

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. Mark Sayers is back on the podcast. We are going to talk about future cultural disruption, the church in 10 years, the Overton Window, something I've heard quite a bit about lately. And how you as a leader can cultivate a non-anxious presence in the midst of it all. Today's episode is brought to you by Overflow. Overflow's online software empowers donors to easily give non-cash assets to churches in minutes, not months. You can go to [overflow.co/Carey](https://overflow.co/Carey) to learn how and by Serve HQ, get their simple video training courses to help you equip volunteers and develop leaders by going to [servehq.church](https://servehq.church). I absolutely love talking to Mark Sayers. He is such a prolific reader, consumer of culture, and also somebody who's able to interpret the times that we live in. He is the senior leader of Red Church in Melbourne, Australia. He's passionate about spiritual renewal. And is the author of a number of books including, *A Non-Anxious Presence* and *The Reappearing Church*.

We are going to talk about, future cultural disruptions, the decline of civilization. Yeah, that's a lot of fun. We all kind of know that something has changed. Well, what has changed? Mark has a really good way of putting his finger on it. We are going to talk about the Overton Window, why it's accelerating rapidly? And how to sleep at night and cultivating non-anxious presence in the midst of it all. So, really glad that you're along for this episode. If you're brand new, welcome. If you're a regular or newer listener, I would love it if you would share this episode afterwards with people who might benefit from it. It is by you sharing that we have record year after record year, and we're so grateful for you and everything you bring into the podcast as a leader. If you haven't yet checked out Overflow, are you leaving money on the table? I think a lot of churches are, because if you're only accepting cash donations at your church, well, you're probably leaving a lot of money and donations on the table. Did you know that 90% of wealth is actually in non-cash assets?

When cash is the only giving option, you put a lid on generosity. So Overflow is here to lift the lid and unlock more ways to give. And the way they do it, is they make it easy to give non-cash assets such as stock, to churches in minutes. And if you don't have Overflow, well, guess what? It takes months. So it's important because the average cash donation in the US is \$128. The average stock donation through Overflow is over \$10,000. So the days of giving the church your leftovers are behind us. It's time to empower your donors to give from their Overflow. So you can learn more by going to [overflow.co/Carey](https://overflow.co/Carey). That's .co not .com, [overflow.co/C-A-R-E-Y](https://overflow.co/C-A-R-E-Y), to learn how. And every church leader knows that having trained and engaged volunteers is absolutely mission critical. But if you're also like most leaders, you know how tricky it can be to onboard people. And we're kind of in the midst of a volunteer crisis right now, so that's why you need to check out Serve HQ.

They have a simple video training course system that helps you equip volunteers and develop leaders. You can create your own training or use their extensive video library. Plus, Serve HQ is an online learning platform that tracks the progress for each person. So they've got a large library of pre-built courses, and they've got follow-up quizzes so that you make sure that you have incredibly well-trained and equipped volunteers. And their tools are super simple and comprehensive, so you can provide basic email and text messaging for team communication. And basically, it's a one-stop hub for how you communicate with your volunteers. So you can check it out at [servehq.church](https://servehq.church). Just head over to [servehq.church](https://servehq.church) to learn more and help solve the volunteer crisis that so many churches are going through. And now, without much further ado, here is my conversation with Mark Sayers. Mark, it's good to have you back.

Welcome.

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, great to be back again.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I always look forward to these conversations. I want to go out on a limb here, and just because there seems to be a little bit of calm compared to all the chaos we've had over the last three years, and there's been a lot of chaos as we've talked about. And I talked to a lot of leaders, they're feeling optimistic and hopeful for a new year, the whole deal. Is that even remotely accurate or delusional? Or are we in the eye of a hurricane or what is going on here?

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, good question. I think there is more change to come is the short answer. I think what we've become attuned to in the last couple of years is a couple of things. One, is lots of, particularly in North America, lots of culture war issues which play out across social media and in the news. And perhaps that feels like that's dropped off a little bit, particularly in the US with the midterms past.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Midterms were remarkably stable.

Mark Sayers:

Yes. But the other thing is also with COVID, with restrictions and stuff like that, the world seems to be sort of learning to live with it. Obviously, China's an exception to that. So I think we can miss some of the bigger changes that are actually happening. And I think if you think about culture war and a lot of how politics has been, it's been a lot of sound and fury, a lot of noise. Whereas, politics traditionally is actually about changing the very structure of things. And I think actually what's happening at the moment is there's huge structural changes which are going to have more effect than perhaps cultural war issues. So for example, if you look at the economic model of the world, there's tremendous pressure upon it at the moment. And we're still paying these stimulus that first sort of began in 2008 with global financial crisis, and then was used again when the pandemic hits. That's the tool that is continued to be used around things like energy now.

And there's only so long you can release stimulus and print money without things like inflation going up. And the rise of interest rates is going to change the world. So the economic model for those that... I think it was James Forsythe, the British journalist, talked about we've been living for 30 years in what he called a NICE world. NICE standing for, no inflation, constant expansion. So when looking for a world where it's going to be, I think particularly with the energy challenges that we have that's not only about the environment but also about Ukraine, but also just energy. The model of the world that we've lived in where everything works well and there's relative peace is being significantly changed. So for example, the British government just put an estimate that in the next two years the standard of living in Britain is going to drop by seven and a half percent.

You're going to see this in Europe. Europe sort of seems to have dealt with perhaps some of the challenges coming this winter. However, that's this winter and I think that we've entered into a new stage, particularly with it's happened and people sort of looked at it for a moment but then moved on. But I think it's like a Rubicon that's been crossed, which was the destruction of Nord Stream 2, the gas pipeline into Europe from Russia, whoever did that. The main suspect seems to be Russia in a lot of people's minds. But that changed the game because now people are attacking the very infrastructure of

the global network in which we live very quietly. Countries like yours and mine are sending our ships to secure our internet cables and make sure they're okay. And so, I think that we're seeing huge economic challenges coming down the line, a recipient of the global order.

And you've got players now like China and Russia and others, Iran, who are not playing by the rules that gave us the world that we had for the last 30 years. So I think we're in for a sustained period of change that's possibly in the decades.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, you see this is releasing, you can tell it's not great. So-

Mark Sayers:

Sorry, I feel bad I send these things and then smile, but it's more like I realized yeah, I'm not laughing.

Carey Nieuwhof:

No, this is real stuff. This is releasing in early 2023, we're recording it in late 2022. And literally today while we're recording, Russia is just trying to annihilate the power grid and the water grid in Ukraine. And if you can't take a city, just try to destroy the people by cutting that off. And I can see that being more of a threat. Another very real thing is the housing market in the US and Canada, same thing in Australia, went through the roof over the last two years, peaked in March of '22 and has been on a downward slide. And a meaningful double digit percentage of Canadians who have mortgages are now at what they call the trigger point where they're no longer paying principle, they're only paying interest. And so you look at that and I'm like yeah, I remember that in my parents' lifetime, but that's never really... I remember my first mortgage was 8% and we thought we got a great rate compared to what our parents used to complain about.

