

Announcer:

The Art of Leadership Network.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Welcome to The Carey Nieuwhof Leadership podcast. It's Carey here, and I hope our time together today helps you thrive in life and leadership. I've been very excited to share this episode with you. Today's guest is none other than Malcolm Gladwell. Really, really thrilled that you're here. And today's episode is brought to you by the Church Disruption Summit. This is a free, live event I'm doing, where I'm going to dissect the Seven Disruptive Church Trends that I think will define the church of 2032. We're going to look ahead for a decade, get you ready for the change. You can bring yourself and your whole team by going to the churchdisruptionsummit.com, and by Pro MediaFire, you can submit your application for their digital grant program today for a very limited time, by going to createtivo.org/grant that's C-R-E-A-T-I-V-O.org/grant to get your grant application in today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, Malcolm Gladwell and I go all over the place in this interview, and it's a really personal conversation. It's the first time I've met him or had a conversation with him, but we reached out and he said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, sure, I'd love to be on." And he was really gracious, so we're going to talk about his personal faith journey, the intersection of church and politics. There's a really fascinating section where one of his early articles in his career was comparing Jerry Falwell and Chuck Colson, and we talk about that, and their approach, and the intersection of church and state. I ask him about his habits, his writing process, how he fuels his curiosity, and why he loves cars so much. The guy just, he has so many diverse interests, it just really is fascinating to me, and so, we go there in the conversation today, and that's what I do on this podcast.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you're brand new, welcome. We welcome new listeners every episode. You can subscribe for free, and we just try to go behind the scenes and have the conversation that you would have over a meal, or in a green room, or backstage somewhere where you could just sit down and really get to know a leader and find out the story behind the story. And well, this time we get to do that with Malcolm Gladwell. As a lot of you know, Malcolm's one of those guests who needs no introduction, but he is the co-founder and president of the audio production company, Pushkin Industries, which is home to his popular podcast, Revisionist History, as well as his most recent audio book, which I talk to him about, Miracle and Wonder. It's an innovative audio biography of Paul Simon. It's fascinating. My wife and I are listening to it right now.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Gladwell has been a staff writer for The New Yorker since 1996. In 2001, he won a national magazine award for a piece he wrote called The Pitchman. He is author of The New York Times bestsellers, The Tipping Point, Blink, Outliers, What the Dog Saw, David and Goliath, Talking to Strangers and The Bomber Mafia. Plus, we also talk about the book he's working on right now, and the problem he's trying to figure out with that, the issue he's trying to address, and well, it's a really fascinating conversation. Also for young leaders, we talk about how Malcolm got fired and how he applied 25 times for a marketing job and nobody took him up on it when he was graduating college. So hey, there's hope for all of us, right? That's the way I look at it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Hey, I want you to think about change. What changes are you prepped for? Because you know what, when I talk to leaders about change, here's what they're afraid of, they're afraid of pushback, opposition, confusion, anger, and yet, I think there's a lot of change coming down the pipe, that's why I'm hosting The Church Disruption Summit. It's an event spread over two days, just one hour a day, where I will dissect the seven disruptive church trends that will define the church of 2032. We'll look a decade in the future and say, "Here's probably where the church is going to land. Now, how do we get you there?" Then I'll give you a framework for change that will help you lead change without blowing your church apart.

Carey Nieuwhof:

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Carey Nieuwhof:

And then, today's episode is also brought to you by Pro MediaFire. Do you need help reaching people online with a new website and social media management, but you also have a limited budget? If that's the case, you need to consider the digital grant program from Pro MediaFire. It's perfect for church plants, small churches and non-profits. Here's what it includes, it includes a new website, social media management, a professional content library and Pro MediaFire's digital growth system. The digital grant program is provided by Creativo, a division of Pro MediaFire, to help small organizations grow online. Grant approvals are based on your size and mission, and are up to 70% off the regular price. They're also providing a limited number of complete website makeovers at zero cost as part of the grant program.

Carey Nieuwhof:

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Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, now without further ado, my, what I thought was a delightful conversation with Malcolm Gladwell.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, Malcolm. Welcome to the podcast. It's a delight to have you here.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Thank you. Pleasure to be here.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. So, I'd love to start here. You have Mennonite roots, You live in Amish, or you grew up in Amish country, as far as Ontario, Canada has Amish country. But you also grew up, if my research is right, in a Presbyterian church, which is actually my original tribe, that's the denomination I grew up in. I'd love to

know, if we can start here, what have you learned? How have your Presbyterian and Mennonites roots shaped who you are and who you've become?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Oh, wow. I grew up in Elmira, Ontario, which is Waterloo County, one of the central Mennonites... Mennonites are in Kansas, Eastern Pennsylvania, Manitoba, and southwest in Ontario, so I'm in one of the Mennonite hotbeds. I would say the Presbyterian influence was marginal compared to the Mennonite influence, just because it was such an overwhelmingly Mennonite community, so many of my friends and family's friends were really Mennonites. And then my parents moved from the Presbyterian church to the Mennonite church, probably 25 years ago. So, they adopted the Mennonite world and left the Presbyterian world behind.

Malcolm Gladwell:

And I remember my dad... This sums up the difference. It was just after they had moved to this Mennonite church, and there was a congregational meeting, and he came back home and he said, "The pastor sat with the congregation in the pews during the meeting." He was so used to, in the Presbyterian tradition, the pastor would lead the congregational meeting. He was blown away by the idea that the leader would sit with the congregation, and be one of them, and listen to others run the show. He just thought that was the most beautiful and moving thing. I remember hearing that and thinking, "You know what, you're never going to go back to the Presbyterian church, you've been captured by the Mennonites."

