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Announcer: The Art of Leadership Network.

Carey Nieuwhof: Welcome to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast. It's Carey here. I'm so glad you joined us. And I hope our time together today helps you thrive in life and leadership. That's actually what this Integrity Series is really all about, right? How do you and I finish well? And today we're going to sit down with Tim Keller's biographer.

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Well, a few months ago, Collin Hanson released a biography of Tim Keller and today we sit down and talk about the making of Tim Keller. He's one of my heroes.

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On this Integrity Series, by the way, we're moving into the final episodes of this, I did ask Collin, I'm like, so there's nothing off the record that we don't know about about Tim where it's going to come out? Like there's some kind of scandal? And he's like nope, nothing I've been able to unearth. I'm like good. Finally, one more person finished well. I'm glad to hear about it. I miss Tim, he's made a huge contribution and I always loved he "making of" and that's what we're going to talk about. We're going to talk about Tim's childhood overcoming loneliness, his teenage rebellion against Christianity.

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And there are some funny moments in that. Why he finished well, and why he wanted people to know about his weaknesses too. Obviously Tim was not a perfect leader. What were some of those? So this is part five of our Integrity Series on the church and if you're new to the podcast, welcome, if you are listening but you haven't subscribed, please do that. When you subscribe to this show, here's what it helps us do: it helps us to reach more people.

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It improves the quality of the guests. And when you leave a rating and review, it makes it visible to other people. So if you appreciated the series, share it, follow, leave a rating and review. We would so appreciate it. So Collin Hansen serves as Vice

President of Content and Editor in Chief for the Gospel Coalition. He hosts the Gospel Bound Podcast and has written and edited many books. He earned an M Div at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and an undergraduate degree in Journalism and History from Northwestern University. He's also an Adjunct Professor of Apologetics and Co-chair of the Advisory Board at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. Man, this a great conversation. I felt like we could have gone for four hours, but we didn't. But you're going to get a full cup, and I always love studying what makes up people that I admire, because there are little clues along the way, it also reminds me that we're all human.

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So, as you know, prayer is an important ministry for any church, and in your community there are thousands of people who are struggling with challenges, think about the people you want to reach, the people you pray for that have marriage issues, financial concerns, loneliness, and they're also looking for answers. Well what if your church can provide hope, empathy, and love? But the question is, how do you connect with them? That's where texting, a really surprising ministry, comes in, and in less than 5 minutes your church can have a major impact. So Gloo wants to help. You can go to get.gloo.us/prayer to sign up for a free texting account, you'll get a dedicated phone number. You can display that number anywhere. In your community, billboards, coffee shops ,wherever. Have people text in their prayer requests and suddenly you and the people on your prayer team can be praying for people.

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Here is part five of our Integrity Series, my conversation with Tim Keller's biographer, Collin Hansen.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Collin, welcome to the podcast.

COLLIN HANSEN: So glad to be here.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah. So I'm curious, how did you initially come across Tim Keller? Just give us the origin story.

COLLIN HANSEN: Yeah. So I think I'm like a lot of people in the millennial generation where, as we were coming up and heading into ministry, Tim Keller began to be this kind of name that we were hearing about, especially related to church planting, especially related to Global Cities. This is after 9/11. And so I was working for Christianity Today magazine at the time. And I was sent to cover the first-ever meeting of the Gospel Coalition. It was at the campus of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, north of Chicago, and Tim Keller's one of the co-founders. And he was going to be there. He gave a talk.

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I still think is an absolute landmark where he works through gospel-centered ministry, especially focusing on Jesus as the true and better fulfillment of all these different Old Testament figures. Very memorable. And I remember talking to him afterward, hey, I'm working on a book. This was my first book, *Young Restless Reformed*. And I said, can you help me with this? And he said, no, I'm not interested in that. And he kind of felt a little bad maybe and then said, well here's my email address, you can email me. And I thought okay, here's my chance. So I emailed him about 10 questions or so in responded with yes, no, no, yes, no, no. It was useless to me as a journalist. So a little bit later I reached out to him and I said, hey, I'm thinking about a series of books about cultural engagement. Do you want to work together on them? And that was the shock. He said, yes.

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And then shortly thereafter, I started working with him at the Gospel Coalition. So, yeah, the first meeting was there in 2007, started working together in 2010, and worked closely together for those 13 years.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Tim was really straightforward, wasn't he? I mean, my interactions with him were interviewed based, but it's funny when he said no, I'm like, oh, you know what, I can imagine that coming out of his mouth.

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COLLIN HANSEN: Well, even as somebody who's pretty conflict-averse and he liked people liking him. Two things he often would say about himself. Yeah, being in New York a long time, especially if you're not from there, you'll come across a little abrupt. And then you met Kathy and you realize that Tim is kind of like the less direct of the two of them.

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But yeah. That's a New York. Things also just kind of Eastern Pennsylvania thing. Overall with Tim, just as you know from interviewing him, so many times just what you saw was what you got.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah. And very, very straightforward. Yeah. So the biography came out. It's called Timothy Keller, came out earlier this year before he passed away. And if people want to grab it, I would highly recommend you share quite a bit of his origin story. And I'm interested in how, you know, our childhood shapes us as adults. I think none of us really escape that. They're things that happen along the way. What are some moments, tendencies, patterns, in his family of origin, his childhood, that really shaped the Tim Keller that we've all come to know, And many of us came to love and respect?

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COLLIN HANSEN: I think this is one of the more significant contributions of the book. The only living immediate family member now from the Kellers would be Tim's younger sister. And it's interesting that I took a different kind of approach with this book. I did talk to Tim, I talked to him extensively, but I knew that he wouldn't necessarily be the best source on himself. So, one of the first two people, I talked to was his sister, Sharon, and all of a sudden all these windows into Tim Keller's life began to open, and you began to identify his father who worked a lot, middle-class manager, very distant to the point where I'd say to a friend of Tim something about him being remote and not working. They're like, no, you don't understand. He literally would not speak.