So when it was like interest rates were at 1%, 3%, I'm like yeah, this is crazy. It's not going to last. But there's a whole generation coming up going, well, we could afford a million dollar home on 2%, but we can't at 4%. And so that dislocation but deeper than that.

Mark Sayers:

Yeah. And I think there's going to be a lot... We're so used to COVID, like say when Trump won the election it was a shock. And when COVID happened and the world shutdown, it was a very rapid shock. I think what we're seeing now is going to be this slow shaving off those things. So exactly what you're saying, I'm paying more on my mortgage. We had this thing where a lot of people saved money during the pandemic, so now they're spending it on services and vacations. But airline prices are going up and going to continue to go up because jet fuel is super expensive and it's not going to get any cheaper anytime soon. Plus you've also got a lot of people have spent a lot of that household savings that happened during the pandemic and they continue to live in that lifestyle, but now it's on debt.

So what a lot of people are thinking about with inflation and interest rates is housing debt, but they don't think about credit card debt. So for a lot of emerging Gen Z or millennials, they're increasingly walking into a significant amount of debt. So there's a finite point that this starts to run out and everything starts to come together. And the other thing I would say in the midst of this is, we have to increasingly start to look at the very real possibility of increased geopolitical conflict. Russia is not just going, I pray and hope that there is a peaceful resolution to the war, but I think that it's not like Putin's going to go, oh well, gave it a try. The more that Ukraine pushes Russia back, the increased chance of Russia doing something quite destructive. But for me, I think the real thing which your country and I is

both feeling at the moment is the increased assertiveness of China in the world, and the increased possibility of a conflict breaking out.

Our former prime minister who is Kevin Rudd who's a China expert, speaks Mandarin, has sat with Xi Jinping. Did his Oxford PhD on Jinping's Rise, just said in our newspaper we've got a five-year window to avert war with China. So this is going to have a huge effect. And I think-

Carey Nieuwhof:

China invading Australia or what?

Mark Sayers:

I think Taiwan, the issues... Sorry, I should clarify that, China taking Taiwan in the next five years which will have incredible economic and technological effects on the world. And that's not even talking about the fact that that affects South Korea, that affects North Korea, that affects Japan, that affects Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia. And that that's something that is going to have huge effects. And I sort of hinted at this in I think our last conversation or perhaps a little bit more clear, that in a world where you can see countries like China and India and other countries possibly in conflicts, what does that mean at a level when people have been looking particularly in the church around issues of race? The issues of nationalism we've also been looking and all, but the way that say people been looking at particularly US is on US nationalism.

What happens when you've got a multicultural church and you've got people in that church who are from different nationalist backgrounds clashing, and I think this is going to become an increasing issue. So there are people, churches who say, there might be a church in Canada and there's a clash between two nations in the other side of the world. And it may have nothing to do with Canada, but you are trying to work out how to do peace between these different groups. So a more conflicted and contested world is where we're heading, and the implications of that are manifold. But just one sort of final point on what you mentioned about inflation and interest rates. I think there are countries like a country like Argentina which has struggled with inflation and debt defaults and stuff for many years, but countries like Northern Europe, a lot of people in North America, countries like Australia and New Zealand have never faced this. You got a generation who've never faced this.

So their model of life is that options are going to keep increasing, the economy is going to keep growing, progress is going to keep going. And I think one thing we're going to see is an increased rise of nihilism and a sense of broken dreams. But I think there's an evangelistic and a pastoral opportunity in that as some of these ideologies and myths fall and a different world emerges.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So I want to get into nihilism and the changing world order, but I got to just pause here because we're 10 minutes in. And there is this delusional belief because I can go to the grocery store today, buy what I want to buy, come home, sleep in my nice warm bed undisrupted and kind of put my head under the pillow and go, this is not happening. Which honestly I must say I have to check that impulse inside me. How do you sleep at night knowing all this, researching this and because I think there are a lot of pastors, a lot of leaders listening who would say, I just want to pretend this stuff isn't happening?

Mark Sayers:

Yeah. The way I sleep at night is I actually think... So the question I ask myself is what do I live for? Do I live for the project of the developed world where my hope and dreams are in better malls and cheaper

interest rates and more options and more variety on Netflix? And I actually think one of the challenges that I've had here in Melbourne, and it's a strange challenge because it's actually quite a pleasant challenge on some ways, is I've lived in the world's most Liverpool city, Vancouver and Melbourne and Vienna have fought for that for a while. And what you're fighting here is a fantastic quality of living. Now I love that and benefit from it. So I don't want to make it some terrible thing I'm living through, but I also see the spiritual cost of that. It means people don't have to think about God, they can live insulated and they can deny the spiritual realities of life.

So part of me is I think when you have a prophetic view of life where you can see that God has tremendous holiness and righteousness, that He calls us to... We are living for the kingdom, we're living for eternity. We're not just living for the project of here and now. So in some ways I see a world where this is great. I think often what the west has done is looked at this, say the church in the south and gone, oh we can see the disparity there. A lot of that is purely because there are more challenges in the global south and perhaps there's more challenges and expectations fall in the developed world. I think perhaps the church could move into a healthier place and we could see a more genuine discipleship.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Mark Sayers:

But really I'm spiritually hopeful is the weird thing I'm saying.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it is good and I think we all know that. But I think if I really had to disentangle myself from what am I truly living for, that's a much deeper question. So this gets into your new book, which we've hinted at before but it's the first time we talked since it's been out. And I loved reading it. You have so much insight into what's going on. But also to distilling it in a way that I think really helps us figure out what to do in the midst of it. But you talk about a non-anxious presence quoting, it's Edwin Freeman I believe. And on your podcast you've talked a lot, which I recommend to everybody, listen to Rebuilders Podcast. If you haven't subscribed, please do so. You've talked for a couple of years now about the gray zone. Can you describe what the gray zone is and what does it mean for leaders leading through it right now?

Mark Sayers:

So in some ways what we've been talking about is the gray zone. And I wanted a term to capture not just what was happening intellectually, but also the feeling of what it is to lead and live in this moment. And I realized that in many ways when we look back at history and you try and look back at other periods, you may look back to the great awakenings, you could look to the early church, you could look to the medieval period. All of these eras and I just named them have sort of containers that we put over them. The Medieval period, the Victorian era, the Enlightenment. And so eras as a concept where we give a name to it and often we do that to capture the thoughts, the feelings, the experiences. There tends to be a kind of order which dominates politically in a particular period.

And I was trying to think about what's the next one we're moving into. And what I began to realize was we are not actually fully in one, we're leaving the previous era. We can see something beginning. I don't know if you see on Twitter or Instagram, these Boston Dynamics videos of the robotic dogs come up and it's sort of like, okay, I can see that they're not walking around in my neighborhood yet but I know they're coming. So it's like you can see the future growing and it's shape starting to take shape and you

can see things passing. It's our state election here on Saturday and I was looking through a lot of the candidates and wow, it's a lot more radical and polarized than in the past. The old days of sort of centrist and people who just wanted to be here because they're in the local rotary club it's changing.