Carey Nieuwhof:

What are some of those characteristics, because you've written about it, you've podcasted about the Mennonite community, it just keeps popping up in your material. So, when you think about, like in the Summer of 2022, you wrote that post about being in an Amish wedding, a Mennonite wedding, and how that moved you. So what are the principles, or what are the ideas, or the spiritual practices that have left a mark inside you?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Well, one is, you mentioned this little post I wrote about, I went to a wedding of a young woman who I've known. She's the daughter of a very close friend of mine, and she's from a Mennonite family, her father's a Mennonite minister, and I wrote about how, at the reception, the bride and the groom and all of their family put on aprons and they served food to the wedding guests. I just thought that was, first of all, such a Mennonite move, an expression of, it's Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. But for the Mennonites, that is a verse that's a story from the Bible that they've taken their yellow Sharpies and they have underlined that. There's a couple of very, very Mennonite sections of the Bible, that would be one of them, and think hard about how to make that idea real in their lives.

Malcolm Gladwell:

I just thought it was incredibly beautiful. So there's that element, the idea that the humility that's associated, and simplicity and lack of pretension that's associated with the way that Mennonites conduct themselves in the world, that was really, really a huge part of what I absorbed from growing up in that world, and has stayed with me.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Another idea, and I deal with this, I have two episodes of this season of Revisionist History that deal with Mennonite, directly or indirectly with Mennonite themes. And another is their pacifism and how that manifests itself. So I think it's hard to explain to some people that pacifism is not a decision, it's not indifference to the fate of your society or culture, it's simply a choice to do your service in a different way. And pacifism, in other words, incurs an obligation. It's not the rejection of an obligation, it is the replacement of one obligation with another, and the question is, what is the other obligation that you replace it with?

Malcolm Gladwell:

And I was surrounded by people growing up who thought long and hard about what is our obligation to the world if we are not going to fight? And the Mennonites do a really, really good job of putting their money and time and effort where their mouth is. They're devoted to service, have extensive missions overseas, do all kinds of... And one of my podcasts is about what that meant in the context of the Second World War, but that was also something that meant a lot to me.

Malcolm Gladwell:

And more than that, I was impressed by growing up with the easy accommodation that the country, that Canadian society had made to Mennonites. The idea that we knew... And the old order Mennonites don't pay taxes, and the Mennonites as a whole, many of them, if Canada were to go to war, would not go to war, but the idea that wasn't a cause of friction, it was just accepted that Canadian society was a place that was home to many different cultures and ideas about... That also, that was another thing that really resonated with me, that it's fine to accept people in all of their different forms, and it shouldn't discomfort us if some people choose not to express their commitment to a country in the same way that the rest of us do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You've had a little bit of a faith... Well, we all have a faith journey, but you've had a bit of a progression of your faith. So, you talk about being raised in a devout family. I think you said your brothers, you have a couple of brothers who are very serious about their Christian faith, your sister's a pastor, your parents took their faith seriously.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Sister-in-law, yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sister-in-law, pardon me. And then you steer right, politically, as a young adult. I'd love to get in a little more of your career, but spiritually it's been a real journey, and you wrote a piece for Relevant Magazine, I think this year, in 2022, where you drifted away from the church and from faith when you moved to the US and your career started, and now it's different for you. What's that journey been like Malcolm?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Well, I think it's about understanding that there are certain kinds of questions and problems that cannot be resolved in the absence of faith. I think that was the... And as equally to that, it is understanding, coming to appreciate what is beautiful about faith. Those two ideas in tandem, that you can't make

sense of the world or fully find joy in the world, I think, if you've turned your back on that aspect of spirituality, and I think it just took a long time to understand that, or to appreciate that.

Malcolm Gladwell:

And so, that's the broadest outline of my journey, is I had these kinds of lessons that I've just talked about earlier, that I was aware of growing up, but making sense of them took a while. It took moving away and reflecting, and the passage of 20 or 30 years, and then I realized, "Oh, that's actually..." If I'd gone to a wedding when I was 25 years old, and bride and groom had put on aprons over their wedding wear, and were serving us food, I would've found that interesting and maybe a little bit funny, and it wouldn't have registered with me, but now, when that happens, it really, it moved me. Now I understand, "Oh, that's actually in the context of the culture we live in." That is a beautiful statement, but it just takes a while sometimes for us to grasp these notions.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's an interesting journey, because what a lot of leaders are dealing with right now in the church is a wave of deconversions, and there's a lot of problems with the church, a lot of problems with the church that we have to get serious about solving. But your story is more of a reconversion story than a deconversion story, which is fascinating. Would you say, as a young adult, heading off to the US and moving into journalism, et cetera, was that as much a rebellion, or more of a drift, or did you have an axe to grind with the church? Or when you look back on that period of your life, do you know what was underneath that distancing of yourself?

Malcolm Gladwell:

I think it's funny. When I lived in Washington DC in the late eighties, early nineties, I used to go to a place called Washington Community Fellowship, which is a big evangelical church in DC. Back then, a guy named Myron Osberger was the well known... He is himself a Mennonite, but it wasn't a Mennonite church, and that was my first point of reconnection. I think it was more about the idea that there is no one size fits all with religious traditions. And I do think we need to... We shouldn't expect that the religious tradition, church tradition that we grew up with is the one that suits us. And I think that was another idea that took a little while to figure out, that there's 20 different ways, there's a hundred different ways to approach these questions.

Malcolm Gladwell:

And I don't think necessarily that the Presbyterian Church of my childhood was the right place for me. Ultimately, I don't even think it was the right place for my parents, which is in no... I'm not dissing it, it's just, my parents properly belonged, I think, in a Mennonite. That was much more in keeping with their... The people there were much more similar to them in the way they looked at the world.

