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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 486 of the podcast. It's Carey here. Spring is on the way if it's not already there where you are, unless of course, you're in Australia and New Zealand then welcome fall, and in the Southern hemisphere. But I'm so excited to have Oliver Burkeman here. And we're marking the seasons because we're talking about, well, your lifespan and a whole lot more.

Carey Nieuwhof:

More on that in a minute. Today's episode is brought to you by Pro MediaFire. You can book your free digital strategy session today at promediafire.com. And by Leadr, check out leadr.com. That's L-E-A-D-R dot com for how you can better engage and grow your team today. And mention my name, use the promo code CAREY for 20% off your first year.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, shortly after my book *At Your Best* came out, people started to recommend another book on time management, one called *Four Thousand Weeks*. And I heard about it so many times. I'm like, "Okay, I got to get this book." So I bought the book and I was so interested in it. I reached out to Oliver Burkeman. And he said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'll come on your show."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And what was fascinating is he answered my email by saying, "Well, wouldn't you know exactly one month ago today, I purchased your book *At Your Best*." That is the day that I emailed him. So he said, "We should definitely do this interview." So yeah, very different approach and thought process to time management. This is actually more of a work of philosophy, I think, than practical things.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And we talk about why traditional time management has failed him and so many other people, what's wrong with it, how being a productivity geek had a negative impact on his life. And why understanding that you have 4,000 weeks to live has become so liberating for him, and now lots of other people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The book is doing extremely well. And he is the author of *The New York Times* and *Sunday Times* bestseller *Four Thousand Weeks*. And he also has written *The Antidote: Happiness for People Who Can't Stand Positive Thinking*. What a fantastic title and *Help! How to Become Slightly Happier and Get a Bit More Done*. For many years, he wrote a popular column for *The Guardian*, *This Column Will Change Your Life*. Again, another great title. And he has a newsletter called *The Imperfectionist*, where he writes about productivity, mortality, and the power of limits.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And he lives in North York Moors in Northern England. I hope I got that right, but that's where we come to him. And one of the fun parts of this interview is the roosters and chickens in the background. So, almost 500 episodes in, never had that before. And I think we left that in. We didn't cut it out, because it was a blast, anyway.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, we want to thank Pro MediaFire who is helping just thousands of church leaders and business leaders advance their mission. So if you're frustrated with staff turnover on your creative and digital teams, I mean they're in high demand, you have two options when you're trying to fill a position. You can hire an internal staff member that's an expert in one or two main areas or hire Pro MediaFire and get an entire team of experts for less than the cost of a professional staff hire.

Carey Nieuwhof:

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Carey Nieuwhof:

And the other day, I heard that 50% of people are still planning to leave their current jobs in 2022, which is crazy. And by now, you've heard me talk about what my friends over at Leadr, the first ever people development software, are doing by transforming the great resignation into the great resolution. They're on a mission to develop one million leaders by helping leaders just like you engage and grow your teams.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's face it. People want to be led. They actually want to be developed. They don't just want to be managed. So how do you care for your team and develop them while fueling your mission? You do it through Leadr. Leadr will help you develop leaders at scale with consistent one-on-one meetings, clear goals and regular feedback. So check them out. It's Leadr, L-E-A-D-R, no second E, dot com for how you can better engage and grow your team today. And mention my name. Just use the promo code CAREY, C-A-R-E-Y, at leadr.com. And you will get 20% off your first year. That's leadr.com. Use the promo code CAREY, 20% off for your first year.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I'm very excited to get into this conversation. It's a different take on productivity and some really good like philosophy bordering on theology in my conversation with bestselling author, New York Times bestselling author of Four Thousand Weeks, Oliver Burkeman.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oliver, welcome to the podcast.

Oliver Burkeman:

Thanks very much for inviting me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, I'll tell you. Your book, *Four Thousand Weeks*, for those of you who are watching this on YouTube, it is burning up the charts. It's got a lot of traction and you've had interviews with Malcolm Gladwell. Tim Ferriss actually put one of your chapters on his podcast and as a regular listener, I don't think he's ever done that. That's a high compliment. I'm sure he is going to have you on. Any idea, when did it release? Did it release in October of last year or when?

Oliver Burkeman:

It was August actually.

Carey Nieuwhof:

August of last year. Any idea why nine months later this seems to be picking up steam and resonating with so many people?

Oliver Burkeman:

Wow. No, I mean, it's been very, very gratifying. I love it. And I'm sure that a huge amount of these things is always just luck, whatever it is. But to give a more substantive answer than that, there's two questions there. I think the fact that it's a number of months on from the launch, that's just a question of how certain kinds of online dynamics work. It was a deliberate decision to launch in the summer. And then you have certain points around the holidays where you can talk about it in a different way. And then there's a new year, which is always a sort of calendar notion for books that have advice or self-help in them.

Oliver Burkeman:

The question of why the sort of ideas that I'm talking about would resonate just more generally now, like this point in history or something, I think that I've been very fortunate. I did not write this book to target the emergence from the COVID pandemic, if we grant for now that we're emerging from it. But I do think there's been a lot of reevaluation that people have been going on. So more people grasping a bit more clearly the limitations of certain ways that we've been approaching time and that some kinds of productivity advice might be encouraging us to do.

Oliver Burkeman:

I think it's fortuitous timing in that regard. But as I say, it was not a clever plan to have it come out at this moment. The lockdown did help me in a certain ironic way because I was about two-thirds of the way through. And I got so terrified that the global publishing industry was going to collapse that I got my finger out and met the ... Well, I didn't actually meet the deadline, but I got it in as fast as I could. In fact, the global publishing industry has done very well, because people want to read books. But so yeah, that's my story.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And what's interesting about it, I mean, I'm just looking at the back cover, but Adam Grant said, "This is the most important book ever written about time management." But in some ways, it came out of your frustration with all the time management books out there. You were a bit of a productivity ninja. And then you hit a wall? Tell us how that happened.

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah. That's a very nice way of putting it. I used the word productivity geek, not ninja, which I think is a little bit less flattering. I was obsessed. I'm not saying that it necessarily led to being particularly accomplished at managing my time. Yeah, so I have long had a sort of interest in productivity and time management. I had in a sort of personal sense, spent a lot of time trying to figure out the right system, the right set of techniques, the right way of scheduling my day.

Oliver Burkeman:

And at the same time, not coincidentally, I ended up writing this column for The Guardian newspaper for more than a decade. One of the topics of which, it wasn't all about this stuff, but one thing it enabled me to do was to review the new books and try out the new systems and take the new courses, which is on the one hand like the best thing ever because you get to indulge your weird obsession for work.

Oliver Burkeman:

But on the other hand, it's a little bit enabling. I say in the book, it's a little bit like being an alcoholic employed as a wine reviewer. There's an excuse there to keep pursuing ... What I was doing, I see now in hindsight, was trying to find the technique or set of techniques that would deliver me this feeling of being in total control of my time, being able to handle anything that might be thrown at me, never having to disappoint people by saying no to them, feeling secure and confident about where my life was headed and my work was headed.