So a past world is passing and new water's emerging, but we're in between. So it's actually an overlap where some of the features of the previous era are here and some of the features of the emerging era here, but it's very confusing. There's no markers. So we're in the no man's land between the two trenches of the two eras. And that's a strange and confusing place to live in. And I think that's actually what is the felt sense that so many leaders have. What is this place? It's strange, I'm trying to lead here. It's an unusual place to exist.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, and you hinted that in your book or you write about it in your book too, that we probably civilizations come and go. The Roman Empire is no more, the Medieval era is no more, the Feudal era is no more. Well, you can argue it exists in different forms. But as we know it historically, are we seeing an empire decline? And most of the audience for this podcast is American, so speak directly to that, is the American empire and decline? What is going on because I think you're right, we're at a hinge point, a crack in history?

Mark Sayers:

I think that it's a really interesting question. So I think absolutely the Anglo-American empire has defined the last couple centuries and perhaps there's a British component at the beginning, and now there's an American component and that's what's defined the world. The reason we have globalization is because the American Navy has secured the seaports, I'd say the sea lines of the worlds and people can trade. And there's a genuine sense that people feel in the world that perhaps things are changing. I saw a video, someone walked through a Macy's or something in North America, and everything being featured was Korean or Japanese. He's like here's BTS and here's this anime and here's this Nordic Noir series or something. And there is this sense that the world has... America facilitated globalization, but then also globalization is sort of taking America's prime space in the world in terms of influence.

And in many ways people now look at America's influence in the world as perhaps sort of some of the internal conflict is sort of spreading outwards. I still think it's interesting, there's a lot still up in play if it's not America, who is it? Is a really interesting question. And the obvious sort of thing positive, is it China? But then China has tremendous in its own interior. But I think the sense around civilization decline is often if you look at a sort of theory of civilization decline, there's also something happening. There was a medieval Arabic scholar called Ibn Khaldun, who was sort of one of the first people to articulate civilization decline. And they said almost generations, you have a generation who builds it, a generation who then maintains it, a generation who assumes it and then a generation who becomes entitled about it.

So you have this sense that we stand on the shoulders of giants who went previous. And I think what sense you get in the US and perhaps in much of the developed world or the west let's say, is that you've now got a generation who just assumes this is all normal and they don't have to sacrifice to build it. And often that's the point where civilizations, despite their strength and America has incredible natural resources going for it, incredible seaports, rivers, food bowls. But there's a sense like are we sort of at a generation which entitlement has now meant that it's sort of internally corrupting.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can we break that down a little bit more? I know you broke it down on your podcast, but is it four or five generations? Because there's a generation that spends it into bankruptcy too. Look at the Vanderbilt or the Rock... Well, not quite the Rockefellers. But yeah that's really interesting to think about because even Remembrance Day for me is about something my grandfather sacrificed, not something my father or I did. Now, I know there's a lot of active military personnel who have been employed in actual battle who are listening to this, so I'm not disparaging that. But it's not like we have been in this global conflict that involved most of us in our lifetime. Yeah, so talk about that.

Mark Sayers:

Well, I think I find two interesting ways to look at it. So I definitely see that I think it's happening in the world. We talked about debt and the fact that this lifestyle... In some ways you could look at immigrant families that live like this. You have the immigrants who moved to a new country, they worked night shift and then the kids have this great life. But then they assume it and perhaps go into debt because they're not working for that life. You see that civilization link. So I think that's definitely happening in the west and particularly narcissism, almost this epicureanism, hedonism, these values where we're seeing ourselves as the center of it and we're not willing to sacrifice. But also I find it interestingly and provocative to think about it in terms of churches and Christian organizations. A lot of what we live in is actually built on the previous generations giving and volunteerism.

And I think we're going to move to a point soon in the church where you've got the baby boomer generation often sometimes maligned. But also provide an incredible amount of volunteerism, institution building and I think we assume a lot of what they've given us. And are we going to get to the point where what we see happening in say the western civilization is also happening a lot about Christian organizations. There's a lot of entitlement assumption and almost that debt spending and into bankruptcy through just not volunteering and not sacrificing for the greater good.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So the five generations are, can you just walk it through one more time? I'm just fascinated by that.

Mark Sayers:

Yeah. And this is sort of my summation of a number of different of these thinkers. But I think you have a first generation who sort of sacrifices for it. They're like the pioneers, they go out and build something out of nothing. You've then got those who are still in relationship with the first generation of pioneers so they have a sense that they want to continue it. So often they're the ones who maintain it, they follow the rules, they do it. It's like you mentioned Remembrance Day, their fathers served so they remember them. The next generation is at this point where they just assume this is normality. So there's a sense of what defines them as entitlement. Perhaps the first generation have passed now. And then I think you have another generation who moves into some form of corruption, being in debt or moral or injustice. They're so far from the beginnings of it. They're being corrupted by the entitlement.

And then you have a last generation which lives in the ruins and looks back. So you think about... I was just in Edinburgh and it's fascinating on the hill in Edinburgh you've got this sort of they built these almost like the Athenian ruins. And this is their way in the enlightenment of looking back to the greatness of the Greco-Roman world. And they're trying to recapture that, there's a mourning of something lost. And there's a lot of that now, a lot of dystopian science fiction is a kind of mourning about the progressive future that hasn't arrived technologically.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you see that in our films. It's even everybody's shooting things darker. We were watching the series last night and it's like literally the cinematography is so dark you can barely make out the characters. And we have a decent TV, almost everything's dystopian or villainous. And it's been that way for a couple of decades, what is underneath that in your view?

Mark Sayers:

I think it's the failing western dream. What's really interesting, if you look at statistics comparing how western young people see the world and young people in Asia, young people in Asia are much more optimistic about the future. And even if you look at sort of Asian young people's interaction with technology, it's a lot less wary. There's an embrace of technology and seeing things changing. So I think what it is, is a sense that perhaps there were better days in the past. I talk to people in my daughter's generation, my daughter's 14, there's a sense that they yearned for the '90s. It's like nostalgia. You look at stranger things, it's that the showing stranger things. Yeah, there's this looking back to the '80s, the '90s, this time before social media and isolation. It's almost like a pre 9/11 world a lot of emerging generations are looking for. So I think that nostalgia is a mourning that they realize their future's not going to be as good as previous generations. And there's always like a rose-colored look at the past, but I think that's indicative.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, you mentioned that in an era of a gray zone there's no rules or the rules keep changing. Can you give us some examples of rules that may be applied as recently as the '90s or early 2000s that don't apply anymore and where this may be going? Because that makes it really confusing for leaders, which is why it's so easy to stick your head in the sand and just pretend it's business as usual when it's not.