Malcolm Gladwell:

But it's funny, About four seasons ago, I did a series of podcasts on how to think like a Jesuit, and I tried to use Jesuitical ideas to resolve certain kinds of problems. It was a podcast on casuistry, the central Jesuit reasoning tool. And it was a really interesting process because, in the course of doing that, I discovered something of extraordinary beauty in the Catholic tradition that I hadn't known was there, and it made me think, "You know what, there's probably something like this in every tradition." And that we should be open to exploring that thing. And we can construct our own way of making sense of

spirituality by engaging in that curiosity about what different traditions have to teach us. If you spend a lot of time hanging around Jesuits, you get into Jesuits. They're like-

Carey Nieuwhof:

They're an interesting tribe.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Very, very interesting tribe, yeah. As they say... I went to Rome and was chatting with some very high up Jesuit and some 14th century thing in the middle, and he was like, "As we say in our tradition, if you've met one Jesuit, you've met one Jesuit." Which I thought was....

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. No, it's interesting. Ignatian spirituality, the Jesuit... The reason I ask the Presbyterian question is, there is an intellectual curiosity about you that I think is... It just goes in so many different directions. And one of the things I've appreciated, even though I'm not affiliated with Presbyterians anymore, but when you look at the best of Presbyterianism, their the denomination or the tradition that remembers you can worship God with your mind as well as with your heart, and I've always appreciated that. So I didn't know whether that was shaping or not, but...

Malcolm Gladwell:

Yeah, maybe. I know that when we were first going to that church, as a young man, as a young kid, there was a really brilliant pastor at the first... It was the first time, this is when I was 10, it was the first time that I would listen to a sermon from beginning to end. That was a revelation to me, that somebody could capture your interest for 25 minutes every Sunday. So I'm sure-

Carey Nieuwhof:

I went through a similiar things as a kid. Yeah, the sermons. I quit Sunday school for kids early so I could sit in the service and listen to the message. I don't know what's behind that, but that's interesting. Well, thanks for sharing that. I want to talk a little bit about how you got to where you are in life too, in terms of career and calling and vocation and the things that you do. You had a pretty unlikely path. It surprised me to learn, and again, you can read all kinds of things online, but you were hoping to start a career in advertising. Was that the stated objective? And if so, what happened? How did you get from-

Malcolm Gladwell:

Well, I didn't get a job. So I graduated from college in 1984, which, in Canada, was pretty bleak economic times, so there weren't a lot of options. And I don't know how I got it in my head that I wanted to be in advertising. It sounded like a fun thing to be, and I applied to 25 places and got 25 rejections, so that was that. And then I imagined, like everyone, I would go to law school. I had all kinds of plan Bs.

Malcolm Gladwell:

And then I by chance got this job for \$9,000 a year at a magazine in Bloomington, Indiana, and just took it. And that was what got me in the journalism path. It was very serendipitous. I was as aimless as... Well, I wasn't aimless, but I like to think, actually, that there is any number of things that either I or anyone could do that you would find... We sometimes think that the profession we have is the only one

that would've satisfied us, but in fact, I'm quite sure that if I had gone to law school, I would've been perfectly happy being a lawyer, and I'm quite sure that if I had gone to grad school, I would've been perfectly happy as a professor, or if I had gone to pharmacy school, I'd be perfectly happy as a pharmacist. I think that we're much more fungible in our joys as human beings than we imagine.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, I don't disagree with that. I think that's a really interesting thesis, because you can get yourself into that little narrow pigeon hole, but how did that job in Bloomington then evolve into books? And I'm aware you ended up at the Washington Post and then started writing for the New Yorker, et cetera, et cetera. But can you spell that out a little bit more?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Yeah, I was working for the American Spectator in Bloomington, Indiana, which was a conservative monthly, and it was actually really fun. I got fired after seven months, but in the seven months that I was there, it was enormously fun, and I started... They were very open to young people writing for them, and so I wrote. Actually, my first article or a second was about Chuck Colson, if you remember Chuck Colson.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh yeah, I do.

Malcolm Gladwell:

I did a piece on Colson versus Falwell, so this is 86. And I was talking about this divide between the evangelicals who wanted to get involved in politics and those who said it was a trap. And Colson was, of course, someone who thought it was a trap for the evangelical movement to become political, and Falwell felt the opposite. And so, yeah, I wrote that. I wrote a bunch of little... It just got me into the... Maybe aware of the fact that magazine writing or writing, as it could, wasn't necessarily plausible as a profession yet, but it was plausible as a vocation, that you could... There were people who did that and they enjoyed themselves, and there were places that would publish you. That's what I learned from that first job, and those were invaluable lessons.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What was your thesis with Falwell versus Colson?

Malcolm Gladwell:

I was on the side of Colson. It's been so long since... I literally wrote this, it's almost 40 years ago now. I really liked Colson. He was an extraordinary sophisticated thinker, I thought, and I loved his story. He was President Nixon's hatchet man, and then goes to prison, and has a conversion, and becomes this evangelical leader in America. I love that he devoted his life to prison ministry. I just thought so much about him was so curious and interesting. And Falwell on the other hand, I never... It's funny, even then, I just didn't think it would end well if evangelicals got too closely aligned with a political movement. I just thought, regardless, at the time, of course I agreed with Falwell's politics. I was a conservative in those years. It wasn't that I disagreed with his politics, I just thought, "Why would you limit yourself like that? Do you really want to construct a world where someone who's not a Republican like you, or shares your Republican politics wouldn't feel welcome?" It just seemed like a limitation in a certain way.