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You'd go into their home and you would not hear him speak at all. And then I would hear a lot of stories about him being a German Lutheran marrying this Italian Catholic wife, and met in World War II, and all of a sudden the stories from Tim's sister about their mother started to come out and these weren't things that Tim really ever talked about anywhere else, but the fact was that she was extremely strict, she had very very high expectations, specifically of her oldest son, she was very religious, and she expected her son to go off and just sort of make her proud in his religious achievement, Tim was simultaneously, family members would call him Boy Scout because he was the oldest child who always did the right thing. Yet at the same time, when he went off to college, he really did rebel, and he rebelled in large part against his mother. He was torn between the dynamics of wanting to do the right thing, but also the pressures of falling far short. And so what it helped me to see, Carey, is that when he would write his seminal book, *The Prodigal God* about the role of grace, he's talking about the parable of the two sons. Not just a prodigal son, but the two sons. Tim, really demonstrated the proclivities of both sons.

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That he had the older son, the tendency toward legalism of a proving kind of living up to his mother's expectations, but also the difficulty living under that and the desire to just get away from it. So they argued a lot growing up, it sounded like a fairly tense environment but he became a kind of protector, especially of his sister. And so, once I saw that, all of a sudden Tim's core message of the transforming power of grace, this gift from God that changes everything about our lives. All of a sudden that made a lot more sense.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: The picture that also emerges that you paint, Collin, is that Tim was lonely as a child. Can you talk about that a little bit more?

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COLLIN HANSEN: Yeah, so part of it's just what it's like to grow up in the 50s and 60s. In terms of you don't have the same entertainment options there, but they also lived on the edge of town. He was in a gifted program which meant that he wasn't going to the neighborhood school. He was going across town. It was set up in such a way that contributed to him being bullied in some different ways. Also, his mother did not allow the boys, Tim had a younger brother as well, did not allow the boys to fight back at all in the neighborhood.

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But as Tim's sister would say it led to him to really learn how to argue his way out of things.

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So you can see some of the initial apologetics and things like that coming out, but you definitely do get the picture of a child who, I mean, he's teaching himself to read by age three.

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And that family, definitely was a middle-class family. You know, they had some books, and there were some restrictions on what they could listen to and things like that. But it wasn't some sort of extraordinary home. So part of the loneliness is simply that as a Tim's sister, Sharon, would tell me, you can see that he was a global kind of thinker. He was different from an early age. But there was a lot of tension because he didn't yet really know who he was. That identity was not settled at all. And that bled into his college experience. He was very much still searching for that identity.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Is it true that he spent a lot of time reading the encyclopedia?

COLLIN HANSEN: No doubt. Yeah, it kind of is an interesting thing that I've heard from some other significant figures of that same generation, that the classic experience of Tim, and I think you could say this about him, anybody who would have known him all the way throughout his entire life, is that when he saw something, he wanted to know the story behind it. And he wanted to tell you about it, just a natural teacher. So there was an innate curiosity, a desire to learn what is the story behind this, and a pursuit to find that out and then tell you that whole story. So friends and family would talk about vacationing in England and they'd be looking out over a Vista.

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And Tim would all of a sudden burst into a 30-minute lecture on the history of the region, because he'd been sitting up all night reading about it, or they'd be sitting on a beach in South Carolina or going on a tour of Charleston, and he would become the tour guide because he knew everything about that place. So yeah, that pattern of, I see something on TV, I want to know about what's going on there. I'm going to read the encyclopedia and then I'm going to teach the rest of my family about, you know, about what's going on behind that.

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That was a pattern that was there in the beginning and it continued through his whole life.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Fascinating. So for younger listeners an encyclopedia, which I grew up with, in my home, every family pretty much had one back in the day. Imagine Wikipedia bound and sitting anywhere, from a two-volume, to a 40, volume, sat on a bookshelf and you just pick it up, look up a subject and read the entry, and that's what Tim did.

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He had an incredible memory. So in my three interviews with him, I remember the second one, which was maybe a year, year and a half after my first one. So we met in person in Manhattan just before the pandemic, had a wonderful sit down for a couple of hours and a great interview came out of that. And then about a year and a half later, I'm picking up on zoom. And he I don't think he looked at his notes, but he said, Carey, last time we were together you asked me about and I told you, blank blank blank, and I'm like, in my head, I'm like, okay, I don't remember. That was like one of the most important interviews I've ever done but I don't remember what I asked him per se. But he did. And then I've also heard through the grapevine that he may have had a photographic memory. Do you want to talk about his ability to recall and knowledge and memory, etc, etc?

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COLLIN HANSEN: I think Carey, that was simply a gift from God. You know, sometimes you look at a figure, somebody that we aspire to, in leadership, we aspire to emulate. Somebody has been especially successful, and we think I'm going to learn their method. You know, one thing you're not really gonna find in my book is a clear method of how to become like Tim Keller.

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I I don't really think that's, he didn't really think to replicate himself that way, and I think at some level, so for example, people have asked him for those of, you know, listening out there who are preachers, a lot of the things you'll have a system for remembering illustrations and anecdotes and things like that. People would asked him, what's your system?

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And he'd say, I can't really tell you, I don't have a system, which was another way of his saying, well, he could recall things that other people couldn't recall. So it just wasn't a replicable system there. So, especially when you look at him as a student, I think for the three years that I that he spent at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, I just can't imagine anybody else who ever could have gotten more out of their graduate education. And all the things he could recall really. That's the backbone of my book is, because he could recall so much of what he learned there. So I don't know exactly how I would describe his memory and his abilities for recall. But it just seems to be a kind of supernatural gifting.

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That I just don't think you see very often at all. And I'm not sure I've seen anybody else with that without parallel gift.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Talk a little bit about his rebellion in his teen and college years. What happened there? How far away from the faith of his childhood did he stray etc, etc?

COLLIN HANSEN: For one of my key sources on this question. And I was just a corresponding with him even this week was the best man at Tim and Kathy's wedding. His name is Bruce Henderson, retired professor and Bruce kind of speaks about Tim in a way that only one of your longest friends can speak about you. Only the best man at your wedding can speak about you. Because he's one of the few people, again, outside of that immediate family who knew Tim not as a Christian.

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And so it just describes how Tim was very much not clear on who he was, of who he wanted to be, was very demonstrative in his arguing. So in one sense, he had very much strayed away from the assumptions about race and religion and things like that that he'd inherited from his family but of course, he started college in 1968, that was a fairly common thing at the time. At the same time, the people he tended to be arguing with about this stuff were the Christians, were Intersvarsity Christian Fellowship. So at another level, he's still with that group. So he's definitely rebelling. He's pushing boundaries, he's asking questions.