Mark Sayers:

Yeah. Well, if you think about computers operating systems, you've got two big ones in the world, sort of Apple and sort of PC. They run on a set of rules, protocols, and it's the same as cultures. Cultures have certain kinds of protocols, there are things that you may do in your culture and you don't realize until you go to another culture that's a protocol you'll run on. And it enables people to have social trust, it enables people to follow particular social sort of taboos. And what happens in a gray zone is that all gets mixed up. So it's like you are trying to run multiple different things on PC and Mac and trying to plug them all in and there's computer viruses. And so for example, what's happened is a lot of the past, if you go back sort of 20 years was around broadcast media.

You had everyone in the country watching a few shows, everyone saw the same movies. Now you think about it, there's like instead of 10 movies that everyone sees, there's 50,000 movies that a handful of people see. And so what that means is you don't have agreements on social issues. So a lot of culture war is really a symptom of that those rules are broken down. So talk about political correctness is an attempt to try and establish a new set of social rules, but then there's debate and context over them. Then you throw in multiculturalism, you throw in a global thing. So classic example, I know this is a little bit later, but the World Cup's on at the moment. And you have European nations who wanted to wear a particular arm band that is one love thing with a campaign with a rainbow flag.

And Qatar is like no. And you've got this clash in something like FIFA, the world's Federation of Football, where all of a sudden you've got an increased activism because people want to establish a new set of rules. But they're trying to now do that in the Islamic world surrounded by nations who don't agree with those Western set of rules. And so all of a sudden stuff starts to break down when you don't have the same protocols that you're operating on. And that's not just true at the World Cup, that's true in your



church. And because we don't have a broadcast media, you've got people living in internet silos where they can be fooled that oh, everyone believes the new rules as I believe them. But that's just the people who are algorithmically being surrounded by you by the algorithms of the network. So in some ways it's sort of a move to a kind of Babel in terms of ethics and morals and rules.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and I think you're right, it works in silos like vertically but it also works horizontally in terms of demographics. Boomers, versus X-ers, versus millennials, versus Z and now Alpha underneath that. And I think that's a nice segue into the Overton Window which you mentioned. And it's something I'd heard a few times in my life, but it seems to be popping up. Can you define what the Overton Window is and then how that is at work in our culture right now?

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, so the Overton window was... I can't remember, I think the guy was called Overton. I think he was a policy analyst and he basically talked about the way that an idea can go. He was using it to say if we introduce a policy that could be unthinkable, what's the point where that becomes acceptable and integrated into the culture? So he talked about that an idea is introduced, it's rejected, but then a few people accept it and then effectively public opinion swings. And it goes through this process where something unacceptable then moves into the acceptable. So that's happened. So for example, gay marriage in many western countries was... You had people like Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama publicly speaking against it. And then only a few years later if you spoke against it, you'd almost sort of be publicly sanctioned. So that's an example of something moving through the Overton window.

I think we're in a new place now where we're in absolute high speed Overton window because of that silos that we just spoke about. And it's interesting too, I remember reading about a lady, I think it's about 2013, 2014, she was in Southern Baptist in Texas. And she went from zero interest in Islam and then six weeks later had pledged allegiance to ISIS. And this all happened because of online radicalization. So we're in a world where the Overton Window is spinning at a hyper speed because you can go into a form of radicalization online because of algorithms and just the immersive nature of the internet. So I think the pandemic, everyone sort of locked down on the phone saw all kinds of radicalizations everywhere happening at once. Some might be to all of a sudden take up a new fitness program for your life. Others are political, others are ideological.

So what we're seeing is the Overton Window going in a rapid rate. So you are seeing now, I was just reading about some of the sort of new frontiers in philosophy and the new things. So everyone's sort of dealing with woke stuff at the moment, talking about that. Already, if you look at what's happening in academia, people are moving beyond that. And there's a critique of the woke stuff saying that they're looking at these different levels of oppression, but the one that they're not seeing is human and non-human. So for example, in an oil spill no one's asked about the agency of the oil and the metal structures and things I'm like, oh my goodness, this is so bizarre. But I'm finding stuff I'm saying in three years time, say something like polyamory, we just saw the FTX where you've got a company with a brain run. Two companies dealing with each other and all the people are in a sort of group relationship and this is becoming more and more in certain areas. The Overton Window's passed on that very quickly. So we're in a sort of gray zone Overton Window, hyper speed.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, and by the way I did a quick Google search, thank you, Wikipedia, Joseph Overton, an American policy analyst. So there you go. But that makes it really hard to preach, particularly you've got a few

decades in you. I've got a few decades in me and that's one of the reasons what you would say very comfortably in 1999 is stuff. There was a stupid BuzzFeed article that came up the other day, but it's like what '90s and 2000 sitcoms got wrong. And they're making fun of the stuff that we used to laugh at 10 years ago. Everybody did. Now, some of that stuff needed to go but some of it was like, oh yeah, I guess people don't think that way anymore. So that makes communicating really challenging. How do you navigate that because you're not just this thinker who writes books, you're the pastor of a church, of Red Church in Melbourne, of real church with real people that you show up at every week? How do you pastor through that?

Mark Sayers:

Well, I think what I realized is I'm in a New Testament scenario. One of my heroes is Lesslie Newbigin, and he was trying to tell people in the '90s, the West is not what you think it is. And he saw the West as an increasingly multicultural pluralistic. And he wrote a book called *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. And I think that's it. I can have someone sitting in the audience who's an atheist, I can have someone who's a new age, I can have someone who's a lapsed Catholic, I can have someone who's an Iranian Muslim who's open spiritually. So I have to engage in multiple things. And I think Keller's been helpful on some of this in the sense of talking about New York there's these different groups that you're preaching to. So I actually find the New Testament is addressing different audiences all the time.

There's Jews, there's sort of Greek-speaking Jews, there's complete pagans. So I think it's a fantastic way to keep us on our toes and engaged. I think what we're going to be careful to is not to keep ourselves just be in our little silo. And the thing I realized is I thought for ages Melbourne's just moving [inaudible 00:36:35] progressive, and everyone who turns up is not a Christian is a sort of liberal progressive. When I began to discover gen Z people turning up who are super conservative but more conservative than Christians. So it's all happening out there. And I actually see that as an exciting challenge, which I think means we are doing misogyny in the west.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This is a bit of a leading question and feel free to disagree, but I imagine it's harder to deal with the Overton Window changing as quickly as it does when you used to be the people who owned the Overton window. Do you know what I mean? Christian sort of set the standards for acceptability for generations. Now you can argue it was never really that way or whatever, but broad cultural strokes. I think you can make an argument that we kind of defined what was acceptable and what was not acceptable, and sometimes we didn't steward that particularly well. Do you think part of the frustration with the changing moral values is somehow related to control?