Malcolm Gladwell:

It's not like Jesus said He only wanted to hang out with people of a particular religious stripe. On the other hand, quite to the contrary, He had the biggest open door policy out there. He was like, "Come on in, I'll hang with you." So it seemed like an odd thing to me at the time. I was very unsophisticated. I was 22 years old when I'm writing this article, so that was just my feeling. And that, I have to say, I feel like I got it right in that instance back then. I do think it was a mistake to so heavily get involved in politics.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think your point about Jesus is well taken. One of the disciples, this is almost never talked about, was Simon the Zealot. There was Simon Peter, Simon the Zealot. Zealotry, from my understanding, was political movement. It sought to overthrow the Roman government, et cetera, et cetera, and Jesus, like, "Come on in, that's not what we're about, we're about this." And ushered in a different kingdom. What got you fired after seven months?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Oh, it wasn't a firing in anger. It was like, "You don't belong here." I had difficulty waking up in the... It's that kind of thing. I get the the office late. But I think they recognized that I was unhappy in Bloomington, Indiana, and so I went to Washington DC and had a better time of it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah. It seems to me, because you have maybe an entrepreneurial streak, you not only have a podcast, Revisionist History, but a couple years into it, you co-found Pushkin Industries, like a whole podcast network, media company, et cetera, et cetera. Talk to us a little bit about that entrepreneurial streak, because when I really looked at the magnitude of what you do, people see you as an author, they see you as a writer of books and perhaps a podcast host, but if you scratch a little bit beneath the surface, and it doesn't take much, there seems to be quite a drive there too, Malcolm.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Well, I did start this company with my friend, Jacob Weisberg. We now have, I don't know, 60 some odd people working with us, but I don't... I'm the arm candy in the relationship. I'm not actually running the company or building it, Jacob is doing all that work. I'm making stuff for the company. So I'd be cautious a little bit about reading too much into that, but like doing new things and I like keeping moving, so I worked for the Washington Post for 10 years and then I was like, "That's enough." And then I went to the New Yorker and worked for another 10 years and I was like, "You know what, that's enough." And then I wrote books for a while and I was like, "Well, I don't want to write books forever, I want to do other things."

Malcolm Gladwell:

I do think it's important that you're... I feel like the freshness of your approach is not a function of your age, it's a function of how long you've been doing the thing that you're doing, and that's an important distinction. There's no reason why a 65 year old can't be as invigorated and creative and energetic of as a 25 year old, but the 65 year old has to actively seek out something new to invigorate them, that's the difference, so I've always have felt that the way to stay fresh is to keep moving.

Carey Nieuwhof:



What drives your curiosity? Your interests seem to range from war to success, to underdogs, to BMWs, to Paul Simon, to curating a book club, to laundry, that was a fascinating episode, you made me completely rethink laundry and how I do it, to smoking cessation. And that's a partial list. You have this omnivorous range of interests. What drives that? Because that doesn't seem to be abating.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Yeah. Well, what does drive that? I don't know. I like explaining things and I like telling stories, and I don't really mind where the story comes from. Somebody sent me a little series of interviews today, 50 interviews they had done about a documentary they were doing on Tom Bradley, former mayor of LA, of Los Angeles, first black mayor of Los Angeles, who I'm very interested in at the moment. I'm thinking about writing about, or I am writing about Tom Bradley, and I was reading through some of the transcripts of these interviews, and it's hard to describe the kind of pleasure that I get from that.

Malcolm Gladwell:

So, Tom Bradley comes out of South Los Angeles at a time where there are no black people in public life in Los Angeles. The power structure of the African American community in LA is really the church, and the dominant guy in the black church in LA in those years is a guy named HH Brookins, and HH Brookins takes a shine to young Tom Bradley. So I've been struggling to find any interview or something with HH Brookins. He's this mystical figure everyone talks about, but there's just nothing out there.

Malcolm Gladwell:

So I'm looking down the list of this interviews these guys did, they're all done from 20 years ago, and I see HH Brookins, and I think, "Oh my God." So I start reading over lunch, this interview with HH Brookins, and it's just magical. It's like he's come alive again, this guy who's been dead he's been dead since, I don't know, he probably died in 2008, and he's suddenly speaking to me, it's like telling me about how he... At one point he was talking about how you'd give sermons. He's like, "The first half I talk about Tom Bradley, the second half I talk about Jesus." And I was like, "Wow, there we go, now he's all starting to make sense." But it's that feeling of that idea that you can discover. It's a little piece in my understanding, and ultimately, of the reader or the listener's understanding of Tom Bradley. I Got a little piece right there, it goes into the puzzle. Tom Brookins decided Tom Bradley was going to be his guy, and that made all the difference in the world. And so, I don't know, I find that exciting, that moment.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But even into cars, like your episode, it was on someone else's podcast about your love of cars, BMWs, that kind of thing. Often, I think what's curious to me about it, is sometimes someone is intellectually curious, so I'm just very interested in history, very interested in current events, but yeah, I don't even know the name of the car I drive, that kind of thing, but you know exactly the kind of car you drive. Do you know what I mean?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Oh yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What about your passion for cars? What's the story about that?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Well, I've always had it. I had it as a kid. Yeah. Like every five year old, I got with cars, it's just, I never stopped. And so, I spend an unknown amount of time thinking about cars, on car websites, selling cars, buying cars, enjoying cars, looking at cars. I don't know, it's just a part of my... There's a whole side of my social life that's essentially people who have lots of cars, or love cars and who wanted text with me about cars. I can't explain it, I have the same feeling about construction sites. It literally is, I have a six year old side of my brain which never shut down, which likes those kinds of dump trucks, construction sites, sports cars, that's all.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Construction sites? Just like-

Malcolm Gladwell:

Yeah, I love them too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

... office towers, cars?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Doesn't matter, doesn't matter.