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But at the same time, he's doing it within that community structure. And you would actually see throughout his entire life, that's why he always believed in the transformative power of Evangelistic communities. You mentioned the pandemic, he

was so discouraged at the beginning of the pandemic, especially about evangelism, because he thought it happens in community.

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This is how people's lives change, is in community.

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When you go back and you look at his story, that's absolutely true.

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It's how he came to faith and it's how he continued to grow, was always in the context of that community.

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So the rebellion was real.

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But he was also doing it within a context where he was going back and forth with Christians like his friend Bruce.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: So Tim becomes one of the leading voices of the Reformed Christianity in his generation, ultimately ends up becoming Presbyterian. But he had a real hodgepodge of a theological background. Didn't he? Like what were the ingredients that it didn't necessarily lead to reformed thinking or Presbyterianism.

COLLIN HANSEN: No. In fact, that was one of the key dynamics of that relationship with his mother, because his mother's church, the one that she brought the family to, was an an Evangelical congregational church. Kind of fundamentalist leaning but also very much non or even anti-reformed. So one of the reasons he went to Gordon Conwell and not Westminster in Philadelphia was because he wasn't reformed.

And in fact, it was a clear thing from his mom and from the bishop of that denomination was, don't you dare. Don't you dare go off and become reformed. But he ran into a very formidable challenger and that was Kathy Christie that was Kathy Keller. Then later they became best friends at Gordon-Conwell and she was the one who really introduced him to a lot of his formative theological thinking, but it remained eclectic, I mean, to say the least as he would say. Because one of those, I mean you can point to Jonathan Edwards and Zada Stalwart of reformed theology in

American history. But then you can turn over and say, the other key figure is C.S. Lewis who definitely does not fit that mold at all. So you'd look throughout and you'd see, I mean he at his, at his core, he was saved within a broadly evangelical context of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, he would develop in a broadly Evangelical context of Gordon-Conwell. At Gordon-Conwell he developed those reformed convictions, became a presbyterian, and then went deeper into that. But I think as you can see fairly clearly in my book, and others' documentation of him, he retained great appreciation for people and he continued to learn from people that he disagreed with. In fact, I think if we're just thinking about some leadership applications here, one of the key single contributions of Tim Keller would be the ability to learn from people that you disagree with.

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So we could cite a lot of examples here. But one key one would be NT Wright. Similar generation to Tim, similar age, similar accomplishments. On a lot of the things related to reformed theology and the Reformation, they would have disagreed strongly, but that never stopped Tim from strongly recommending some of his works, such as his work on the resurrection. So that just was something that was there from the very beginning, at InterVarsity, his only personal mentor ever was Ed Clowney who was the President of Westminster, but Ed knew that he wasn't reformed, that Tim wasn't reformed, as I encouraged him to go to Gordon Conwell. But then it kind of came full circle because at County then did lectures at Gordon Conwell that helped to contribute to Tim becoming reformed. The only other name I'll just toss out there, at this point at least, would be RC Sproul.

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Many people may not realize RC actually performed the wedding ceremony for Tim and Kathy, and was very much closely involved with a lot of people influenced by RC Sproul, and actually made some trips and visits to Ligonier Valley Study Center in Western Pennsylvania shortly after RC Sproul had started it. What was Tim's seminal moment where he went from that period of doubt rebellion? Because I think he was questioning the very foundation of the Christian faith.

Is it true? Is it credible? Is this something I'm going to base my life on? What was his turning point?

A turning point, there is in 1970. It's the end of his sophomore year.

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And all these, all these questions are coming to the for it. It's not it. It's a common experience.

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I think that a lot of us face, you're in sophomore year, you're that wise fool.

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You've learned enough to be dangerous in some ways, and that's really where he was.

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It was that turning point of, I can't really go back to what I inherited from the church of my upbringing, but I'm not sure I want to go completely against it.

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What happened, ultimately, was that in his searching, he was found I mean, he's looking for all these things but ultimately that became just absolutely formative for his not only his experience but then what he would teach of of God's grace finding him of him being overwhelmed. So he engages in all these intellectual Pursuits but

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At Tim's teaching philosophy was always that you start out teaching, and if everybody's taking notes, then you're doing the right thing. But by the end, if anybody's taking notes, you've done something wrong. They need to be looking up and listening to you engaged emotionally. So that's very similar to the dynamic of his conversion was 1970 was he's doing all this intellectual investigation, and he's concluding. This doesn't have the answer. This doesn't have the answer. This doesn't have the answer. This is the age of existentialism of the death of God movement, but he isn't finding it. Buddhism isn't working for him, Islam, these things are not working.

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But in the end, it's not some mere intellectual exercise. It is a transformative encounter with Christ himself and acceptance of the gift of grace and received in the context of a believing worshipping community, which was his friends for Intersity Christian Fellowship.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: What happened to his loneliness as he got older? I mean you're talking to lifelong friends, he had a very strong marriage, all of his life with Kathy. Because loneliness is now basically, and you know this Collin, an epidemic for a lot of leaders and I can relate to feeling lonely as a child, I definitely had that in my own past. What did Tim do about his relationships as he moved into adulthood and then maturity?

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COLLIN HANSEN: It's a very perceptive question because it not all church leaders are going to answer that question the same way. And so with Tim specifically, what you see is primarily the loneliness was dealt with through an exceptionally strong relationship with Kathy, with his wife. So he develops this incredibly strong group of friends, they dubbed themselves The Edmond P Clowney fan club at Gordon-Conwell and it's two women and it's two men and they pair off and they remain lifelong friends. So David Midwood, the other man, died of cancer years ago, but Louise was an absolute amazing help to me on the book.

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I have just unparalleled insight into those years. And she even mailed me a lot of the documentation that she'd kept from those years. So they made very, very, very strong friendships in seminary. There's a group called the Robins that they would send letters around to from the seminary years. And then also, when Tim moved on Mccarthy moved on after seminary to Hopewell Virginia for his first pastorate and made some really strong lifelong friends there as well, especially Graham and Laurie Howell, who make a significant appearance in the book as well. But one thing I noticed in there is that that was very much true in seminary. It was true in his first pastorate.

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And Kathy was primarily the person, and is primarily the person, who facilitates a lot of those relationships and friendships, but professionally as it went on then Tim's relationship started to become a little bit more ministry-based or professional and then when he got to New York things grew so quickly that I didn't find a lot of evidence of close friendships in New York, in a lot of ways.