Oliver Burkeman:

I was investing a lot in the hope that I could control my time in this way. And so I think one of the sort of surprising benefits of that was if you try like a hundred different ways over years of trying to reach this kind of control, this sort of mastery of your time and it keeps not working, that's actually a very useful process to go through because you begin to wonder if the question you're asking is the problem rather than that you haven't found the right answer to it yet.

Oliver Burkeman:

So in many ways, this book is like what comes on the other side of that. It's like, I became sort of disillusioned in a certain sense, although I think it's a very positive idea, positive kind of disillusionment. And I think in some ways that's what I'm now trying to communicate in this book. I'm trying to clear up certain illusions that gets in our way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I think you have a fair critique of traditional time management as you become more efficient, as you become more productive. One of the arguments you make, and I'd like you to take it far beyond this observation is great, now you just have capacity to fill your life with even more. And where is that getting us? And I wrote *At Your Best* as not a rebuke. It's a certainly very different angle than what you have, but I found the same thing too, that you can just become more efficient but that doesn't make you more effective.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what were your quibbles, arguments, frustrations with traditional time management? And more particularly, what it was producing in your life, Oliver?

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah. It's a great way of asking the question. I mean, so firstly, yes, we can talk about this in much more detail. But I think a lot of people recognize that problem with purely focusing on efficiency, this idea that if you make many system really, including your own personal productivity, if you make that system more efficient and that's all you do, so you get better and better at processing more inputs in the same amount of time. All else being equal, what will happen is that for various different reasons, you'll attract more and more inputs into that system.

Oliver Burkeman:

And I think there's also a reason to believe that there are more and more junk inputs as well. So it's like a lower quality of stuff. And we see this reflected in sort of ... This is Parkinson's law, the idea that the work expands to fill the time available for its completion. It's that old thing about how the reward for good time management is more work because if you become the person in your office who can process a project faster than anyone else, what do you think is going to happen? You're just going to become a receptacle for even more of them, whether or not that's in line with you goals and your values.

Oliver Burkeman:

I think to get really sort of briefly deep about it, the problem that I have with all of this advice, or at least with the way that I think people use it. I don't think the individual productivity writers are always at fault here necessarily. There's this kind of, they will talk about the fact that you can't do everything. They will talk about the fact that you've got to make choices, but there is very often this kind of back door or unspoken hope that you can actually use this most recent shiniest system to kind of avoid having to confront the consequences of being a finite human with limited time.

Oliver Burkeman:

So in many cases, it's not that the person writing the book is a pro. I think David Allen's Getting Things Done is a work of genius and has sort of influenced me in unlimited ways. My problem with that book was that I came to it thinking, "Ah, right now I've got the way to never have to make any difficult decisions with my time," which he doesn't claim he's going to offer, not his fault.

Oliver Burkeman:

Other writers and sort of gurus I think are more at fault in what they hold out as being the consequence. So if you come to these productivity techniques in that spirit, this idea that it's somehow going to enable you to do an end run around the human condition, you're not going to have to make tough choices. You're not going to have to sacrifice things you care about in order to focus on some other things that you care about.

Oliver Burkeman:

You're always going to be able to process no matter how many emails come in or however many ambitions occur to you, or however many obligations people try to put on you, you're always going to be able to find a way to handle them. Then that's when it all goes wrong and it's a recipe for just getting more stressed and more frustrated because you never get to the place that you're aiming for.

Oliver Burkeman:

Just before you reply, let me ask if the roosters who are on the adjoining property to where I live have just started going completely insane. So if this microphone is picking up too much hen noise, let me know. Well, I'm not sure what I can do about it, but let me know anyway.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think that's just fantastic. I've never had roosters on the podcast before. So I think we'll just leave it in. I-

Oliver Burkeman:

They're marking their territory. It's this kind of like in chicken world, it's the expression of the ultimate kind of masculine testosterone fueled superiority. And it just sounds so ridiculous. It's just such a silly noise. Anyway, carry on.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you're in the north of England. Are you all over?

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah, we are. We moved into the country. We can talk about that if you want from Brooklyn, New York.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, from New York.

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, wow. what I was going to ask you was approximately how old were you when you realized this traditional approach, this geeked-out approach to time management is not producing good things in my life. When did that hit you?

Oliver Burkeman:

Well, it definitely didn't all happen at once. I do write in the book about an epiphany, which happened to me, I guess when I was about ... It wasn't very long ago, 40 or something. I'm 46 now, but I think all through my 30s, it was growing. And I think, I don't know if this is what you're getting at necessarily, but I definitely think there are formulations of the idea of a midlife crisis, not the ones we sort of joke about and the sort of caricature, but the idea in Carl Jung and in other psychologists. About this idea that there comes a point when certain strategies that maybe worked and served you pretty well as a young adult start to stop working and you need to think again.

Oliver Burkeman:

And I think it definitely was for me, the way this manifested, was an example of that. I've tried not to write a book that only speaks to other people in that situation because I think a lot of these insights are totally useful to get a handle on if you're 22 or 70, and if you feel that you haven't yet. But yeah, for me,

it was very much a sort of, hang on a second. This has sort of worked in a way, not very well, but sort of for my 20s and early 30s and it's sort of stopping working.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's interesting, 500 interviews almost in on this podcast, one of the recurring themes, Oliver, is a lot of people, a lot of leaders end up working, refining, developing a system. And somewhere around late 30s to very early 40s, question it all and go, "What is this actually getting me?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I think there's two paths. You either reinvent, like I did. My burnout happened at 41. So your big questioning started around a similar stage of life. And I think the option is you reinvent and get better or perhaps you become very cynical and start to eye that retirement line going, "This stinks. Here I am." And it was sort of that, "Gosh, this is not making me a better person, a better partner, a better father eventually, this life."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you were an acclaimed journalist. You did great work at an international level. So it's not like, "Oh, here I am, piddling away at this job I don't like." You were kind of living the dream but realized it wasn't a dream. Is that a fair or more like had nightmarish qualities to the dream?

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah. And I think that's totally right. I think that ... I mean, I don't want to overstate my own level of crisis. I'm not someone who I think if you ... For me, it was characterized much more by a sort of slow burn of anxiety and just not being that happy. So I do think that some of the ways in which I'd approached using my time definitely had some sort of positive effect.

Oliver Burkeman:

As you say, I'd managed to build a career that I think was pretty good. But if you're doing that in the constant belief that you are headed ... They're all sort of byproducts of this quest to get to this point where you're going to be able to relax and be like, "Okay, now I know what I'm doing in life. Now, I'm on top of things. Now, things are working out."

Oliver Burkeman:

It's when you keep failing to get to that point through this method, that it eventually begins to lose some of its allure because you're being led forward to something. Not that I didn't have a huge amount of fun and creative fulfillment doing all the things that I did as a working journalist, I really, really did have that. But they were all sort of ultimately meaningful to me it seemed because of where they were leading and where they were leading was presumptively somewhere where I was felt in control and secure and not so vulnerable.