Carey Nieuwhof:

All of the above.

Malcolm Gladwell:

On my way to work, I drive by this building that's being... Massive old building that's being renovated, and I always slow almost to a stop, just to see what they've done over the previous 24 hours.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There's something underneath this I want to explore for a second, which is, a lot of leaders I talked to, I had a burnout period in my life years ago, and so, on a regular basis, sometimes almost daily, I'm talking to leaders who are burning out. One of the questions is always, do you have a hobby? I didn't until I burned out, now I do. Not at the level of probably buy and selling cars and slowing down at construction sites, but I boat, I learned to grill, et cetera. Do you see, when you think about your rhythms, your disciplines, your habits, the curiosities outside of work help drive the continued passion for your work? If that makes sense. In other words, the cars, the construction, and you're passionate about running as well, and have been your whole life. Do you see a connection between the two?

Malcolm Gladwell:

I do very much. And I did, in this season of Revisionist History, I have an episode about... This will link up to your question. It's about refugees, and I tell a story of how my parents, back in the seventies, got together with a group of their friends and sponsored three Vietnamese refugees, and then I tell the story of my brother who's a... Was an elementary school principal, about how he had all these refugees in his school. And one of the points of the podcast is that my brother's attitude toward refugees was

shaped by unconsciously and conscious... Excuse me, and consciously, I'm quite sure, by my parents' attitude towards refugees. And my point is that being kind to strangers is a habit, it's a contagious habit, it's something you have to practice if you want it to be...

Malcolm Gladwell:

And I always think that's why, for example, there's so much talk in the Bible about kindness, because you have to keep doing it if you're going to do it. You can forget how to do it. It's a muscle you've got to exercise. And there's so many things which people think of as traits, and I would say, they're not traits, they're habits. So you could say, when people say that curiosity is a trait, what they mean is, that kid was born curious. Well, actually, I don't believe that, I believe it's a habit. What I believe is that's someone who practices being curious, and the more they practice, the better they get at it, the way that the more you... It's like saying playing the piano is a trait. No, it's not, it's a habit. You're not born being able to play the piano, you have to learn it, and then you have to keep doing it if you're going to be any good at it.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Kindness is that. You might have a predilection towards it, but you got to practice it if you're going to be any good at it, and curiosity, all these kinds of things. So what habits are... What hobbies are, in part, they are ways in which we practice ways of dealing with the world that can be very useful outside of it. And a hobby is a thing that you pursue in the interest of... It's a way of finding joy in some relatively prosaic activity. That's the point of a hobby, right? It's like, I'm going to find a way to turn this into an enjoyable activity, and that's an insanely important habit. You're practicing being happy. It's what happiness is, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

I have never heard a hobby defined that way, and I'm going to play that back and commit that to memory, because I think that's exactly what it is. It is a way of finding joy in something, whether you're doing woodworking, or cars, or even studying construction, or barbecue, that's something that I really enjoy doing, cooking for other people, grilling for other people, et cetera.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's interesting that your family... Because we grew up about two hours from each other, an hour and a half from each other. I grew up in Midland, Ontario. Basement of our house, 1979, we bring in Vietnamese refugees, my parents did as Christians.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Oh, so we have that in common.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, seriously. My bedroom was over here, their bedroom was over there. And that really shaped things. It was a movement, I think, in the Canada of the seventies. That must have left an impression

with you, to be sharing your home with people from around the world, or you would've still been home at that time. Would-

Malcolm Gladwell:

Yeah, so they would come over, so they weren't living... Our refugees were old enough that we got them an apartment in town, in Elmira, but they would come over all the time for meals. But speaking of habits, my parents had a habit of bringing in people for meals. So my dad had graduate students from all over the world, and they would constantly showing up. They would show up like clockwork on Saturday nights and Friday nights, and we would just feed them for years. It was just normal that you would have two Indian guys and someone from Africa would show up at five o'clock on a Saturday, and they would just have dinner with us, and then we would sometimes go to their...

Malcolm Gladwell:

I'd eaten more serious curry by the time I was 12 than most kids in Southern Ontario. And the reason my parents did that is that some people had done that for them when they were... My mom was an overseas student who goes to school and university in London, and that's how she got by, people invited her into their home when she was... My dad's parents would do this. It's like this intergenerational... So it's just a habit of mine, and this is a lot of what the podcast I did on this was about, which was, it wasn't a big deal for us because it was no different from what my... It was just a version of what my parents had been doing, and many of their friends had been doing for years already, just not on this geopolitical stage, but opening your home to people, to others, and sharing and offering kindness, that's just how you rolled.

Malcolm Gladwell:

And it never had a name, I think, or a cause attached to it until '79. But what happens in '79 for Canada is so interesting. You know this, many people listening may not, Canada is now... It's between Canada and Australia, both on a per capita, and in many ways, on an absolute basis, lets in more refugees than any other country in the world. It's now a national habit.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Malcolm Gladwell:

So we started practicing in '79, and we never stopped practicing. We did it with Syrians, did it with the Afghanis, we did it with we did it through the... With the Vietnamese in '79, that's another version of what we're talking about. If you look at, someone was showing me the public opinion polling in Canada for support of refugee resettlement, and the number of Canadians who say they would happily sponsor a refugee if given the opportunity, the numbers are off the charts, and that's not because Canadians are better people than anywhere else, it's just that it's a habit. We've been practicing, so we're used to it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That'll be on season seven, right?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Your team sent me advanced episodes, and that one hadn't been produced by the time we recorded it.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Season seven is launched in June, so it's ongoing, but that's episode six, it's about refugees.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, great. Well, I'll look forward to it. The rest of the season that I got in pre-production was fascinating. Just really, really great stuff. You're also reimagining how audio books are done. I was intrigued when Talking to Strangers came out. It was just such a fantastic audio book. I read the Bomber Mafia last Summer when it came out, and wish I'd listened to the audio book. One of those things where I'm sure that would've been really fascinating, and probably will at some point, but your Paul Simon book was fascinating, where my wife and I are halfway through it, and it's almost like Netflix, so if I skip ahead, I'll be accused of adultery, so I have to wait until she's in the car to finish it. But it's fascinating, it's just an extended conversation mash up with Paul Simon. Tell us about your passion behind audiobooks and what you are thinking about even further reinvention of.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Yeah, it's just, that's very simple. It's an obvious idea that, why, if people are going to... Lots of people now want to listen to books, because it's easier, it fits with their lifestyle better than reading them. And why would you, if that's the case and they're willing to commit to six hours or whatever of... Why are you just going to sit in a sound booth and read the book to them? Why not make it into an audio documentary? Why not, if you're talking about Paul Simon and you tape the interview, just play the interview, right? Why are you reading?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Or if you're talking about, in the Bomber Mafia, you're talking about flying a B-17 bomber, let's hear the bomber, let's hear the sound of the bombs falling. You're talking about FDR giving a fireside chat. Well, let's hear FDR gives a fireside chat, there's tape of that. So it was just a very common sense notion that if you're going to commit to telling a story through audio, then go all the way, make it an experience that people will want to join you on. So that's a lot of what Pushkin is about, is about that, is we started this company so that we could improve the overall quality of audio, of what was available in audio.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, anything else you're working on that you're really excited about right now in terms of reinventing a format, reinventing audio or a particular project? While we're on this subject.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Well, there's just the podcast and the current book I'm writing, this Tom Bradley project, and I'm still puzzling through that. But the Tom Bradley... The problem, which is such an interesting one, but I haven't quite figured how I want to approach it, but it is this question of, so here is a black man in the 1960s, in Los Angeles, in a city that is... Where the African American community's never more than 15%. He wants to be mayor. In order to be mayor, he must accommodate the interests of the white majority, and yet he is a member of a very distinct embattled community, black community. How does he square

those two obligations to his own people and to the people he needs to attract? That problem, which has been... Versions of that have been played out a million times over history.

Malcolm Gladwell:

I really want to, I find that fascinating. There's obviously the point in, remember, when in the Bible, when Jesus is asked, when He takes out the coin and says, who's on the back of the coin? It's that same thing. What do you owe to Jesus, and what do you owe a Caesar?

Carey Nieuwhof:

True.

Malcolm Gladwell:

That's a really, really fascinating question. And then I'm looking for a way to explore that in a creative way, and the compromises that choice necessitates.

Carey Nieuwhof:

For your writing process, you're in the middle of a book right now, I believe you said, and again, feel free to correct this, this is just research for the interview, that you start in the middle, and you're not exactly sure where a book ends before you begin, you just start, you do your research, and then it takes on a life of itself. First of all, is that reasonably accurate? And secondly, what does a writing process look like for you, Malcolm?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Yeah, that's reasonably accurate. I tend to start with some kernel that I think is interesting and can go in lots of different places. The writing process... Actual writing takes up a very small amount of time, it's all the stuff around the writing that takes a long time, the research, setting up the research, the rewriting, the editing, the mulling over what you're going to do. So a lot of it is... And I have less time now than I used to, so I've had to get more efficient at all those tasks. So there's very little...

Malcolm Gladwell:

The people's fantasy about writers is that we go off in a cabin for six months and sit down to the typewriter every morning. That just never happens. It's more like you have an hour and a half in the morning where you think about and work on a little section of a chapter, and then you come back to it two days later when you have another hour and a half. It's very fragmented, and like I said, it's the other stuff that takes all the time. The amount of logistics that's involved in writing nonfiction is enormous, finding things, reading them, thinking about them, interpreting them, thinking about where they fit.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and you do a lot of interviews, you do a lot of travel. Talking to Strangers, you're recording a conversation in a cafe on your iPhone, you'll listen back to that. A lot of it is very research based. Give us a typical day or week in the life of Malcolm Gladwell right now. What are you spending your time on? What do your rhythms and disciplines look like?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Yeah. Well, this week I spent some time rewriting the final... I had to do a final set of revisions on the last podcast episode of this season, which is about story of a guy named Lester Glick, a Mennonite, of course, who's involved in this strange experiment in the Second World War. He's a group of conscientious objectors who volunteer to be guinea pigs in a medical experiment at the University of Minnesota, and it changes him. It's an experiment where he... And I do three episodes on this, it's called the Minnesota Starvation Experiment, and they agree to be starved, to undergo six months of profound malnourishment so that scientists can understand what happens to people who are malnourished and how to nurse them back to health, which everyone knew was going to be one of the central problems coming out of the war.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Millions of people in Europe and cross Asia who are in a state of profound under-nourishment, how do we help them? And we had no idea. What do you feed them? How quickly do you feed them? Can they recover? Is protein more important than carbohydrate? On and on and on. So he's part of a group that served as this... And so, he's been long dead, but I interviewed his children, and it was all about how did that experience... He suffered, as they all did, all the guinea pigs did. How did that suffering change the rest of his life? So once the experiment was over. And the answer is, it changed his profoundly. He, on the one hand, had an eating disorder for the rest of his life, but on the other hand, it strengthened his determination, his motivation that he should spend his life, broadly speaking, bringing sustenance to those who were malnourished, which he interpreted as spiritual sustenance.