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It's also, you're growing up, your kids become busier, and then fairly soon into that, he becomes, within a decade or so, you've got 9/11. And then after that, the books,

and becomes a really world-renowned figure in that process, and friendship becomes a lot more complicated.

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The thing that I'll add here at the end is that something seemed to have liberated him with his diagnosis three years ago with of cancer, all of a sudden, you know, when you're a ministry leader, you have to maintain a lot of relationships for professional reasons. He seemed to have been liberated for the first time in his life, to think about his legacy and to think about investing in the younger generations. And so he seemed to have gotten deeper into developing some of those friendships and rekindling older friendships really when he was liberated from a lot of the pressures of ministry and when his life's end began to come into focus, but I think Tim's are a good example of just how complicated friendships and how common loneliness can become for leaders. There was one person, you know, it was interesting that Tim spoke, so highly, especially to people in New York.

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One of them was Bruce Terrell. And one of them was Dick Kaufman. Dick just died a little while ago. They were his two main executive pastors, that is only two, but his two main ones. So you could sense that the real close relationships largely came from how these men had served his ministry and really had solidified some of his weaknesses. And that really meant a lot, meant a tremendous amount to him. But I wouldn't say that friendship became natural. I guess one thing, one final thing to mention just in terms of loneliness, though, I don't think Tim ever would have thought himself lonely, so long as he had a book. You know, like books are friends.

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You know, so if he was engaging that was a dynamic exercise, a friendship with the book and with its author.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well you might be able to argue that he was friends with C.S. Lewis, even though they never intersected.

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COLLIN HANSEN: That is that's exactly what I'm trying to get at. And I think even more so than while say something about Louis and then something about Tolkien the thing about Louis is Marco Fujimura what the artist renowned artist was an elder at Redeemer and he would say, we always knew and Tim didn't have time to prepare a sermon because he would just quote serious flu but he could recall C.S.

Lewis. And it was like Lewis was one of his old friends. And then Tolkien was that older friend because Tolkien was the only author outside of scripture where Tim said, "I never stopped reading him. I will always read Tolkein."

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So Tolkien was that constant companion of his as well.

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Wow. Yeah, that's very fascinating. And what impressed me was some friendships were lifelong and it seemed like Tim and Kathy. I mean, he wrote a book on The Meaning of Marriage and everything like that, but I think they really did find solace in each other.

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Yeah. Oh, absolutely. And it's one reason why so many of us are praying so much now for Kathy and love her and think of her in this grief because you don't. And I don't mean to say that their marriage has to be paradigmatic for everybody in leadership. Whether inside or outside the church, it's simply to observe that you and I could talk to Tim in a professional context and we'd be getting the authentic Tim.

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But when you would see him together with Kathy, or you'd call them up and you'd realize that in a New York apartment, they're never far from each. So you're going to get Kathy's comments in the background. It was just a constant dialogue, um, between the two of them. And that is rare. And it's kind of like Tim's recall. If it's a gift that you receive, then you accept it. But it just doesn't always happen for everybody else. Even when you're very close in marriage, you may not have that kind of overlap or even that kind of closeness.

Well there's a lot of different directions we can go, one, and I want to put a pin in Tim's last three years, because I want to come back to that toward the end, he said something to me that honestly, I can't get out of my mind. I've shared it with friends and they can't get it out of their mind, just about your legacy and distraction, etc, etc. But we'll come back to that.

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Tim became one of the best-known. I mean, whenever I introduce Tim either on the show, or to friends, or introduce the thought, you know, often say, unlike most of us, he'll be read 100 years from now. And I think that's very true. I mean his

contribution is at that level but when he died, I was reflecting on him and it struck me that Tim didn't build a platform thinking or hoping that his message would be heard. He offered a compelling message. And the platform built itself. Is that a naive understanding? Like, I get hit up by leaders all the time. It's like, how do I build a platform? How do I get more followers? To me, from what I know on the outside looking in of Tim, he didn't think that way at all. Is that fair? Is that a characteristic? Or was he more strategic about building a platform than it might appear?

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COLLIN HANSEN: No I think you're right about that and I'll mention here Kathy as well, and it's one of the reasons why writing this book had been something of an awkward exercise because Tim knew that this was something that would help other church leaders, that cooperating and working on this book would help with other church leaders, but talking about himself, pointing to himself, using himself as an example, did not come naturally at all.

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That was very awkward and not something he enjoyed doing. In fact, it really relates not only personality-wise, but also strategy-wise, going back to something that Redeemer Presbyterian Church implemented from its founding in 1989. And keep in mind that Kathy was the communications director for the church and it was a no-publicity policy, essentially.

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Now there were all kinds of exceptions to this.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: What did that mean? No publicity.

COLLIN HANSEN: Well what it meant was they did not go into New York, like kind of the stereotype you see now, Carey, is that a new church arrives in town, and you see these placards everywhere, saying, not like your grandmother's church, you know, new exciting dynamic, whatever, it was really the opposite for them. It was like, we're gonna lay low. We're not seeking publicity. We're not trying to promote ourselves. In fact, we're trying not to promote ourselves. Well I'll say two things on this. And it's why they're in my introduction in the book. The first part is personal.

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What the first line of my book says is this, the first 10,000 people Tim Keller sees when he walks out his apartment door have no idea who he is. I'm not sure that's true, but it's how Tim and Kathy thought of themselves. My first book was about

Billy Graham. Billy Graham sought fame so that people would hear about Jesus. Tim never did that, it was just not what he did. People didn't even know that Tim would be meeting with the President of the United States because he wouldn't broadcast that information, whereas Billy Graham would promote that as a way of saying, see, my message has credibility on stuff. So, Tim, personality-wise and strategically just did not do that. As the first reason, the second reason about it, no publicity process or policy of not seeking out media, and not trying to send out press releases, things like that, was because their goal was to try to reach people who had been in New York City for a long period of time and did not know Jesus.

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You weren't really going to get a lot of help. In fact, it would typically backfire on you.

