I don't know that that's a bad thing. I think that's just the way we all are. And I hope that I'm helpful and I hope that they feel like I'm their friend, because I'm sure we would be if we had time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I love that heart. And I love that I feel the same way when I meet listeners and I meet leaders and yet we all have a certain capacity and we got to make sure that there is somebody in that inner circle of three to five.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The book is fantastic. It's called Find Your People. It's out when?

Jennie Allen:

Two, 22, 22. It's February 22nd, 2020.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's pretty cool. That can only happen once in human history.

Jennie Allen:

I guess so.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I guess so.

Jennie Allen:

And it just so happens.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It just so happens. Well, it's fantastic. It'll be available widely wherever books are sold and I would highly recommend it. There are reads you do to prep for an interview and it's a reread for me. So I'm going back to do a deep dive.

Jennie Allen:

Thank you. That means a lot to me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, no, it's sincere.

Jennie Allen:

You're so humbling dear. I love you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, no, it's a reread and I'll be sharing it with friends as well. So I would encourage leaders because this is an epidemic. I think it's a double epidemic in leadership, so I'm really grateful you went there. And

thanks for being so transparent. We didn't really get into writing styles and male and female, but they'll be around three. We'll do it again.

Jennie Allen:

I love it. Let's do it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And if people want to find you online, what's an easy place.

Jennie Allen:

Yeah. Jennieallen.com, J-E-N-N-I-Eallen.com and all my links are there.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Great. Jennie, thank you.

Jennie Allen:

Yes, I loved it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Pretty rich, wasn't it? And honest, which are always the best conversations. You can get transcripts, details, quotes shareables and more over at careynieuwhof.com/episode477. And again, if you haven't checked it out on YouTube, you can do that. Just subscribe there and then when you want to watch, instead of listen, you can that as well. Don't forget that listeners of this podcast can receive a lifetime founders discount to their creative outreach platform from Pro MediaFire, the new one, it's called Creativo. And you can go to creativo.org/carey, that's C-R-E-A-T-I-V-O. So creative with an ivo at the end [.org/carey](http://creativo.org/carey), C-A-R-E-Y.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And if you haven't ever taken the Unstuck Church assessment, no better time to do it. It's free. And it'll tell you where your church is at and it's life cycle. Go to the unstuckgroup.com/carey. That's the unstuckgroup.com/C-A-R-E-Y. Next episode we have Bob Lotich coming up. He is the founder of SeedTime. I had the privilege of reading his new book and he has a fascinating story about money, creating and scaling an online business and a whole lot more. Here's an excerpt.

Bob Lotich:

It's a big world. It's a big internet and there's a lot of people out there. And I think when it is a crowded space, I think that's often a clue that there's a lot of demand in that space. In the case of some of the people you mentioned, and I mean, I could name hundreds of others, there's a lot of people in the space, I think the key is really getting specific about who the person is that you're talking to because as someone scales and grows, they can't be as super specific. It tends to get wider of the net of the people that they're talking to.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also coming up, Philip Yancey, Bob Golf, Francesca Gino, Ann Voskamp and a whole lot more. You get that automatically if you subscribe and it's free. If you haven't yet signed up for my online mastermind, I'm going to show you how to build an influential online presence. I'm going to open up the vault and share a little bit about how we got this podcast to 20 million downloads, but also how we've built a platform that started as a hobby that has now attracted millions of leaders a year. In fact, leaders will access the content we produce more than one and a half million times a month. And while individual mileage may vary, you need to get more eyeballs on the stuff that you're producing. Some of you're producing emails, you send out a newsletter and you have a terrible open rate. How do you change that?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Some of you you're posting to social, you're getting three likes and you're like, nobody's paying attention. Well, you know what? You're online messaging matters because it's how you get heard today. And whether you're leading a church, a business, or just yourself, don't get discouraged and don't keep taking shots in the dark.

Carey Nieuwhof:

March 1st, 2nd and 3rd, I'm hosting a free mastermind on how to build an influential online presence without losing your integrity, without losing your soul, without going to gimmicks and tricks and the latest hacks. This is quality stuff, I think, for leaders. This March 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, you can register for free by going to influencekickstarter.com. That's influencekickstarter.com. I want to get you kickstarting your influence. So join me for the mastermind at influencekickstarter.com. Why don't you bring your entire team? Thank you everybody for listening. This is such a joy to be able to do this with you. Thank you for the ratings and reviews you leave. And thank you for trusting us with your time once again this week. Continues to be an incredible year so far. Thank you to everybody. And 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.