Oliver Burkeman:

And so I write in the book. One of the things that was obvious to me at that point was that ... Sorry, these chickens are-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yes. Now, he is coming through. This is entertaining. Everyone is leaning in to see what happen next, Oliver.

Oliver Burkeman:

The problem is I've tried this. They're not my chicken, but if I go and sort of try to intimidate them, they go about, they get very, very flustered and they move about two feet and it makes no difference to the sound interruption. So, there's really no point. It's one of those things you just have to accept, I think.

Carey Nieuwhof:

My parents lived on the water for a number of years, and when my grandmother was still alive, she was in her late 70s or 80s, her job during the day when my parents were at work was to go and chase the Canada geese off the water, off the lawn. And it was never effective, but it gave her something to do. They would come back about a half hour later. So I think we are losing the battle against nature in the meta sense and perhaps in the micro sense. But I think we will persist.

Oliver Burkeman:

Yes. I asked somebody around here, what's the way to get them to stop making a big noise if you want them to. And he said, "A bullet." So they're not my chickens and I will not be taking that action.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm not too worried about it.

Oliver Burkeman:

Anyway, what was I saying? I think that one obvious area where these methods don't seem to work so much are in sort of my personal, in your personal life or one's personal life. It's like you can get a lot done in the professional world through methods that are maybe not making you happy, but are generating enough positive results to not be questioned. But they don't tend to work so well when it comes to relationships and parenting and things like that.

Oliver Burkeman:

And I think what I came to see in hindsight, I write about this, was that I had on some level been thinking that I was going to get to a point where my life was so in order. And like I was so on top of things that then I would be able to build the life that I assumed I wanted to at some point, which was to be in a committed relationship and perhaps to be a parent, which I turned out - I ended up being though it wasn't always a part that I knew would happen, I think, or knew that I wanted to happen, that I might be able to do all this just as another project feeling like calm and confident about it.

Oliver Burkeman:

Okay, you put it into practice and it happens and your life goes swimmingly. And of course, it's very obvious to anyone who's been through any part of that that actually what you have to do is just sort of jump. You have to surrender this desire to feel like you know exactly what you're doing in order to do an awful lot of the most important things in life.

Oliver Burkeman:

And if you had to know what you were doing before you became a parent, nobody would ever become a parent because it's one of those experiences that resists that kind of knowing from the outside. So, that was one reason that I began to see the limitations of this approach. But apart from anything else as well, I just wasn't ... It's not a way to feel very happy, to feel like you're constantly approaching something that you never get to. And it's been quite a few years now. So don't you think you would've got to it by now if it was there, I suppose?

Carey Nieuwhof:

That whole idea of hope or promise deferred, right? Which I think is ... And this is one of the things I really appreciate. I mean, I picked it up thinking it was a time management book and realized this is as much a work of philosophy and perhaps as well talk about theology, I think as it is anything which I really enjoyed. But I'd love just -

Carey Nieuwhof:

So people who haven't read the book *Four Thousand Weeks* as a concept, where did that come to you and not a spoiler alert, but that's basically the number of weeks that you have in a typical lifespan, is about 4,000 weeks. And the great subtitle, *Time Management for Mortals*. It's fantastic. How did that concept hit you? Was it a particularly morbid day when you're like, "Oh, all I have is 4,000 weeks." How did that hit you, Oliver?

Oliver Burkeman:

I don't vividly remember where I was in my life when I made the calculation. I remember what happened when I made the calculation, which is that I sort of freaked out. And then as I say in the book, I went around asking my friends, "How many weeks do you think ... Don't do any maths in your head. Just tell me what you think." And you get some wild figures. People say like 150,000 or something. And you're like, "I'm afraid not. At 4,000 ..." I'm rounding down to get a good headline figure. But basically, it's not many more than that is equivalent to the average lifespan in the West.

Oliver Burkeman:

And in a way, there's a bait and switch involved in the title here because firstly, I think that induces panic in people when they realize what it is, and I hope and believe that the philosophy that the book espouses actually comes as a relief and a liberation. There's one approach to all this stuff, which involves saying, not you can do everything and you have all the time in the world, which is one mistake of some kinds of time management advice but actually the other kind. The other way of doing this that I differ from is saying like, "You've got so little time. You've just got to do something totally extraordinary with every day and you've got to be doing ... Are we going base jumping at the weekends," and whatever it might be.

Oliver Burkeman:

And that's just an incredibly stressful, self-conscious, anxious way to live. I don't want to counsel that either, but what I'm really getting at, I think in 4,000 weeks is like, it's really finite. It's very short, but even if it were quite a bit longer, it would still have this quality of coming to an end. And because it comes to an end that all these things matter for us, this question of how you should use a day and whether you are wasting your time and how you can fit more things into the same amount of time. All of this is just a consequence of the fact that time is, that our earthly time is finite.

Oliver Burkeman:

So in a way it's not really to do with the fact that it's only 4,000 weeks because the same problem would happen if it was 8,000. I think maybe if it was like 200,000, that would feel so different that we wouldn't be troubled in the same way, but it's a finitude that I really want to get at as opposed to the specific number.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think this might be my last question about traditional time management techniques, but I think regular listeners to this podcast are the kinds of people who buy the time management books. And you argue that it produces or can produce an existential angst. It did it in you and it does in others. And then you also say, I think you make a really compelling argument early in the book that people are struggling with what you call existential overwhelm, a term that I love. It just immediately resonated. What do you mean by that? Like existential angst, existential overwhelm. What does that mean to you, Oliver?

Oliver Burkeman:

Well, what it means in the context that I define it in the book is that it's easy to assume that when we think about being overwhelmed and busy today and the particular quality of unmanageability that I think comes with modern busyness. It's not just having lots to do. It's feeling that there's more that you must do than you can do.

Oliver Burkeman:

This is obviously felt a lot by people in various lines of work where they have long to-do lists, but it's kind of broader than that. It kind of a phenomenon just of being alive today at this point in history. So that even if you are retired and you have plenty of financial resources and you have none of the problems that we think of a busy working person that's having, there's still like far more possibilities in the world in which we live. And you will know about far more possibilities than you could ever get around to.

Oliver Burkeman:

If you are a sort of very hedonistic person who just like uses social media to find out about great parties happening in your vicinity and want to spend your whole life with them, there will still be more of them. Thanks to the way you've connected to them technologically than you could possibly attend. And you can sort of replicate this for any domain you like.