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So I say in the book that he wanted to reach skeptics on the upper east side of Manhattan more than he wanted to sell books in Nashville. And sometimes selling books to Evangelical Christians makes it harder for you to reach people in New York city. So we've seen some other churches going to New York and really it's for people who are tourists in the city or passing through a brief period of time. That's not the kind of church that Tim Keller sought to build. It's not the example he set with his family, and so yeah, he was not about building a platform so that this would happen. In fact, one of the things that he regretted is he thought, we should have separated congregations earlier to replicate the different communities instead of making it about me. But part of the problem was, the Lord was working a revival. He was such a gifted teacher that it grew too quickly and it outpaced things. So yeah. You're absolutely right. He did not seek to build that platform, and in some ways it might have been, I felt like, Tim left people wanting more. And thus they did.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah. That is a really good point. That's really that's very well said, Collin. And yet, at the same time, you know, you mentioned New York City. So in your book, you say Robin Williams, Elizabeth Hasselback, many others would frequent or visit Redeemer. How did he relate to famous people?

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COLLIN HANSEN: Yeah, so there's a great observation about this that came from David Brooks, a New York Times columnist, and daily other friend of Tim's. Yeah, exactly. So so they, they were part of a book club, some different folks, in the last number of years.

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And the way he described it was that everybody in the room would just, you know, the virtual room with just kind of wait and see what Tim would say. And then they would finally have to ask him, and then everybody just kind of hoped that he had liked what they had said. Tim kind of had an anti-charisma charisma. I don't know how to describe it, but he was not.

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He wasn't that fascinated or impressed by famous people, which is one reason why I think famous people felt comfortable with him. He just wasn't the kind of person who was going to reach out to you and try to take advantage of you, at all. And so, that's part of what allowed people in New York to be able to attend because it wasn't, I mean, I ran into timid Elisabeth Hasselbeck when I visited one time and they were just in the fellowship hall, just grabbing whatever, coffee and donuts, or something like that. It was just, it was not a place where if you wanted to be seen or be impressed or even to impress others.

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It set that tone that he wasn't really impressed. Which ironically made it easier for him to relate to famous people. I don't know how you'd explain that to others, but it's very much just his personality. And there was no photographer there to get the pics to post on social. You know, that actually kind of makes his biographer a little bit upset because, for example, I said, okay, so I'm sure you guys have photographs of the message on September 16th 2001. I'm sure you have photographs of the lines extending outside the church building, because that'd be really helpful to include in the book to be able to illustrate.

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No, of course they don't. In fact, you know, when some Christian media showed up to be able to broadcast and their service, Kathy physically chased them away. And told them, do not come back. There was just a certain sense that what they were doing was precious and physical. It had driven these people here, it wasn't just for consumption. Part of this is generational though as well, because this is still pre-social media, pre-smart phones, and things like that. It'd probably be different today. So it's personal and strategic and also just probably the time of life.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Although I think there's something very compelling to it. I think sometimes we get over our skis in terms of seeking influence and maybe get it, but you don't have enough character to sustain it, or enough content to sustain it, and Tim was the opposite.

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COLLIN HANSEN: Well let me give you an example of that. You're exactly right on here, Carey, the example here. I don't think I've ever said this part before. So Tim and I had feedback on the book. And so I'd gathered everything that I could find about, why he originally did not want to go to New York, all the rationale he'd given, things about his family about Kathy about how much he liked his job, why he didn't want to plant this church?

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But then he came and he clarified something. He said it wasn't the reason. The reason was, I didn't think my prayer life could sustain the challenge. I was not ready spiritually to be able to do it. That's what I was afraid of the most. Oh and keep in mind this is somebody who achieved. I mean, I know this is going to be exaggerated, because I can't think of every different scenario, but I don't know how many parallels we have in Christian history for somebody, his literary output over a fifteen year period. Seven was actually a little bit less than that period that we have like from Tim's. And um. But of course, it's in part because he started at age fifty seven.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Was that his first book?

COLLIN HANSEN: Well was his first major release he'd earlier done work on Ministry of Mercy. That was his demon doctor of ministry work, Westminster Seminary kind of his academic expertise and then he'd also done some chapters. But the first major release was not until he was 57 coming out in 2008. The reason for God, as well as the Prodigal God. So, to your point there, there was, it was well, he was baking for a while. And the result was very tasty.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Absolutely. And what a great first book on my, my goodness, my goodness, the reason for God, what do you think having done as much research known him for as long as you've known him? What do you think is the most misunderstood aspect about Tim Keller, his life, his personality teaching, you pick?

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COLLIN HANSEN: I think that people on both the political and Theological Spectrum, I think, right and left both misunderstand him. And it's kind of weird that both would misunderstand, but I think it is basically this, that he at his core would be accurately described as a consistent lifelong from his conversion, conservative Evangelical again to clarify. If I'm speaking there about his theological convictions in his founding of ministries like where I work, the Gospel Coalition that was very consistent. In fact he developed those convictions pretty much as a young adult. And he didn't really ever deviate from them. So the reason that's confusing on both sides is because mythologically being in New York. It meant that he was often emphasizing what Christians share in common with each other over what we disagree about with each other. So that was a mythological decision that made him in some ways. Perhaps sound a little bit more ecumenical. So when you love your enemies, respect their arguments, Christian or Non-Christian, and you're focused on what Christians share in common for mythological purposes. It might make people think that you lean a little bit more left than you do. Just because of your disposition, because being right-wing is a little bit more considered, you know, combative and things like that. But then on the left, there might have been a misconception to say, wait a minute.

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Maybe we don't understand how formed he was by reading the Puritans or how formed he was by Elizabeth Elliott, or other figures that led him into, but would be often described as conservative Evangelical views. So, I think both sides have misunderstood him in that way. And it was a misunderstanding that that at least I don't know that he cared about this, but it was a misunderstanding that I hoped to try to help correct in the book.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: It seems to some extent the die after his conversion was set early. So you have the story from 1970. It was the Kent State shootings. The Jesus movement had come to Bucknell college where Tim was attending.

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And he decided to protest. And when I read what he put on the sign, he and a friend put on a sign, I laughed out loud. It was it was the best. So his protest sign read, and I'm quoting, "The resurrection of Jesus Christ is intellectually credible and existentially satisfying."

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I'm like, okay, way to go 21-year-old Tim. That's, that's pretty amazing. I mean, do you see the die being cast that early in his thinking?

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And his personality and his makeup and everything.

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COLLIN HANSEN: Carey, I think it was I think it was set so quickly that I actually made a mistake in the book. So the mistake that I made in the book is that I never talked about his official or formal call to ministry. It didn't even occur to me to ask about it. And apparently it didn't occur to him to tell me about it because it was so quick that he's converted to all of a sudden he's out there at the bookstall for intervarsity Christian fellowship, arguing with people and recommending books like that just the same person that you would have imagined later on. And so part of this is because his conversion, like for many of us, it was sudden and yet it took a long time. So he was reading mere Christianity. He was reading these books.