Mark Sayers:

I think there's a couple of things there. I think maybe also because as an Australian, the first church in Australia was burnt down. And there's a sense where Australia was trying to do a sort of... It was some of the most secular people in the British Empire, had a lot of sex workers, convicts and soldiers who were being punished. So there was always this sort of post-Christian thing to Australia. So maybe I don't feel that in the same way that perhaps people do in other places. But I can see the point and I think there is a sense of not... I think there's a difference between losing control and losing power. And perhaps that partially it's not the loss of control of the Overton Window, it's the loss of the fact that you can have the power to control it. So there's a natural anxiety that comes up when we have a loss of control.

So there's lots of places feeling that. But I think the most biggest pushback and where it moves into the realm of politics or trying to influence politics is when you think we can get that back. So the strategy to win back the kingdom of God is to retake the Overton window. Part of how I see it is the Overton Window is going so fast, it's almost making a mockery of itself. And I find so many people who are just the world's... Non-Christians are very willing to have the conversation with you, which begins as what on earth is going on? My head is spinning, how do you see this as a Christian? I have that conversation often. If I spoke to a friend in Europe, same thing. So I think that the Overton Window spinning actually undermines the ideology of the day.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, and that can explain the hyper-politicalization of faith in the United States. We're going to take back the White House, take back the supreme court, take back the governorship, that grasping for power. All of this leads us to anxiety. As you say, people are rattled, leaders are rattled, people are frustrated. Whether you're trying to get back to the way it used to be, trying to forge a way forward that takes us into the non-anxious presence. The latest stat I just got from Barna done in the fall of 2022, is it's not 42% of pastors are thinking of seriously leaving ministry. Now it's dropped to 39%, which is still discouraging. But a lot of us are thinking, hey, I'm just going to check out, I'm not going to do this anymore. How do you find or cultivate a non-anxious presence in this context, Mark?

Mark Sayers:

I was thinking about this this week, actually. And I think that one thing I've noticed is on some ways when I talk to people, so do these podcasts and you're getting discussions with people over the place, there's an element when I began talking about a lot of this. People looked at it ideologically, okay, so there's this new idea coming up and how do we deal with this and what's my response apologetically to that or whatever. But what I'm noticing is I've spoken to people where it really hurts is relationally. And I think what's marked the last year is yes, it's the pandemic, yes, it's polarization, yes, it's all this stuff. But when you ask someone about that they'll go yeah, my church got... Polarization's been a big thing and they'll talk about politics. But then they'll say there was Fred, and Fred was my friend and he became radicalized or he disagreed with me on this. And him and his wife and kids, they don't talk to us anymore.

And I think that that's what I've noticed. So there's an element I can throw out the here's what's happening cultural thing, which is a great explainer. But where the rubber hits the road for so many leaders is relationally and families, friends. What happens when the people in the team you planted with get into conflict or turn on you? The issue of ghosting of... John Tyson early on in the pandemic put up a tweet or something, he is like that term ghosting which sort of comes from millennials in dating where all of a sudden someone just stops replying to you. But I think John put up something saying something or rather that happening in the church. And the amount of people I know who've experienced that, we were so tight with those people. We buried their mother. We married them, and then one day they just disappeared. So I think I want to make that a real thing, almost this is a pastoral answer as much.

And I think in the midst of that, the answer has to be a dependency and an intimacy with Jesus. And I think I look a lot more... I've got my cultural answer, but I think where I'm landing on this is biblically you are walking through this place where I think of the cross. And Jesus has poured years into these 12 guys, that's His team and they disappear, and what he must have felt like. And who was it? I've gone blank on who said it. But I remember I just read a quote recently where they were saying that... Oh it was RT Kendall, where he said, "One of the most painful things on the cross that Jesus must have felt was

misunderstood by those who He is closest to." And so I think that's the real price. So I think an increased dependency on Christ, there's a great disparaging quote he gave to his young pastors... Had that book letters to young pastors or preachers or whatever where he said, "Brothers prepare your heart to be betrayed by some of your closest friends."

We never get told that seminary, that's not told in leadership books, but that is the lived reality of so many people I'm talking to over the last two years. And that's just the turning to Jesus, and it's a seminary moment. But on the other side of that, I think there is an increased spiritual authority. I think there's an increased dependency, an increased being close to the vine. So I think we've got to help and nurture people in that place.

Carey Nieuwhof:

You say that churches and Christian organizations that have been overtaken by chronic anxiety will resist growth. As soon as I read that I'm like yeah, that makes sense but I'd never thought of that before. How does that dynamic play out, Mark, what's underneath it?

Mark Sayers:

There's a book that a friend recommended to me recently called Leadership on the Line by Heifetz and Linsky. And it's not a Christian book but it's so interesting that it just said something I'm like, this is 100% felt, I see this everywhere. I've never heard a leadership book explain it. And basically their argument crystallized is, a leadership is advocating for a positive program of change. People resist change because to change you've got to lose something, sacrifice something, change hurts. So people will not attack your program of positive change, they'll attack you. So that's going to happen to you. You're going to get massive backlash. They will come to take you out. So you need a program to survive, that's essentially the book. And I'm like, oh my goodness, that's so brutal. But it's actually spot on. It's like it's so real. And so people don't want to change.

There are people who want control there. There's a familiarity that we want to cling to. There's elements where our flesh, when we're challenged to grow in the Christian scheme, I think of becoming more Christlike, when we're growing, we're dying to our flesh and our flesh resists. So any leader, and I think so many young leaders whether it's the training they've had, seminary nomination, the internet has not prepared them for the backlash and pain that comes when you advocate for positive change. In fact, the model of leadership they've been given is one of celebrity that people are going to love you, you're going to be known. It's going to be wonderful. What they're not being told is that those closest to you and those around you and the crowd will backlash against you because they don't want to change. So I think that sense, if you bring that together with what Friedman is realizing is that change is having this non anxious presence in the face of continual backlash. And that's what I say in my book, might critique it a little bit of Friedman, is that I don't think we can do that without the presence of God.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. So break that down a little bit more because I think that's right. I've seen that a million times where it's like, I'm not going to attack your idea, I'm going to attack you. And so many leaders in that field feel it, it happens to politicians, it happens to preachers, it happens to business leaders who are bringing about change. Look at what's happening with Elon Musk in Twitter right now. And I'm not defending Elon Musk. I mean that is a crazy show going on right now. But so much criticism focused on him. I always thought, do you really want to be a politician because basically every headline about you is going to be negative and that's leadership?

Mark Sayers:

Yes.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So when you're in those crosshairs and when the betrayal is personal, you've mentioned turning to Jesus, what else? And maybe that's enough, maybe that's it. But what else helps in cultivating a non-anxious presence?

Mark Sayers:

I think that there is a distance that needs to happen. And what I mean by that is one of the things that the world says to us is you need to be close, you need to see me. That language of therapy, which can be really helpful in certain environments also can go beyond its bounds. And the language like the leader as therapist and must see every person. And it's interesting I hear so many people saying, they're like, I left that church because I didn't feel seen. And part of me is like I know pastors seriously, that person's got hundreds or thousands or whatever of people in that church. They're not going to see every person intimately. But there's almost this cultural value that the leader is the therapist, the leader's actually not the therapist. The leader can still be caring and compassionate, but there's not the intimacy sort of one-on-one.