Malcolm Gladwell:

And he went around the country, planting schools of social work and helping people, also feeding people. He actually used to make huge amounts of cinnamon buns and give them out. He was profoundly changed, and in some ways, distorted by this experience, but in a way that was actually beautiful. And anyway, so making this, it's a very tricky thing to bring this guy to life and to explain particularly to people in 2022, why... This guy's name was Lester Glick. Why Lester Glick would've said the way that he suffered and the way his life was distorted as a result of his participation in this experiment was a good thing. And that for someone of his religious faith, suffering in the name of some broader cause is not some weird unthinkable thing, it's a normal thing, it's funny.

Malcolm Gladwell:

And I'm trying to explain... I both have to explain how ideas about suffering that are held by someone who is not just a devout Christian, but a devout Christian of that particular variety, are different, and also ideas about suffering in the middle part of the 20th century are different than now. Now we're allergic to suffering in all its forms, and we don't understand that it could have... Anyway, so I spent one day, Monday, I spent rewriting that thing, and then Tuesday, I tried to do an interview. I think I'm trying to arrange this interview with somebody.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Do you know the writer, Gary Wills? He was a Catholic and then he became a... He was a big deal journalist and religious writer in the seventies and eighties. He wrote a book which I discovered randomly in a hotel room. It's a long story. Read, thought it was amazing. He's now well into his nineties. I've been emailing, got his email from his daughter, and I've been trying to get him to talk to me about this book, which is insanely interesting. So that was a big project on... And then I'm trying to promote the season of Revisionist History, and then I came in and I recorded the episode I was rewriting. And

then it's like a rhythm of some... It's this mix of research, promoting the shows that I've done and then working on the next thing.

Malcolm Gladwell:

And then I was talking to these documentary filmmakers in LA. They're the ones who have all this Tom Bradley material, and I was trying to see if I could join forces with them. And so, it's just a mix, every day there'll be 10 different things that I'm trying to go through and check off.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you do your running in the midst of all that? I take it, you're still an avid runner, are you?

Malcolm Gladwell:

I'm injured at the moment, but I try and carve out some time at the end of the day. And the great thing about running is it's not golf. To be an avid golfer is inconsistent with any legitimate human activity. It's three hours a day, it's like, how do you do anything else? Then you got to drive there, and by the time you're done, that wipes that an entire afternoon. But running, you can very efficiently run for 45 minutes and be fine. So it's actually the best possible sport for someone like me to be involved in if you're busy. But this morning I got up and went to the gym, so I got it out of the way then, but I could squeeze it in, it just means I have to... The long slow workout has been replaced by the short intense workout.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And then, any other personal disciplines, rhythms, anything from bedtime to diet, or anything else that's really helping you stay fit, alert and curious at 30 years into a career, 35 years into a career?

Malcolm Gladwell:

I do think one of the things I try and do is listen, expose myself to things I disagree with, which I think is a really useful exercise. And because very often, what you discover is that you disagree with it less than you had thought you did. So one of the things I did yesterday on my lunch hour, was I read the Dobbs decision, the Supreme Court decision on abortion. I read most of it, it's quite long. I skipped over the super legal parts. It was super interesting. Do I know what I think about it yet? No. I have some thoughts, some little bits of it that stuck with me, but it's just very useful to... Because you can't get a flavor. It's 200 pages, so you're reading in the newspaper, someone else's approximation of what was said, filtered through that person's set of interests, biases, what have you, so you're not really getting it, and I think you have to get it, and it allows you to evaluate the responses. So, should I be angry? Should I be hysterical?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Should I be fearful? Should I be happy? Should I be... You know what I mean? You can't really decide unless you... So I read that. It was super interesting to read it and to mull over and to see the way everyone's on the court. The court is such a bizarre institution that I've never, as a Canadian, I can't wrap my mind around the idea that you have all these people who are there for life. So weird that they're there for life. Whose idea was that? It just seemed strange. Why wouldn't they be there for 10 years, and then they... There's no other institution. What would happen if every church said that the minister



was there for life? Or your doctor said, I'm your GP and I'm going to be your GP for life. It's just weird, isn't it?

Carey Nieuwhof:

It is weird.

Malcolm Gladwell:

I don't get why they're there for life, but that's a thing aside. But anyway, I just think it's a useful... You have to be moments in your life where you force yourself to access things that are outside your normal range of interests, because it really does broaden your perspective.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a great discipline. Well, we have a few minutes left, Malcolm. I like to ask this question of different leaders. We've had your friends from Next Big Idea Club on the podcast before, Adam Grant, Susan Cain, Daniel Pink, et cetera, and we've had different people weigh in on this, but you do have tens of thousands of church leaders listening right now. If you could give advice to church leaders in this moment, is there a particular piece of advice you'd like to give to church leaders?

Malcolm Gladwell:

That's interesting. One thing is, the one thing I've noticed just within my own family or circle of friends, the impact of COVID on the church is really dramatic, that you have a community that is based around, in its simplest form, social communion, and you shatter the communion. Everyone's stuck in their homes, and you break the habit of coming together on Sunday morning. And that's actually really significant. And I'm strongly of the view that we're doing way too many things online and not enough things in person these days, but I really feel that about any spiritual gathering, needs to be in person. And to have gone for three years where that was impossible in many cases, is really, really, really hard, and I worry a lot about the recovery of that and trying to build those habits back up again.

Malcolm Gladwell:

And I guess the other thing, I think it's already happening in some sense, that I've been really intrigued in watching my mother, for example, and seeing how her spiritual focus over the years has moved from the general congregation to small group work, and realizing how crucial those small groups have become, almost to the point where they... They don't supplant the institutional church, but they're certainly a really, really powerful parallel force, and at her stage of life, a more important force. That's really where her spiritual life is, it's in her small group.