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And then he was converted and then he's out their mission Ali, you know, the milieu that he was in at Bucknell, you mentioned, the intellectually credible. Well, that was what we talked about earlier, his pursuit, eventually as a religion major the other religions does, the message does a gospel Christianity, does the resurrection, does it hold up to intellectual historical scrutiny? That's the one thing. But then, when we're talking about being existentially satisfying, I mean it's because It's a combination of things one. It's because it was a matter of identity and personality for him and becoming a Christian, but also this is the era of Albert Camus of Sartre of existentialism. So this was the intellectual movement that he was learning in his classes that he was arguing over with his classmates. And in fact, the message that Ed Clowney came to deliver as an outreach was about existentialism. It was related to his work on Kierkegaard when he was a grad student at Yale. So he came in to address this question. So for those of us who are not in that boomer generation who lived through all of that, we might have forgotten that but absolutely like that was considered the avant-garde challenge to Christianity. So what's consistent for Tim is like other figures like Edwards or Calvin that he looked up to. He was very much engaged from the beginning in the cutting-edge theological and, and intellectual and philosophical challenges to Christianity. Oh, absolutely.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: I can see him, that was 1970. And it's so funny among all the long-haired hippies and the whole deal. I can imagine Tim, you know, that's fine, but I can also hear a sermon of his in 2021 being along those lines, you do. And it's just incredible.

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You mentioned, before we leave young Tim entirely.

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Tim had some childhood wounds. Any others that we haven't touched on yet and how they shaped him?

COLLIN HANSEN: Well I think one of the other childhood wounds would just come out later into adulthood. And that was just really his relationship with his younger brother. This was was was was something I mean, there were. He was a fair bit younger, and I don't get a strong sense that they spent a lot of time together. But one of the key differences be between Tim and his younger brother, Billy is that Billy was more like his mother personality-wise. In fact, it was their sister who gave me the key insight. She said, you know, when you visited my brother Billy's place, you knew where every single thing was because it was exactly where my mother had it, you know, so you could tell. So there was that kind of thing in the other thing was that Tim wasn't at the same church with his family for very long because they'd flip from the Lutheran Church over political and Theological reasons to this other Church. Tim wasn't there that long it was kind of a decision-walked-out kind of place. His younger brother was the kind some of you may know when you're listening here, you may know the personality, Tim's younger brother was the kind of kid who walked the aisle every week. Like he just he knew he wanted to do the right thing. And so he did that every time.

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But his younger brother then ran far away, and lived a homosexual lifestyle, eventually contracted AIDS, and then died of it, died of complications related to AIDS, in 1998. Tim then preached that he became a Christian shortly before he died.

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I think my book is probably the first time or only time that we have documentation of the sermon that Tim had preached at that funeral. So, in some ways that was a bit of a kind of a Reconciliation of that of just that, that relationship and, and with their mother, and with their family of kind of well also, say, the other thing in there is that

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Contracting AIDS and everything like that was, of course, just a big deal in the nineteen eighties and nineteen nineties. And it was a major challenge and kind of a point of shame between him and his family. But in his death, there was actually a lot of reconciliation with his parents. They came administered to him and hospice. Which lasted a number of months? Um. So yeah. I mean, the reason I'm bringing all this up is because Tim really didn't talk about that very much. And he was always a challenge of, what do I talk about here? When people might think that I'm exploiting my brother's memory to be able to make a theological point? Right. So he was really loathe to be able to talk about that. Um. But I thought it was really important because it's no doubt a major backdrop of his moral and intellectual and spiritual formation across his entire lifetime.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: When you look at his whole life, were their particular patterns, disciplines habits or rhythms that you think really contributed to what he was able to accomplish with his life?

COLLIN HANSEN: Well, you know, boy the only thing I can say is that man read like nobody I've ever known.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Like you get the impression because he's quoting by memory from these obscure philosophers and historians and seem to know about everything. Like, did he just wake up and read and then read some more?

COLLIN HANSEN: Yeah, yes, and yes, and yes. So I think, you know, he's very much a he was very much a creature of his time and his place. Here's what I mean. Being in New York, the center of publishing in the United States was so perfect for him because at one point in the Heyday of newspapers and magazines, he's subscribing to all of them.

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So he is getting first things and he's getting Christianity Today and the Wall Street Journal, and the New York Times And The Village Voice and New Yorker and New York Magazine. He's getting all of them and he's reading them just devouring them.

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And then it's like, the internet is made for him.

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One of the comments that people would often make is yeah, I was a 25 year old blogger in 2006 and all of a sudden I got an email from Tim Keller or I got a comment on my blog from Tim Keller.

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Most leaders I know of Tims's caliber, have left Twitter behind a long time ago. Major reason is that you're a big, inviting target. It's a very hostile atmosphere for most prominent leaders. But Tim could not stay away because he loved learning what he could learn on Twitter, or the way it would aggregate so many different things. He just loved reading that sort of stuff. So so Tim seemed to have a much stronger idea than anybody else I know of his generation. Of what was happening on the Internet? Because he was reading it. So so so I mean, the thing is that only the only practices that I would recommend from this or maybe commend would be, he didn't watch a lot of TV and, and this is not necessarily what I would recommend, but he didn't really have hobbies, you know? So it's interesting. I didn't have these major parts of the book about. I mean, when he was younger, he played video games, when he was younger, also, he played trumpet, but those weren't things that he was still doing when he was older. So, really reading was his hobby, it was not only his ministry and his practice, but it was, it was also basically his hobby.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, any any insights into how he cared for himself in terms of sleep exercise, diet, etc, etc?

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COLLIN HANSEN: That's a good question. I don't think it came up very often. The one thing that I can keep in mind are the one thing that comes to mind is that especially for his health and just general practice.