So leaders need to be pastorally caring for people and they need to be with the people. But then they also there needs to be a sense of distance where they can see the bigger picture, what's going on. And so people need to cultivate patterns of... I've talked in some of my books about the idea of withdraw return. There's this element that the leader is able to lead because they aren't really part of the crowd and they feel even some of the sting of the crowd, which enables them to actually see some of the idols of the crowd. But then they in love return to the crowd. It's like Jeremiah, Jeremiah is told I think it's in Jeremiah six, by God that he's to be a tester of men. That is literally to create these tests for people to see. And sort of the Hebrew concept is that's to be done through yard and through knowing, through being close.

He's not a scientist at a distance, but he is going with God, seeing the bigger picture. And he's looking everything from geopolitics but then he's amongst the people. He's getting thrown in the ground system toilets in punishment. So I think that that distance is really key. And I think having people as well who you can trust perhaps that you aren't leading in the same way, that perhaps maybe outside is also helpful as well. But I think an understanding and a yes that you are willing to go forward in leadership even when you're going to get backlash. And that at the starting point, counting the cost, I think there's been a panic because there's so few younger leaders coming through that we sell it to them. Yet we don't say yeah, this is also going to hurt and this is going to possibly cost you everything.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Okay, so let's drill down on that a little bit. I've often thought about it, I don't think I've ever articulated it. So maybe I'm misreading you. We know each other somewhat well through the podcast and leadership circles, but we haven't hung out a lot. But I'm saying okay, that might be easy for Mark because Mark has a whole bunch of books behind him. All right, it's the wrong app. But you got a whole lot of books behind you, you do a lot of reading, you have your academic life, et cetera. I am wired differently than most pastors. So I thought about why I was able to architect so much change. And this is a theory of mine. I recently redid my spiritual gifts inventory. And according to whatever we're using at

our church right now, which I'm still a part of, leadership is at the top, communication is at the top, faith is at the top.

At the bottom, prayer, which apparently I've never gotten good at even though I pray every day. And mercy is at the very bottom. And I look at that and I'm like, if you start taking shots at me, it just hurts less than a lot of pastors I know. There are pastors I know who I pull the arrow out, and sometimes days later, but usually an hour later I'm like, eh, okay, not all that is healthy. Some of that needs more therapy. But I've gotten a natural ability to distance myself from the critics. It just doesn't hurt me the way it hurts other friends because I'm wired differently. And I think that has made change and criticism easier for me. Now have I lost sleep? Yes. Have I had friendships burn? Yes. Does it sting? Yeah. And some of them have stung for years. Took me a long time to get over it. But I think less so than most. Any advice for the pastor and going into your own experience, who feels it more intensely? And maybe you do, Mark.

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, I do. If you can lay hands and pass that gift of not having a feel on me, I'll take that gift in a moment, that anointing in a moment.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm not sure it's from God, I don't know Mark.

Mark Sayers:

Yeah, I think you're right. There are people who have a natural ability where I don't know what it is. But I have articulated I think what you said, I am the opposite of often what people think of me. I think a lot. But I'm a feeler, I'm an F on things. I'm not that. So a lot of my learning is actually to understand the world and understand people and understand the pastoral situations that I'm in. To learn something detached from people in reality is not attractive to me. So it's difficult and I think for me, I know that what God's done in my life is so much that has come through the path of pain and suffering.

And I think that pain and suffering leads people into greater spiritual authority. I wish it was different. I wish it was. And it's not everyone's particular path. I wrote a book called Facing Leviathan, which is really this is that story. Is that there are many leaders who go through tremendously painful things. And I think often what they feel is they can't lead because they feel so strongly, but actually think they also have a real contribution to make because they can relate to people who do feel that change. So there's a greater... I'm a bit hesitant of the word empathy, but there's a greater compassion that they can have for people. And they feel it. They feel it more deeply. And I think on my sort of gift thing that's sort of the prophetic is, I feel very much to sort of identify very much with the prophets in the Old Testament who's sort of saying things that aren't always popular, and then often that has a personal cost and so on. I think we need all sorts.

But I think what I'm noticing, I think younger generations haven't been taught to distance in the same way. It's not the world they've been taught, the way they've been raised in schools is being very aware of feelings. And I think there's extremes. But I think my little message to anyone who's listening who's like, it hurts this season, that to me is a font to go deeper into bring that before Jesus. And I think that the benefit of that is greater spiritual authority.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you distance yourself when it is hurting? And thank you for sharing that because it would be easy from the outside looking in to go, oh, he's very cerebral intellectual, maybe he doesn't feel it either. But you do, you feel it very intensely? So what do you do to not just give up and call it a day? How do you distance yourself so you can go back in and love?

Mark Sayers:

There's a couple of key things. Again, the first thing on the other side of that wall, there's a room which is now where Rebuilders is recorded. But before it was recorded, I remember a period when we didn't have that all set up in there. And there was a really tough challenge I was going through and there's a heater unit on the other side of there. And I remember one winter it was just really tough season in ministry, and I came in here at night and a lot of that was literally laying on the floor flat before God. Just saying, "Just take this." And it was really interesting the intimacy that developed with Him. That's the complete opposite. Here's a great idea, it was literally like I am laying on the floor before you. And I remember I heard this story about Pope John Paul II where when he first went into the Vatican, he had this prayer chapel where he would pray. And they couldn't find him for ages and they'd come in and they'd keep looking for him.

And every day he's meant to be in prayer, this guy's meant to be the pope he's not praying. And then they realized that they couldn't see him because he was lying flat as he prayed in the sort of presence of God. And I remember reading that and then thought that's all I can do at this moment. I'm just going to lay flat in front of God and sort of just cry out to Him in the pain. I think the second thing is processing it with wise people. I have a leadership coach and a lot of that is not just like, "Hey Mark, here's an idea of how you can lead." A lot of that is me processing in the right place. I think a lot of younger pastors, because they've not got a place to do that can do that online, they can do that in the pulpit.

There's a sense where you need to be real but also you need to process. And then recognize what in my journey and what in the pain I've gone through is actually to use to be taught? What's actually for me in here is really key? And then I think time is a distancer. There is a sense where when you keep walking it's like grief. Grief is everywhere and it becomes a little bit less and a little bit less and it's going to return. But there's a sense that I think as you go through things and I think that's why I believe in there's a grit and determination in me. Despite all my feelings, I'm a very determined person. And part of that is I think a commitment to God because Christ changed my life and I want to follow Him. So I'm committed to keep going even when it's horrendous.