Oliver Burkeman:

There's just a sense that the experiences the world has to offer because of our point in history and because of how we relate to the information about them are just constantly far more than you will ever be able to get your arms around. And that in a way, this does leave people feeling really burdened even if what they're burdened by is how to spend a lot of leisure time. It might be a bit nicer to be overwhelmed in that way than overwhelmed in some other ways. But it's still this kind of lack of fit between what's on offer and what you can make time for yourself.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It is that sense of infinitely more. Well, I went to Machu Picchu and that was great. But I haven't yet been to Africa, but I haven't yet been to Asia. Oh, I've been to Asia, but we only spent a week there. We have to go back and do a month. And it's just like the to-do list at work never stops. The number of

relationships is infinite, the number of experiences. We become kind of those adrenaline junkies, those experience junkies. And what I really loved, and I want to pivot now and talk a little bit about the philosopher.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So here's a quote and I'm paraphrasing the Swedish philosopher Martin Hagglund, if I got that name right.

Oliver Burkeman:

I think so, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. So this is what he said. "If you really thought life would never end, then nothing could ever genuinely matter because you'd never be faced with having to decide whether or not to use a portion of your precious life on something." Can you dig in? That's a really fascinating quote and I guess this idea, and we do have tech titans now basically pursuing living forever or longer or 200 years. But his point is simply that if you have this idea of living forever, it demotivates you from prioritizing your time. Can you explain why that was such a compelling thought to you?

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah. And that you read is me paraphrasing him, and then you're paraphrasing that. So I just want to be ... He might object. If he came across this, he might object to what I'm getting from his work. But I'll tell you what I do get from his work. He wrote a brilliant book called *This Life*, which is a sort of case for secularism in many ways and a case for finding meaning in the fact that we are finite.

Oliver Burkeman:

And let's put a pin in the question of whether the eternal life that he's talking about is actually what religious people mean. I'd love to return to that topic.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I would love to talk about that.

Oliver Burkeman:

That if we had eternal life in the sort of mundane sense of the life we have now just continuing and continuing and continuing and never coming to an end. In other words, the kind in theory might be developed in Silicon Valley at some point in the future solving death, as they not at all hubristically like to describe it.

Oliver Burkeman:

There would be a lack of stakes. I think that's the way I think about it, that the stakes would be nonexistent. The reason that it matters to use a portion of time for anything is ultimately because deciding to use it on that thing is deciding not to use it on anything else. So that's why you have to make tough choices. It's also why it also sort of gives meaning to some of those choices if you see what you're sacrificing in order to make them. And for a finite human, there's always sacrifice in every choice, whether you recognize it or not.

Oliver Burkeman:

Whereas if we lived forever, I say in the book, the answer to the question, should I do X or Y today or with this career? Or should I ... It would always be just like, who cares? I mean, you'll have a million other opportunities to try out all the alternatives. You'll never have to forego any experience that occurs to you or any ambition or any relationship that you feel like you might want to enter into. I mean, the thought experiment breaks down. Obviously, you can't be in a monogamous relationship with two people at the same time. And there are still choices.

Oliver Burkeman:

But what is given to us as a result of our being finite is the fact that every choice matters, that there's this sort of huge hinterland of things you're turning down every time you decide to do anything.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So yeah, you said you're open to this. So I'd like to just run some thoughts by you and just get your reaction to it because I read the book as a person of faith. So I'm a Christian and I'm one of those people who do believe that life happens after we die in our earthly existence. But there's two different views. And I'll just talk for a moment and then I'd love to see your engagement because I don't think your book is an antitheistic book. You seemed very open. I think you quote from Jesus. I believe you quote from Ecclesiastes and you quote from other world faith. So it's not like an antitheistic book.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But my understanding, if you look at and again, we have a variety of Christians. People are not going to a hundred percent agree on everything, but if you believe that there's an afterlife, there's two views of it. And one that I would not subscribe to is what you do in this life doesn't matter because you can live forever. You can destroy the environment because God's going to renew it. You can do whatever you want with this life. That doesn't strike me well at all, or that nothing happens spiritually on this life until you get to heaven that you can't really fully know God, that reconciliation isn't possible. Peace isn't possible.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There's another view and this one, I subscribe to a little bit more, and I had a fascinating conversation with John Ortberg. We'll link to it in the show notes, about eternity being now in session. And so the idea, the study of like eternity is in theology called eschatology. It just means it happens after you die.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And there's a view called realized or partially realized eschatology. So when Jesus walked around, he would say, "The kingdom of heaven is near, or the kingdom of heaven is now." And you look at that and go, "Well, 2000 years ago, it was really close, but it's not close now." But another understanding of it, and I think the better understanding is, "No, it actually is now."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I've been married to the same woman for over 30 years. And, I was saying to my wife, Toni, the other day, "it feels like the kingdom of God is nearer in our marriage than it was 15 years ago." Like there is a peace, a harmony, a oneness. When you pursue peace over war, I think you realize some of the kingdom

of God. When you restore a harmony to nature, you get a little bit closer to the Garden of Eden and a little bit less on the other side of Eden. And you care for the environment, you're realizing the kingdom.

Carey Nieuwhof:

When there's peace between human beings of different worldviews, you're realizing the kingdom. So all these things that Jesus taught, you could say, "Oh, they're pie in the sky after you die." Or you could say, "No, no, no, they're fully realized after you die." But actually, the idea that we're living forever actually incentivizes you to make this world, not just for your sake but for the sake of others, a better place. Thoughts on that.

Oliver Burkeman:

It's totally fascinating. I've been endlessly fascinated by the various religious and especially Christian responses to the book, which have not at all been hostile. I mean, very sometimes critical, but it clearly connects to a lot of things that are very interesting to people who think deeply about Christian theology. Now, and I'm totally religion curious. I'm far from being antitheist.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I didn't pick that up at all in the book.

Oliver Burkeman:

No, I kind of feel like, the only problem is there are certain things I think you have to believe that I can't honestly say that I do believe, but there is so much in those perspectives that does resonate and that I draw on here and there in the book.

Oliver Burkeman:

I think that the ... So, one thing to say here is I think that there are clearly lots of ways of talking about eternal life that do not vibe with this notion that it's just more time to complete your to-do list or whatever. That it's some form of realization or there's another noun that's not coming to me. But some sort of like a flowering or a blossoming of something in a way that is a sort of a state change and it doesn't make sense to think of it as a mere continuation.

Oliver Burkeman:

And then secondly, also these ideas that there's something sort of, certainly some ways that people talk about eternal life. I feel like I've come across this more in the Jewish faith, but it might well be a Christian idea that it's more to do with switching from a sort of a horizontal to a vertical idea of time, if that's a one way of trying to get at it. It's not a linear idea at all. And that may be connected to something that you were just saying.

Oliver Burkeman:

It's to do with some concept of time that goes beyond the timeline. So it's not just about, in what way does the timeline keep going if you believe in this. It's just a separate ... It's a fundamentally different thing that then connects to certain ideas in Eastern religions about spiritual enlightenment and transcending the self and all these ideas.