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Several of his close friends would tell me Tim would forget to drink water, if not for Kathy. And I'd say that's a really interesting metaphor. They said, no, I didn't mean that as a metaphor, I meant literally, he would not drink water, unless Kathy would give it to him. And so the major discipline there was that Kathy, very much devoted herself in many ways to caring for him in ways that he would say. Simply lose, you know? So, for example, he would want to, you know, with you or with me or anybody else, he'd want to just be on the podcast forever. And then, all of a sudden he'd be like, well, Kathy is telling me that I need to get onto this. Like she is the one who's really trying to help him with that. And so, again, I'm not necessarily

recommending this to other people is just to say that he just simply would not have been able to accomplish half of what he did without a lot of really direct support from his wife, who was very much dedicated to helping in those ways on multiple levels, the most practical levels, relational levels, as well as intellectual levels. That's kind of what I mean. You just don't find a pairing like that that often where all of those things seem to match up. So I do get the sense that in some ways, Tim probably didn't take care of himself as well as he could have. But there he did have a wife who was trying to help him as she could.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Ah that's helpful to see. It's not surprising to me. The one thing that really surprised me when I met him in person, I had him sort of pegged at five-nine. Five-ten. Not at all. He's we was. What? Six-three, six-four?

COLLIN HANSEN: Six-four, yeah.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: And not large in terms of of you know, overweight or anything like that.

COLLIN HANSEN: Big frame.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Big frame. That's the word. Thank you, big frame and a large imposing presence. Very, very unassuming personality, very self-effacing, down-to-earth, relaxed. And yet I could see you talked about it in the biography that when he made an argument boy, you listened and he was like fully engaged like bodily engaged, mentally engaged, emotionally engaged, and that is that's a tour de force. Like when you sit down with Tim Keller I was hanging on for dear life for those hour and a half ,two hours. It's like I'm listening to every word making mental notes because it's like a bullet train trying to keep up with him.

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COLLIN HANSEN: Yeah, you don't normally find people who are good at listening as well as teaching and so one of the things that stood out to me, I thought

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Let's see, how do you develop his contextualisation method of how to teach to New Yorkers and I thought I'd get long lists of books just knowing Tim. And there were a couple books that I mentioned in there that he read, but really was just sitting down and talking to people. And that's again, what I'm getting at in that in that context. So, you're sitting there with some of the most prominent public Evangelical intellectuals, you're in a book club with them, but he has the discipline to be able to

sit there and listen to the others, to the point where they have to draw him out to what to say even though they all knew that he was the smartest person in the room, and would have the most insightful comments. But I mean, I never talked with him about this so I can't say it for sure. But given his innate curiosity, his humility, his respect for others, his just absolute love of learning.

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If you're talking, you're not necessarily learning. You know. And so he would have wanted to learn. Was there something else here that I can develop? Even if I might have the most insightful comments in there. But yeah, you don't normally see those that combination and in the same in person.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: So I want to go back to something he told me in our last interview together. Which I think it came out in 2023. But I believe we did it in December of 2022. So it's five months before he died. And he was in very good, relatively speaking for someone with terminal cancer, very good, mental space, lots of energy, etc. And this is a long quote, but I want to quote it. And then I want your comment on it. He said, I would say that as a man who is sixty-nine years old, I was actually pretty unfocused.

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Because the reality is it doesn't matter whether you have cancer or not when you're approaching 70, you should actually know that the time is short. You don't really have decades anymore. You've got years anyway, and so I should have been more focused but I was tending.

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This is the part that shocked me.

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I was tending to do whatever anybody asked me to do you're nice person, you're a minister, so you do whatever anybody asks you to do and I had no focus. I really didn't, I wasn't saying what do I really if I finally had one year left, two, three, four, five, what should I be doing. I didn't have that focus. Now, I do. End of quote and I what I heard that from Tim I just about fell over because I'm like, if Tim's unfocused I don't know if there's hope for the rest of us.

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How do you hear that comment about his focus and I think he was being very sincere he's just like I spent the last decade were responding to a ton of inbound when I probably should have been doing what God wanted me to do.

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COLLIN HANSEN: Yeah, there's a lot of good ways for us to answer that question. One of them is that it's an exaggeration I'm sure. Because he did say no to a number of different things before just by sheer capacity, and he did hire an assistant, whose job was to help him say no to certain things. So, he wasn't just doing anything randomly, but on top of that, he did not like to disappoint people.

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He did not like to disappoint people. And he did not like people being upset. And he did not like conflict. So that probably meant that he said yes to some more things than he probably should have. The overall issue here, though, is that he could just get away with it more than other people could, you know like earlier I mentioned the question about the sermon collection. Okay. So I would recommend everybody, if you're the kind of person who's teaching regularly, you need to have some kind of system. Tim could just get away with it. He could be so productive while being unfocused because he had exceptional ability to do those things. So he probably just didn't wreckage guys need to be discipline in some of those same ways. But here's the other challenge.

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He was so successful as an entrepreneur.

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Launching Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

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Launching Redeemer City to City to start new churches around the world, launching The Gospel Coalition, that these organizations would have significant demands on him. They would say we need your help with fundraising. Dear Presbyterian Church we'll be building some of the first church new church buildings in Manhattan in decades, they needed Tim's helped to fundraise. You know, same thing with City to City, The Gospel Coalition needs him to speak at an event or something like that or attend a board meeting or whatever. That's the kind of thing where he was saying, yes, but he was saying, yes to institutions that he had helped to build those institutions were so successful.

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That they needed him to continue to do that. And so, maybe in some ways, what he should have done is he should have been more deliberately mentoring young leaders, maybe he also should have been focused on ensuring that he would be able to write everything that he wanted to write. And that he wouldn't assume that he had that time because of course he retired at age 67, didn't get the cancer diagnosis until a couple of years later. So he didn't necessarily know when he was retiring that he would only have 72 years. Probably realistically thought I've got a good decade there to be able to do that. So that's that's kind of the leadership lesson and application in warning for all of us is that we're of course not even guaranteed. 72 years. We're not guaranteed tomorrow. You know what Jesus said? So what I take away from that comment from Tim is that we should try to be deliberate and focus on those things that we can do, and not merely simply responding to other people's expectations of us. And I do think that's that's probably what he was kind of the bottom line of what he was getting at with that quote.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Did he have unfinished tasks?

COLLIN HANSEN: Yeah. Unfortunately, he did. There was a book. So on the spot in Oxford. He was doing a mission there. An evangelistic mission, and on the spot, somebody was asking him a question about biblical teaching on sexuality. And he developed to encourage people. Check out my book or check out his book on preaching. You can see his illustration of the Anglo-Saxon warrior.