There's been many times when just want to walk away, but I think that commitment to Him. And I realize that the more committed I am, the greater distance I get from pain I've gone through and the closer I get to Him as I become more like Him.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I think that kind of leads into one insight, I'm going to read this quote that says... This is from a non-anxious presence. "A worrisome introspection became normative as believers became more focused on their inner worlds than a world to be reached with the gospel." I think pain can come... And it's not like I never feel pain, there have been intensely painful seasons. I just think I feel it less. But where I became almost entirely self-focused. Andy Stanley told me once, he goes, "Pain is selfish." Drop a cinder block on your toe and see what you're thinking about. You're only thinking about that toe. And I think it's so true. When you're in pain, how do you find the strength, or what are some keys to finding the strength to stay outward focused and not be totally self-focused?

Mark Sayers:

Well, I think that the short answer is vision. And we've got a vision to be the people of God, to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth, to leave the kingdom bring us of justice and mercy. And so I think that's the vision. What I have noticed. So I've been a big advocate at practices and habits and really fascinated by them. They've had a huge effect on me. That's something we advocate for in our church. I did notice when the pandemic happened, there was this reduction in our worlds. But there was also a temptation because we couldn't control the outside world. The world had told us that, but you can control the world. The world's your playground, it's your destiny. You can almost rearrange the universe according to your will. Pandemic showed us we couldn't. Like there was a whole bunch of stuff out of control.

And the economy and the environment and all that is continuing to show us that. So the dangers then we just control our inner worlds. So I just create this literal cache of practices and what happens then is vision is reduced. I was at a conference recently in Europe. And I was standing there and I was in worship and there was different people who were praying at the front and giving some different words. And I just had this sense. I remember I'd read Rees Howells Intercessor book and about how in World War II he was interceding against Hitler. And I'd just read and I'd just flown from Australia and I'd flown over the Black Sea the day that there were intelligence reports that Putin may drop a tactical nuke over the Black Sea. And I remember just thinking, well, we're on the precipice here.

And I remember thinking, what if this is 1939? And so I'm in this conference and I felt this thing of you are thinking too small. Why do you need to look back and go, oh, it's great that Rees Howells prayed. And we should have a practice of prayers, over my church every Tuesday they have a practice of prayer. And I just felt like this big vision to don't just look back at him and celebrate what he did in the past. Why are you not doing this now? And I felt this tremendous urge to actually go to the front, say to the people who were in that session, we need to pray that war will actually be averted and we need to cry for peace now. And again so I'm like, oh this is going to sound crazy, now be in control. I remember I said, "I'll just think about this for 30 seconds before I go ahead with this."

I close my eyes and before I know it I'm walking down to the front. And I went and I said share this. And I'm in this hall with people from all over the world crying out for peace in Ukraine. It was an incredible moment and for me that's the sort of faith we need for this moment. Yes, we do need the habits and we need to practice them. But we also need to still have the vision that what God is using those habits for, is to shape us in Christ-likeness and Christ came to save the world and he partners with us in that project. And we need to have a big vision at this point in time. The world's out of control. We need to be more engaged with the world now than ever before, that's why God has put us here

Carey Nieuwhof:

On your podcast, I'm sure you see a lot of mistakes that leaders are making right now, but there was one you're really focused in on. Can you go through some of the mistakes that you see leaders making right now?

Mark Sayers:

Yeah. I think one of the big ones and what we captured on our podcast recently and there's a bunch of subcategories you can boil under this. But the summation is, so many leaders make technical solutions. So for example, everything's changing. So what's the size worship hall I need, how many services should we do? How many people should I employ? What sort of sermons should I be preaching at this moment? What book of the Bible should... These are all things and they're important. I have to make these decisions all the time so I don't want to slate them or say that there's something wrong. But in periods of change, what you realize is that if you just keep making technical solutions, often technical



solutions are suited to the previous era. If we're in a gray zone, there's no markers, there's no rules. We don't know what the world looks like in six months.

We need to learn to start making adaptive leadership decisions. Adaptive leadership decisions where you're like, I don't know the playbook. A technical solution is my computer breaks down, give me the manual. There's a whole bunch of engineers and scientists who work out to build this thing. I just have to repeat what they did in the past to move towards flourishing. In a gray zone world where everything's up in the air and chaotic. Some of the answers that people listening to this need to make in their churches have not been discovered yet. So this is where we're almost being forced back to bring this full circle back to civilizational decline. We've been forced into... We want to be managers continuing the tradition when actually we're being forced by reality to be pioneers. So what that means is that says to your people, "Hey, we're going to head in this direction. I don't know where it's going and we don't have all the answers yet. But we're going to pray that God leads us and that we discover answers as we go."

Now, leaders do not like to say that because a lot of leaders authority comes from their technical proficiency. Now, when everything changes, your authority comes from your openness to what the spirit is doing. Your openness to look at the environment and being adaptive. So I think we're moving from a world of technical ability to adaptive nous

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's a really good word because you're basically refining a system that isn't working anymore, or you're asking the wrong question. That makes sense. We've hinted at this throughout the conversation, but what does the modern church today have to learn from the historic church? And what does the Western church have to learn from the non-Western church?

Mark Sayers:

Yes, I think that history doesn't repeat at rhymes. And I see history as a incredible repository of inspiring characters and stories. And it's a testament that at really dark times, God turns up and does a new thing. Just taking carte blanche, some technical solutions from the past is not what is going to be the solution for the future as well. So I want to make that distinction. So I think there is so much we can learn. But the big thing is that, I think what I've learned from history is that the exact at the moment. I think of the dark ages... Again, I was just in Ireland a few weeks ago, and island is this country on the edge of the Atlantic. And when Europe re-paganised... A lot of people forget that the gospel came through and then a lot of the tribes in northern-Europe re-paganised and went back as the Roman world fell and it went to kind of gray zone of the dark ages, that these people in Ireland through prayer, through mission re-evangelized Europe.

That's a story I want to hear. I tell that story. Every time I go to Ireland, I'm like these cities were literally one guy praying, and order and flourishing coming around there and these cities grew out of it. That's my prayer for Ireland again, but also that's an inspiration. So number one, but also I'm not going to now go into the central part of my state in the middle of nowhere, and build a little hut with stones of prayer and reenact the technical solution of an Irish mug from the dark ages. I want to take that inspiration, but I want to pray what the Holy Spirit's doing in the next season. I think what we can learn, we can romanticize the non-western church, it also has lots of problems there. But what I have learned from as I've spoken to particularly people in the persecuted church is the question that ask me, are you willing to be culturally on the edge?

Are you willing to be marginalized? And there's also marginalized communities in the western church as well. I think of the testament of communities which have experienced racism for many years, who are

part of the Western church. Who have had experience of marginalization, who I think we can learn from in the next season of, well, what does it look like when you don't have the levers on the hands of the power control of the Overton window? But I think it's learning... I think much of the Western church has been bloated. It's maybe has had too much money, maybe it's had too much bureaucracy and management. And actually what we can learn I think is God still turns up with very few resources, very few programs. And God turns up in a big way when you're just going after the presence of God and who God is.