Oliver Burkeman:

And you get this notion in all sorts of philosophies and spiritual faith that in some sense, we are time, which I find very sort of fascinating idea to sort of think with. And I'm probably not making a lot of sense because it's getting to the limits of my ability to talk about, but there is some sense of the collapse of that linear view of time and the idea that eternal life means something completely other than that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is very biblical, Oliver, the collapse of the linear view of time. No, this is right on. I mean, theologians, it's very interesting. Theologians, I mean back as far as Aquinas and before that, had this idea of creation ex nihilo, which means out of nothing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And for a long time, nobody really believed that, that the universe was eternal. And then when you look at the Big Bang, it seems like, "Oh, everything actually did come out of nothing," whatever that nothing was. And time had a beginning, but time also has no ending, which is interesting. And the Christian worldview would say, "No, God always was and always will be."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so there is that idea that this space-time continuum that we're in at some point is going to be rendered meaningless and we will be in some other state, which almost sounds very ... Yeah, that sounds very meta, but there's some really good theology around that.

Oliver Burkeman:

I think where this really interests me and maybe this is going off topic, so just tell me. But I think if I'm honest in my book, I treat the fact that we long to be infinite and that we long to have all the time in the world, et cetera, et cetera. I don't really talk about where this comes from. I just point out that there's a mismatch between it and our worldly existence.

Oliver Burkeman:

But I guess if I was sort of pressured to explain that I would sort of see it as some kind of evolutionary glitch or some sort of, it's the fact our minds have developed these capacities to sort of think about or contemplate eternity, contemplate being able to be more than mortal and to want and to ... I think that's the thing. It's the desire, to want to be able to do more than we can do on earth. And it's just a sort of accident that we need to get over.

Oliver Burkeman:

And since the book came out, I've read some and been contacted to discuss some very interesting aspects of this coming out of Christian theology, which I think one way of thinking about what these people want to say in terms of where they part company with my thesis is that longing, that is itself. There is somehow the expression of something divine that the longing itself, which is not fulfillable in the mundane time that we have on the planet. Hence, all the things I write about in the book.

Oliver Burkeman:

But that longing itself is either from God or evidence of God or something like that. There's a very famous quote from C.S. Lewis that I'm sure you are super familiar with that, "If I find in myself a desire that can't be fulfilled by any aspect of my earthly existence, then the logical conclusion is that I was

created for something more than earthly existence." I'm not sure I buy that logic from my vantage point, but it's fascinating to me because I don't think I have a very good alternative answer to where this longing to be infinite comes from.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and I love the philosophical slash almost theological bent of your book. And I don't know that I have a lot of significant departure points from your conclusion because the Scripture, when you look at them, Oliver, I mean I think you and Solomon could be first cousins. When you read Ecclesiastes, depending on whether you think it was Solomon or Qoheleth, that's a long debate, but the author of Ecclesiastes and you have an awful lot in common. It's like, "This is meaningless, meaningless so chasing after the wind. I want to get to putting a dent in the universe."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And yet, when I think about realized eschatology, there's been a passage, I've been reading the Scripture since I was a kid, that always perplexed me because we believe in salvation through Jesus. It's not like, "Well, when you die, a little more good in your life, so therefore you go to heaven or a little more bad in your life, therefore you're not in heaven." We don't believe that. We believe that Jesus, I do once and for all, died for people's sins. And it's through grace that we're saved, not by works.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And yet Jesus drops all of these things where he says, "And great is your reward in heaven." It's like, "Well, like what?" I've always wondered like, "Okay, so what, like a Mercedes, bigger house?" That seems really selfish and trivial. "Is it your salvation?" No, because that got handled another way.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And as I put that together, this is a working theory. I may get lots of comments about this working theory, but I think it's because there's evidence that work isn't going to go away in eternity, that what we're doing here is a shadow of what is to come, a distorted shadow but a shadow of what is to come. There'll be relationships. There'll be meaning. There'll be purpose. And that perhaps if you were faithful, and Jesus told a couple of parables on this, if you were faithful with what you had been entrusted with in this life, you will be entrusted with more in the next.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So for example, we've had this thing in North America called the emerald ash borer that went through our community in the last two years and destroyed a lot of trees. We have a lot of mature trees in our property. We lost maybe 50, a hundred trees. This year, I'm replanting them not just for beauty's sake, we still have a lot of trees, but partly I think that's my stewardship over creation. I get to co-partner with this, make it a better place. This leadership podcast is an exercise of stewardship. It's a way to bring great conversations with amazing leaders to thousands and millions of leaders.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so I really enjoy doing it. And so actually, it's that eternal incentive. Not that I want the bigger house, I don't even know what that looks like, but, okay, if I am faithful somehow in this life that that goes into eternity, that's incentivizing me to do something meaningful with my life. Just a different view. Any thoughts are welcome.

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah, it's fascinating. I think the ... I don't know how it connects with exactly with what you're saying, but I think that one of the really sort of potent ways of thinking about what people are doing when they are trying to use productivity to get control of their lives and to sort of become masters of their time. And in some sense, to play God over their time is to ... There is a sort of a quasi-religious aspect there.

Oliver Burkeman:

I think it makes sense to talk about what I was looking for from those techniques back in those days as my early 30s as some kind of salvation, that word seems appropriate. It was a very bad way to find it, but it was-

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, lots of people-

Oliver Burkeman:

... the urge is well described by that. And so the notion that we're trying to, I think whenever I write for a largely secular audience, whenever I write about the idea that we are trying to, that people are sort of trying to justify themselves and justify their existence on the planet through the volume of their productivity and somehow get to a stage where they're okay and enough and accepted and acceptable because they are so efficient and productive that they can do all this stuff, that always resonates with people very strongly.

Oliver Burkeman:

And the connection to discussions of grace and work-based salvation is just unignorable there, right? I mean, we're talking about the same psychological dynamics, whether among religious people or not, and the notion that maybe you don't have to do an impossible amount or even anything to justify your existence on the planet is an incredibly powerful one that people are hungry for regardless of how they frame things theologically or otherwise, I think.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No. And I think to me, that is at the heart of the Gospel, that salvation by grace means it doesn't matter what I do. I do not need to justify love. God's love for me comes unconditionally. And in some ways, you can see salvation as I'm not earning it, I'm accepting it and I'm walking into it. And because I'm loved, my life has meaning. And out of that meaning flows something hopefully significant.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And one of the things I love that you take issue with because I've been guilty of this, is like using the phrase that Steve Jobs popularized or perhaps invented, "I want to make a dent in the universe, or I want my life to count, or I want it to have meaning or purpose." I've definitely felt that urge and that's an urge I'm trying to have redeemed on a regular basis. Purify my motives, God, make sure it's pure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What is wrong with that kind of thinking? And because what you're saying, I mean, the psalmists talk about it like we're a spec in the universe. We're dirt, we're dust, we're nothing. And who is God that you would think of us and you've got a chapter that's very close to that. I think it's the one Tim Ferriss

featured on his podcast. Talk about that realization as you've had it, Oliver, because I found it fascinating.

Oliver Burkeman:

Oh, thank you. Well, this chapter's called Cosmic Insignificance Therapy and this is my notion that there's actually something very empowering and uplifting about recognizing how insignificant each of us is in the cosmic scheme, on the time scale and from the perspective of the universe.