Malcolm Gladwell:

That's super interesting, and I think of that even beyond churches, that idea that there is something about a group of 10, 12 people that is incredibly powerful. And the army realizes that, and true many churches realize that, but I'm wondering in the rest of society, whether we shouldn't come to a broader appreciation of, there's some magic there, and there's something socially optimal about the small group that should be exploited in many other domains, that that's a way to pull off this combination of a group that's large enough that you can find inspiration and support, but small enough that it's intimate. That is a balance of those two things, and that's the sweet spot for human beings. So I think, I guess I would say that the pursuit of that small group magic is a really fruitful avenue for the world of churches.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Last question, Malcolm, because we're coming up on time, but is there a subject or an area of life that you would love to pursue, that you've never pursued, or a question you wished somebody asked you that nobody ever asked you? Is there some unexplored vista that you're like, "Oh yes, I wish we could go here."?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Yeah. Well, there's tons. I don't know, I write sometimes about science and medicine. I don't know enough to know what I don't know. Does that make sense? I wish I had the leisure to explore. I don't know much about statistics, and I feel like so much of understanding the world now requires some depth and appreciation of data on one hand. The other thing I would say is, I only know one language, which profoundly limits my ability to appreciate and learn from other cultures, which I think is a real weak spot in the way in which I appreciate the world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's good to know our limits, isn't it? Wow. Well Malcolm, the new season of Revisionist History, by the time this airs at the end of July, will be available pretty much everywhere. And if there's another call to action you would have for our audience or a place you'd like to direct them, where would you like to send our audience?

Malcolm Gladwell:

Oh, if you go to the Pushkin website, pushkin.fm, you can find all of our various audiobook offerings and all the cool things we've been up to.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Great. Malcolm, you've been so generous with your time and also with your insights. Thank you so very much.

Malcolm Gladwell:

Thank you, Carey. That was really fun.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, that really was a delight, wasn't it? And I'm just so grateful that Malcolm was so open. If you would like to learn a little bit more, some of the things that we talked about, we'll link to everything in the show notes. You can get that at [careynieuwhof.com/episode509](http://careynieuwhof.com/episode509), and there's also transcripts there too if you want to dig a little bit deeper.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And also, I almost said it in the interview, but hey, if you're in LA and you know some of the story of Tom Bradley and the preachers that helped him, let me know, and we will let Malcolm's team know, because you know, he's trying to find this one guy and not having much luck until he finds these interviews. And I know we have a lot of listeners in LA, California, and if any of you have any insider or knowledge on that, shoot me an email, [carey@careynieuwhof.com](mailto:carey@careynieuwhof.com). My team will get it to Malcolm's team, and yeah, you'll help them out on this very noble project.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, Malcolm Gladwell, thanks so much for being so generous with our audience and by sharing your story. Next episode, we got another one of my favorite people, Ramit Sethi. He is a number one New York Times, bestselling author, podcaster and finance expert. And well, we're going to talk about something completely different, money. And he has got a unique take. Here's an excerpt.

Ramit Sethi:

And I knew exactly what to do. I'm Indian, so I know what Indian mom guilt is like. I employed it like a weapon, and I was like, "This is my chance." I said, "Listen, so here you are, a multimillionaire, standing in line, and you get to the front of the line and you get that last Lion King ticket, and that poor family behind you, who came from some little no name town, and they were hoping to take their children to see Lion King, but they can't afford the full ticket, now they can't see it because you, a multimillionaire, took the last ticket. How do you feel?" And she was like, "Oh my God." And I was like, "Got you."

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's next time on the podcast. Also make sure that you have registered for The Church Disruption Summit. It's absolutely free, I'm hosting it, and I'm going to dissect the seven disruptive church trends that will define the church of 2032, and get your entire team board for free by going to [churchdisruptionsummit.com](http://churchdisruptionsummit.com), that's [churchdisruptionsummit.com](http://churchdisruptionsummit.com). And by Pro MediaFire, submit your application for their digital grant program today for a very limited time by going to [creativo.org/grant](http://creativo.org/grant). That's C-R-E-A-T-I-V-O .org/grant. Also coming up on the podcast, we've got Thom Rainer, Jeff Henderson, Nona Jones, Stephen M.R. Covey, Patrick Lencioni, Tim Tebow, Chris Anderson, who founded TED Talks, and so much more.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And I want to thank you so much for listening. Whatever you're doing, I really, really appreciate the fact that you took the time to listen even right through to the end. A lot of you do that. We see the stats, a lot of you do. And if you enjoyed this episode, make sure you shout out Malcolm on social. You can shout me out, I'm Carey Nieuwhof on Instagram, C Nieuwhof on a lot of other platforms, and share it with a friend. Tag a friend, text a friend the link, whatever you need to do. Thank you for getting the word out there, it helps us to do what we do and do it really well and get top tier guests like Malcolm Gladwell.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So, thank you so much, everybody. I really appreciate you. Hey, I want to serve you, and we do that through this podcast, but I find sometimes I listen to podcasts but I never venture beyond the audio, and if you're thinking, "Yeah, I'd like to see what else there is." And you're a church leader, make sure you register today for the Church Disruption Summit. I'll be hosting it in August. Would love to have you there. It's absolutely free. You need a manual for change, change is coming. We're going to talk about what those changes are and then how to accommodate change. I have led a church for two decades through massive change, massive change, and we didn't blow it apart, we didn't. And so, I'll share some of those little tips and strategies and much more. So go to [churchdisruptionsummit.com](http://churchdisruptionsummit.com). And guess what, we'll catch you next time with a fresh episode. We got my friend Ramit Sethi coming up, and thank you so much for listening, and I hope our time together today has helped you thrive in life and leadership.

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