That's the good news I think the church outside of the west can tell us. And I think that's an inspiration for us as we move into the next season. And that's why I'm hopeful, I'm hopeful for what God's going to do. Is it 10 years? When is it? I don't know, but I'm actually hopeful.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, and on that note, I want to think about what you see a decade from now. I know the emerging era hasn't emerged. I know we don't know 100% what's ahead other than instability. But from what you can see, where do you think the western church will be a decade from now? And there's probably like a shell of what was left. And then where are the seeds of new birth, new hope, and what will the future church look like in that context, Mark?

Mark Sayers:

I think one of the big things, so there's all the different cultural stuff that was spoken about. I hinted at it early, but I think the big thing in 10 years which people aren't reckoning is that, if you go to any western church, you go to a church in Canada, the United Kingdom, Northern Europe, New Zealand, Australia, whatever, America, the predominant largest group is people who are in the baby boomer generation who are probably in their 70s. And that generation is going to pass. They're either going to be less involved or they're going to literally pass. And we overwhelmingly, people have not prepared for that. So the church just demographically, even if there's less people moving to secularism is going to significantly shrink. And there is a battle for the next generation. And it's no longer a battle for the next generation of, is the church going to have contemporary enough forms to engage them?

Almost that feels so redundant now. My belief is that there is... We've got our advent series coming up and I think I'm going to preach one of the least Christmassy nostalgic sermons ever, which is Herod coming after the next generation. And I think there's something in that. I feel that the powers and principalities of our day is coming after the next generation in incredible ways. Why? Because I think the enemy sees the seats and I think we're going to see probably a smaller church, but I think it's going to be a more devoted church. There's going to be all kinds of crazy stuff. We're going to have crazy synchronism. There's all going to be stuff happen. But that's not what I'm looking at. What my hope is and what I want to build towards is hopefully in 10 years, maybe no one remembers who I am, but there'll be a bunch of people who I'm pouring into now who almost we'll look back at the church of the '90s and the 2000s and go, "What were they [inaudible 01:09:22] doing? They were just wasting time."

Who are devoted in prayer, devoted in mission. And I think those seeds are people. I think there are people listening to this now or this we'll be passed on to someone and go, I think this is you. Some of these people are 14 now, some are 28, but they have this hunger for renewal. They're complete outliers in their generation, and they are willing to pay the high cost to get the high growth spiritually that God is going to ask of the church in the West in the next season. And it's not the size of the church, it's the size of the devotion in the seed, in the remnant in the church. And that's why I'm hopeful because I see that. I was at conference recently and it was interesting. The conference was going well and then I went

outside and there was a youth section. And just hearing the praises and hearing the hunger coming from this youth praising, I thought that's what our hope's going to be.

Our hope's obviously in Jesus, but it's in Jesus using that next generation. So I think that's the picture I see, a smaller and I think a stronger, more devoted church which is the seed of renewal.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Anything else you want to share with us? Man, it's been fascinating as always.

Mark Sayers:

Ah, just like be a seed seeker. Any leader here, I reckon you've got one of those people in your church. How are you going to pour into that person, not the anxious bang crowd?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mark, absolutely fascinating. The book is called A Non-Anxious Presence, How Changing in Complex World Will Create a Remnant of Renewed Christian Leaders. Love the book. People can find you at Rebuilders podcast. Make sure you check that out. Where else are you showing up online these days, Mark?

Mark Sayers:

I'm primarily on Rebuilders. I have an Instagram and I've got Twitter, I'm a little bit negligent. So I try and push it all into Rebuilders, it is probably the best place.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's such a good show. Anyway, thank you so much, Mark, until next time. So appreciate you.

Mark Sayers:

Oh, thanks so much for having me. It's been fantastic.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, a super perceptive conversation with Mark Sayers. If you want more, we've got everything in the show notes at [careynieuwhof.com/episode](http://careynieuwhof.com/episode) 546. Really happy to share that with you. We've also got transcripts. And want to thank our partners for this podcast. Overflow, if you haven't been to [overflow.co/care](http://overflow.co/care) yet, that's co by the way not com, check it out because you will be able to empower your donors to easily give non-cash assets like stocks to your church in minutes, not months. And if you are struggling to really develop your volunteers and onboard them quickly, make sure you check out Serve HQ. Or you've got a great volunteer culture and you simply want to make it better, check out what [servehq.church](http://servehq.church) can offer you. Go to [servehq.church](http://servehq.church) today. Next episode, my friend Sean Morgan. Nobody in the church today has a breadth and depth of experience Sean Morgan does, when it comes to creating successful pastoral succession.

And something like half of all churches are going to go through succession in the next few years. And if you've been through one are contemplating one or think this might be the time, don't miss this episode. Here is an excerpt.

Sean Morgan:

Insecurity.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really? Yeah, just be really insecure?

Sean Morgan:

Yeah, just be insecure. Be the outgoing leader who so secretly wants to get the credit. And then subtly the things you do, the body language maybe even, and the things you don't do, it will undermine the current leaders. I know exceptional incoming leaders where the outgoing leader because of their own insecurities, say things like when somebody complains to them and say, "Well, I'm just not really sure that we should be doing things that differently. We shut down that campus recently and I thought that was a great initiative." And if you say something that you feel like is supportive but what it actually is, is a backhanded compliment. You say something like, "Well, that new leader person, they're just really young and immature." And secretly what you're saying is, well, they're clearly not the leader I was.

Carey Nieuwhof:

If you subscribe, you get that automatically for free every time we release a new episode. And we are releasing some fantastic episodes like Tim Keller's coming up, Andy and Sandra Stanley, Caitlin Beattie, John Mark Comer, John Lee Dumas, who else have we got? We got David Platt, Nathan Finocchio, Mark Patterson, JP Pokluda, and so much more. And if you subscribe, you get it all automatically. And thank you to everybody who left a rating and review. I get a lot of conversation around the podcast. And if you're wondering, how can I make this better? Easy, leave us a rating and review because when you do that, we get noticed by other potential listeners. And as this listenership grows, guess what? We get to do more and more of this. So thank you for giving us permission to do this week after week, six episodes a month. It never gets old.

And I love doing this with you and I'm so grateful for you. So I have got something I want to tell you about something new I want to give you. It is my first ever curated newsletter. It's just new. We've only been doing it for a couple of weeks. It's called On the Rise. You can subscribe at [On the Rise newsletter.com](https://ontherise.com). And if you want to get a short email in your inbox every Friday, that outlines some of the very best stuff that I have found on the internet, the best books I'm reading, the best shows I've watched, some of the most interesting ideas that are captivating my mind. Well, think of it as a way to be introduced to new material, do some deeper research in areas, or maybe for example sermon research or just some writing that you're doing. It's a curious mix, kind of like this podcast. And I promise you I'm spending a good amount of time on it.

I want to make it the best there is. You can get it for free, simply go to [On the Rise newsletter.com](https://ontherise.com). Would love to see you over there. And thank you so much for listening. I hope our time together today has helped you identify and break a growth barrier that you are facing.