Oliver Burkeman:

Again, I think there are probably some interesting overlaps on tension points with theological views, but I'm sort of making the argument that there's a very great self-centeredness to a lot of the problems that certainly, I think a lot of people encounter with time, not necessarily only with people who have sort of megalomaniac personalities. I think it can be very shy and retiring. People can also be sort of entangled with this kind of self-focus where it just feels like every decision you face matters cosmically. You absolutely have to get decisions that you make right. It goes along with this feeling that's very hard to shake even though you know it's absurd on some level that the whole of history is there to lead up to your life.

Oliver Burkeman:

And now you've got to make sure you do the right things with it. And there's something very, very freeing about seeing that most of the decisions that I get sort of tangled up in and feel anxious about on a day to day basis will not matter to anybody a hundred years from now, not because I then become a nihilist and do nothing and think what's the point but because then I think, well, why not take the riskier, the bolder decisions? Why not do the things that could lead to some really interesting outcomes? And it's freeing in that respect.

Oliver Burkeman:

The other thing is that there's something wrong and I'm working here off the work of the philosopher, Iddo Landau, and I write about his work in the book that there's something wrong with the definition of meaning when it comes to assessing the meaning of your life that fixates on this idea of putting a dent in the universe, of creating a legacy that rings through the millennia or something, because that would seem to rule out lots of things that I think we instinctively know are meaningful ways to spend life-cooking nutritious meals for your children, beautifying a little corner of your neighborhood even though it's not going to save the world, caring for an elderly relatives.

Oliver Burkeman:

I read a thing that made a big impression on me by, it was Charles Eisenstein, the spiritual writer. But writing about somebody else, an environmentalist who had received blowback from the environmental movement for taking sort of a couple of years off the cause to spend most of it caring around the clock for his elderly mother-in-law and just that there's something wrong with a value system that says, "Well, that's a total waste of time. You just shouldn't be bothered with that nonsense because she's going to die and the planet is still going to be on a glide path to terrible climate crisis." We know that there are meaningful things we do with our lives all the time that are not reflected on that sort of world straddling scale.

Oliver Burkeman:

And so just sort of lowering the bar when it comes to one's definition of what counts as meaning can enable you to see that an awful lot of things you're already doing may be more meaningful than you'd realized. And that a lot of the choices that are open to you about how to spend your life are more meaningful than you'd thought.

Oliver Burkeman:

Now, I can't resist the totally freelance unqualified theological speculation here and say that I suspect that one's response to this from a religious perspective is to say, "Well, the way you get around this paradox or this seeming ... You don't just have to lower your bar. You have to understand what it means that God cares about the movement of the tiniest sparrow's wing," right? I mean, if God can be omnipresent in the lives of everybody, then everything they do matters from a cosmic scale too, in the sense that the God scale is the cosmos scale.

Oliver Burkeman:

So, I'm open to that possibility I suppose, but I'm just using it in the ... I suppose I'm just doing step one in that chapter of the book and say, okay, we'll talk about that later maybe. But just like maybe go easy on yourself from the point of view of this notion that what you do in your life has to fulfill what you think of as putting a dent in the universe, because I mean did the iPhone even put a dent in the universe? No disrespect to Steve Jobs, but in a couple of millennia, a couple of thousand years, are we going to be ... Is humanity, if it survives, going to be using iPhones? I assume not.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No. And will we remember who Steve Jobs was? Who invented the telegraph? Good luck with that.

Oliver Burkeman:

Right.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And half the audience is going, what's a telegraph?

Oliver Burkeman:

Exactly.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I loved it because, and again, there's great biblical precedence for that view so people of faith don't need to be threatened by that at all. There is a like, "Oh, my goodness, I'm just a spec in the universe and what does my life matter?" And yet, somehow it does, it's a bit of a paradox. And it's that line that I've heard and used a few times. It's like, "Name your great-great grandfather," 99% of people can't do it.

Oliver Burkeman:

Wow. Yes, I haven't heard that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh, yeah. Can you? Can you name your great-great grandfather?

Oliver Burkeman:

Great-great, no.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No? Great, perhaps but not great-great.

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah, with a little bit of pause for thought. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And so we're significant, we're publishing books. And I wonder, I've got about a decade on you so I'm about 10 years older than you are. But I remember, and you can probably relate to this because it was predigital when you were a child. But I remember movie stars and famous people, and to me, there was zero access to that. They might as well have lived on another planet that I had no access to because we didn't have millions of dollars and I wasn't famous and I didn't have the talents to sing or play music or whatever it is that made you famous.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But then said iPhone comes along and social media comes along and suddenly, we all have a shot at making a dent in the universe. And you can start an Instagram account and some people go from zero to a million. Others go from zero to 10,000 or a hundred thousand and suddenly we all have this shot at it. And I'm a driven person by nature. Something I'm working on, you appear to have been a driven person by nature. And do you think, because you have a section on distractions too, and I want to get to where this is all going before we wrap up today because you found a lot more peace since you've kind of realized that you're mortal, that you're a speck in the universe, that perhaps you are not going to make a dent in the universe.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I guess the question is really is social media just making it easier for all of us to fall under this spell that our life has to matter, it has to be significant and somehow that has to be measurable because we need a certain amount of fame or impact or difference or destiny or whatever? Do you think that's harder now than it was say when you or I were kids?

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah. I think it is harder. And I think social media and digital technology in general is a big part to blame. The problem I always have is that I do think that these kinds of technologies, what they tend to do is just catalyze and supercharge everything in both directions. So, it's definitely true that that sort of living in public and living for comparison and the creation of a sort of competitive dynamics where there didn't need to be competitive dynamics, nothing wrong with competition in certain contexts. But there's no reason why we all need to be dragged into the same sort of pyramid structure battle with each other to be the best. We ought to be able to just all do our thing.

Oliver Burkeman:

On the other hand, I'm very much aware that I couldn't, without many aspects of this, the internet certainly. I wouldn't have been able to write this book as I did. And I don't think it would've been able to reach the people it's reached. One of the fascinating things for any of us in the sort of writing audience, content creation, podcast, whatever that whole world is called, I'm sure you know this from personal experience, right?

Oliver Burkeman:

Because these technologies allow us to reach our tribes, the people who are really interested in following what we are doing and engaging with it, it doesn't actually need to be that many people as a proportion of the world's population, who are ... It certainly isn't. I've been very, very lucky and I'm grateful about how the response to this book, but the overwhelming majority of the people on the planet have absolutely no idea who either me or you are.

Oliver Burkeman:

But because these technologies enable us to connect in these ways, you can find and you can reach those people. Because I think the other thing when I was coming up and even when I was a sort of young writer, and it's still true today for some people in this trade. They think that what they're waiting for is everyone's sort of competing to have the mega blockbuster that's going to make them millions and millions of dollars. And then they're going to be super famous. And that basically doesn't happen in book publishing or many other realms. And when it does to anyone, it happens to one in out of a thousand people.

Oliver Burkeman:

So, I guess I don't know why I went on a whole pro social media rant here, but I think one of the ... There are possibilities to use these technologies to actually embody that spirit of cosmic insignificance therapy. The idea that like, if I can reach a few thousand people and we can have an interesting discussion about things that matter, that's great. I don't need to be a Hollywood superstar commanding the attention of millions.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So this isn't your first book. Is this the one that you've had the most response to, *Four Thousand Weeks*, to date of all the things you've published?

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah. I've only written one other book. I had another book out that was a collection of newspaper columns. So I've only got one real comparison point, and yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, here's the question I want to ask. It's maybe a hypothetical, but I want you to imagine 33-year-old Oliver Burkeman writing this book when you were caught up in the productivity game, that you were caught up in geeking out, and your life was busy and it was somewhat unsatisfying leading you to question everything. How would you respond to that kind of success then versus how it feels now? Because in the last 10, 15 minutes of the interview, I want to talk about your life now, some of the values you hold now.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But I think most of us who have experienced a modicum of success would say, "Boy, you better have something solid to catch you because the high of hitting a New York Times list or being the talk of the town for that 15 minutes or 15 hours or 15 years doesn't satisfy the way you think it would, but the productivity trap makes you think it would."

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah. I think that's totally right. I think what I'd add to that is the difference is not that I ... I don't think I'm a completely different person than I was like 13 years ago. In fact, I'm really into this notion that a big part of personal growth is sort of accepting that there are certain aspects of your own personality that you're never going to get a free of even though you really like to. And actually there's a great liberation in that acceptance. But it's definitely, I can see it in myself much more now. So, it's easier to sort of step away from, get some distance on, and respond more creatively to.

Oliver Burkeman:

So the one thing that springs to my mind is I was always in that famous distinction between fixed mindset and growth mindset that I'm sure you'll have encountered. I was always a fixed mindset, a fixed mindset person. And one characteristic of that is that when something goes well, the way you take that is that the bar has now been raised and you've got to meet that. You've got to keep meeting that new standard.

Oliver Burkeman:

So, I did very well in high school academics just in a completely tediously boring, predictable way that you would expect, a certain kind of diligent student to do. But it doesn't bring pleasure because if you get straight As one year, then now you've really got to do it the next year. It'll be worse if you didn't. So, that idea that success just sets a new bar that you have to keep meeting in order to feel good about yourself was something that I was very familiar with although I didn't consciously see it in those terms.

Oliver Burkeman:

And what's interesting with this book, I don't want to overstate its success, but yeah, it's definitely exceeded my expectations. What's interesting with this, I see that same dynamic kicking in. I do see that sort of stress response, which is like, "Oh God, it's doing, it's done this and this and this. And now I've got to make sure that it keeps in that chart or I've got to make sure that the paperback does as well as the hard cover." I totally see that operating, but I see it now. And that is different because now I can be like, "Oh yeah, it's that thing."

Carey Nieuwhof:

- attachment from it like, "Oh, that's me."

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah, exactly. It's me doing my old nonsense. I don't actually believe that. I don't believe that the next book I write, if I have the opportunity to write another book has got to be ... I don't intellectually believe that it's got to be as successful or more successful otherwise like that's terrible or something. But I definitely recognized that emotional reaction.

Oliver Burkeman:

So that's a difference and there's definitely a space there. There's definitely a gap. So I think that would've stressed me out more to have this particular level of success then but at the same time, I would probably have taken more of an ego boost from it because I just think like so much of this is luck and good fortune and accidents of timing. And probably the younger you are and the more you feel like you're trying to get in control of your life, the more you're going to want to take credit for things like that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. You cover so much in the book and I would encourage people to read it. You talk about freedom and loneliness. You take a poke at digital nomads who have all the freedom in the world, and yet not a lot of deep relationship. You talk about just this piece that you have from realizing your insignificance. You talk about distractions and how to overcome the temptation that everybody else has a plan for your life, you got to figure that out.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you could describe your life now and some of the things that you're experiencing since you let go of the productivity treadmill, the productivity hamster wheel that you seem to be on, what are some qualitative changes that you feel in your life now? I'm trying to get the right word, but you know whether that's a feeling and emotion, a quality of peace. After having arrived through this philosophical framework at a new way of thinking about time, what are the tangible results in your life? How's it different?

Oliver Burkeman:

Well, I don't know if I've arrived in any finalistic sense. But yeah, having evolved in some ways, I'm definitely much less anxious than I was. The problem with these kinds of questions is you're always comparing. The correct comparison is with how I used to be as opposed to with a model human being. So I'm probably still pretty anxious as a person compared to some people. I'm probably still quite engaged.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Or even subjectively.

Oliver Burkeman:

But no, yeah, I'm definitely significantly sort of calmer. I'm a lot less rigid. I'm a lot more flexible in a sort of, I don't mean I'm just a pushover and do what everyone else wants me to do, but I'm much more able, I think, to have my own agenda for my life and my work coexist with other people's. Although I still struggle with it a bit, I think if I had had a ... I mean, I'm often just, as I say, I didn't become a parent until I was 40. And often I'm just amazed that people do this in their 20s. I would've been such a disastrous parent in my 20s.

Oliver Burkeman:

But to plan one's day in a way, for example, that it has direction and focus. And obviously, your book that I've been reading is totally in the spirit in a way that also allows for the fact that small children obey a different schedule and you want it to be able to interact. You don't want to plan your life in a way that

makes it, that renders it, that defines it as a problem. When my five-year-old bursts into the room, as he might at any moment during this recording by the way and wants to tell me something, you don't want to make it ...

Oliver Burkeman:

I think I'm better. It's a struggle, but I think I'm a lot better at sort of exerting agency in a relational context instead of either I get to plan everything or I just have to give up and do what everyone else wants me to do. And I sort of oscillate between like being a control freak and resentfully going along with everyone else, that ability to sort of navigate relational life, marital life, common life without losing sight of things that are uniquely my own agenda.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I feel like we arrived in a similar place via different methods. It's probably the greatest joy that I've found in the approach that I share in *At Your Best* is I am significantly less anxious. I'm still driven, but it's a modulated drivenness. It's not going to destroy the people around me or ruin relationships.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I have hobbies now. You got a whole section in the book or chapter two on hobbies, which I would strongly urge people. And this is great for those of us who are really driven, find something that costs you money that you really enjoy. There is a challenge. That's the definition of a hobby, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

But I felt, Oliver, when I was reading your book and preparing these questions, you and I could have spent an afternoon together and just let the tape run. But for my final question or one of my final questions, I want to talk about near the end of the book, you encourage people to abandon hope and have this really interesting micro narrative where you quote someone, I can't remember who, but who says, "Well, the apocalypse is coming. The apocalypse is coming." Well, maybe the apocalypse is here. The world, the Arctic ice caps are melting. And as we record this, we've got a war in Europe and a very angry Russian leader. Maybe the apocalypse is here.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I may be butchering your argument here, but you say, "This can actually bring you peace." Can you explain that? It's fascinating.

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah. I think that hope in the way it functions in our lives. I'm not saying this word doesn't get used in different ways, but I think the way it often functions in our lives is as a way of placing power and agency outside of ourselves. And I quote here in that section that the environmentalist, Derrick Jensen, who talks about this. You don't want to be hoping that governments change their way and start doing what you want them to do as an environmental campaigner. You don't want to be hoping that the next generation is going to sort out the mess the world is in. You don't want to be hoping that one day you'll have the freedom to spend your time on earth in the way that you consider most meaningful.

Oliver Burkeman:

You want to actually let go of that kind of hope in order to see that like, this is it, life isn't a dress rehearsal. You are here now. You've got the resources you have, and you don't need hope in this sense as to be a sort of motivator to lead you on to something that's going to be happening in the future. You can just do the things that bring meaning to you and to those you love out of the motive of love.

Oliver Burkeman:

So, Jensen has this lovely thing about why ... He's a real radical environmentalist if you look into his work. I mean, it's like he takes all this extraordinary long way, but he makes this point that like, you don't need to hope that salmon will survive in order to dedicate your life to saving the waterways where they live. You just need to love that they do exist and that you want to give your life or part of your life to allowing that to happen here and now.

Oliver Burkeman:

So again, just to return to a persistent theme of our conversation, I can see ways in which this feels antithetical to theological viewpoints about like what we're doing here and what that all means for the future. But at the same time, I can see a lot of affinities because I think it's this notion that like, it's here, it's right here that matters. And this is not sort of degraded version of something else, or a sort of provisional preparatory version of something else. This is it right here.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. And people have to read it. I think you really have to read that chapter because it made me think, and even looking at the life of Jesus, Jesus was very focused on the here and now. He talked about what would happen in the future, but very focused on what was around him and gave the famous passage that many of us struggle with is, don't worry, don't worry about your life. Don't worry about the future. Don't worry about tomorrow. You quote it. You quote it in the book.

Oliver Burkeman:

Right. "Have no care for the morrow for the morrow will take care of itself. It's sufficient to the day of the evils thereof." I say in the book, it's probably very sacrilegious, but I always hear wry humor in those lines. I mean, I always hear like-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I don't think that's sacrilegious.

Oliver Burkeman:

... you've not got enough to worry about? So, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oliver, this has been a fascinating conversation. Any final word for our audience today? Anything you would encourage them to do, a call to action, or a question you want them to ask themselves as we wrap up?

Oliver Burkeman:

Wow. I mean, call to action, no. I guess the question that I try to keep coming back to myself is something like ... I haven't got a specific phrasing of this, but something like, what would you do

differently today if you really let it sink into your bones that you aren't going to be able to do everything, that you can't, that you're going to have to neglect all sorts of things that legitimately matter in life, if you're going to spend your time and anything at all? And how would that affect how you spend the day, if you could actually sort of unclench a bit from that quest to make sure you made time for absolutely everything that could possibly strike you as meaningful? Because that is off the table, I think, for us in our lives.

Oliver Burkeman:

And I think it's a real relief because the pressure is off to try and do that. You just need to make a bit of time for a few things that count.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I really, really appreciate your book, your work, you taking the time in the midst of a really, really busy season for you to take an hour with our listeners. Obviously, book is everywhere, where can people find you online these days, Oliver?

Oliver Burkeman:

Yeah. Book is everywhere you'd expect to buy a book. And then my website, oliverburkeman.com, has more about the book and some. That's where you can sign up for the email newsletter that I write, which I call The Imperfectionist.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's what I'm going to sign up for right after finishing this. Thank you. Thank you so much for being with us. I really appreciate it.

Oliver Burkeman:

My pleasure. Thank you so much.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, I don't know about you, but I love it when we pulled the camera back a little bit and we start talking a little bit of philosophy and some theology and we start thinking about really why we do things and the bigger picture, not just how we do things. So, really enjoyed that conversation.

Carey Nieuwhof:

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Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, we got a lot coming up for you. Dave Ramsey is my next guest. I've been looking forward to this interview. We've been setting it up literally for two years, pandemic got involved, canceled trips, all that stuff. Well, here's an excerpt.

Dave Ramsey:

Because you underpaid and got a substandard programmer who did a substandard work and we call that Christian excellence? Come on. That's unbelievable and completely unacceptable. And yet, that has been pervasive in entire sections of Christianity to where when you say, when you put Christian on the outside of it, it means, "Oh, well, it's not a really good film, but it's a Christian film." What? I mean, come on. "Oh, it's not really good music, but it's Christian music. They said Jesus, you know."

Dave Ramsey:

No, I mean, come on. If you're going to put ... I tell our people, if you're going to put a cross on it, drive it right. If you're going to put a cross in the back window of your car, drive it with excellence. We're not going to walk around telling people we're Christians unless we are, A, one, the best in the market because we're a bad witness for Jesus when we're substandard. And underpaying people is a sure way to get some substandard work done.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Also coming up, we have got Shauna Niequist. That was a fascinating conversation. Andy Stanley, another one that I think is going to raise a few eyebrows in a good way. Who else have we got? We've got Susan Cain, Daniel Pink. I'm very excited to have Daniel back. Vanessa Van Edwards, Ramit Sethi, Jackie Hill Perry, and so many others. I think you're going to really enjoy this season that we have prepared for you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And thank you for continuing to share, continuing to get the word out. We're welcoming new listeners, I think, every single episode. And if you're one of them and you haven't hit subscribe yet, please do so. And if you enjoyed this episode, please share it on social. Please text the link to a friend. And would you let us know? You can tag me. I'm @careynieuwhof on Instagram, @cnieuwhof on other platforms.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And if you enjoyed this episode, you can get more content by going to theartofleadershipacademy.com. It's something we launched about a month ago and it is going fantastic. We've got hundreds and hundreds of leaders in there in the first 30 days. And the conversation is exactly what we hoped it would be. We've got leaders who are thoughtful, who are supporting each other. We've got world-class mentors in there who are going to be leading the conversation. And I've got all of my courses in there. I've got, well, just about everything in there that we produce.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I also do training for your team inside The Art of Leadership Academy. And I do a live monthly coaching call and I bring in some incredible guests as well for that. So you're probably thinking, "Well, how much is it?" It's like \$397 a year. That's it. Why? Because we want you to have access to the very best to have peers running in the same direction. We have business leaders in the academy. We have church leaders in the academy. We have people from all over the world in the academy.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you're going to find somebody that you can run with. We even have a really cool app that we've customized and you can hit the Near You button and figure out, "Oh my goodness, there's three other members in my area, my city, my county, my region." And you guys can hang out. It's a way to really

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Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, thank you so much for listening everybody, and we will catch you next time on the podcast. 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.