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But the point is, he was trying to illustrate that, none of us form our identity individually even though we have that concept in the West instead, we form it communally and he just came up with it on the spot and is very effective. He believed that one of the core idols and misunderstandings of our age is related to the concept of identity and so he wanted to write something to be able to treat that concept. But what's interesting is that his longtime publisher just didn't really think it would sell necessarily.

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So that's one reason why it didn't hit the forefront there so you know I'm not sure Tim has so many things that were unpublished or published as essays that could become books.

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And I know that his longtime assistant at Craig Alice is working on some of those projects now which is wonderful. So some of them will still see the light of day. I know that some of what he left unfinished. He wanted us to do at the Keller Center for cultural apologetics, which he and I launched together this year. So hopefully we'll be able to do some of those things. But that was one of the first things that came to mind was. Well, I don't think we're ever gonna see his book on identity and that. So that's sad to me.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: So that first interview I did with him which I think is, pushing half a million views and or downloads is crazy. Yeah, that's the one we did in person in New York between audio and video, but he talked about those ideas like if I was starting over again in New York,

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I would actually base my preaching on identity and went through sort of three. And I have gotten more feedback to that one idea. So whoever's listening if you could plumb the archives for any identity stuff, Tim may have left behind. That would be wonderful to see.

COLLIN HANSEN: You were talking to him the same time that I actually saw him the last time in person. All the interviews that we did were over phone and zoom and things like that, which actually help because I could record them and things like that. But um, at that he was very much in that mindset in twenty nineteen going into 2020. So is the last period of time before the pandemic and before he knows he has cancer right. Thinking big picture. He's thinking about his granddaughter. He's working on a new kind of catechism that will address common questions emerging in the twenty first century. And he's telling you, and he's telling me.

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I don't think people can go back and just grab my stuff and do that anymore. I think something's changed.

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And so what what he had talked with us about at the Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics is that idolatry was that breakthrough concept that he worked to develop the 80s and 90s that really spoke to people, but yes. Now we're dealing more with questions related to identity and what is and one reason I've emphasized this throughout this conversation is that when you go back to who he was in college,

his conversion, it was very much a question for him about identity. So that's that's how it all kind of ties together for him.

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But yeah, the more that I've read in terms of apologetics and generations, it's going to be a major concept that we need to continue to try to treat with the biblical wisdom.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Collin, I feel like we talked for five hours. This is this been so, so helpful. I want to shift to Tim's Legacy or let me phrase it this way. Finishing well, so we live in an age where, you know, anybody who seems to get a platform seems to have skeletons in the closet and you know, they get completely disgraced. I don't want to name names and unfortunately, everybody's got three or four in their mind even as I ask this question, Tim does not appear to be Of those people. I mean, he had his struggles. So, what were some of his struggles, his weak points? And then, why do you think in the end if he finished? Well, and I have no reason to believe, he didn't what contributed to him finishing well, and being off stage, what he said, he was on stage.

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COLLIN HANSEN: I mean, I'll just answer that last question first and it. It might sound cliché to people, but it's a genuine humility. So genuine humility before. Jesus Christ is a genuine recognition of the Sep eight. You know that Grace is a gift, and as it is a strong sensibility, increasingly toward the end of his life. That life is about intimacy with God. And we're constantly seeking that spiritual renewal in both an intellectual sense and also an existential sense like that that is what he continued to come back to. Is that humility? And that's easy for people to say. But one of the things that stood out to me very early on is that the people who tended to idolize him were people who are further away from him as opposed to closer to him.

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That is not an obvious thing. Often you surround yourself, physically, with a group of sycophants, people who just tell you what you want to hear, that was the opposite for Tim kind of the people who are far away, they tended to have that lofty view of him, whereas the people close to him tended to have a realistic view of him. So I'll give you an example here.

[01:10:40.800]

Catherine Alsdorf is a longtime colleague of of Tim's. They worked on Every Good Endeavor together. Either she summarized the experience really well. I was talking with her in a number of early, Redeemer Presbyterian church members. And I'd be scribbling down notes as they talked about all these amazing things about Tim and she'd see me with my head down and then she'd say, Collin, but don't you dare make him out to be a saint.

[01:11:07.000]

Don't you dare. He made some of us so angry, he had real problems. He was driven to his knees in prayer because of the problems that he had. And really it was related to management.

[01:11:17.900]

It just wasn't one of his strengths. And so Tim would often talk and may have talked with you about it as well, about how he didn't think he was a very good leader. And I strenuously objected. He was a very good leader but it was not a good manager and I just chalked it up to, there are very few leaders in any walk of life including the church who are good at everything. There are very few who are good at most things. Even the greatest church leaders that you know, were good at some things and not at other things.

[01:11:56.200]

And I think we don't tend to understand that. And thus some of them don't understand it either. And they think that they have omni-competence. Tim did not have the illusion of omni-competence in part because he was surrounded by some really opinionated, you know, driven people in New York, and they didn't hesitate to point out when they were having real problems on staff. And so there were two different crises of leadership at Redeemer Presbyterian church, one in the nineties when they were growing so quickly from their start and the other after September 11th when they were just overwhelmed with trauma and grief and money that was pouring in and Tim got thyroid cancer. Kathy has Chrones disease, really hard, both times were major challenges. And so, um, that was just one of those. When those weaknesses. But it's interesting that you know Carey in this book.

[01:12:49.600]

It's in there in part because Tim wanted people to know that and that's what makes it more helpful to us as leaders, as opposed to some books where you'll learn about some figure and you never see anything that he or she did wrong or struggled with those little might, they kind of actually fill us with some shame. Like, what's wrong

with me? I'm not perfect. There should only be one book we ever think about that with, and that should be the Bible. I didn't think about that all of our heroes have clay feet and in Tim's case is simply just wasn't very good manager and sometimes wanting people to like you and not letting conflict make you a very incapable manager and it frustrates the people that you work with because it leaves things unresolved. So but it but it all comes from that place of humility to say. Yeah, I didn't have everything figured out, I needed. Good people around me to help me.

[01:13:44.500]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: I got the sense to that, he really, I don't want to say struggled but had the success come so quickly and so beyond what he expected, you know, I don't know. I think we all have hopes for our church, but I remember and I think this was recorded to in that first interview but he talked about is better to have a church of 5,000 or 10 churches of 500. And you can see him going back and forth and in the end he said you know, I think there's a very significant Argument for 10 churches, of 500, but then we were able to do so much more as a church of 5,000 because we had the resources. We had the scale and he's kind of like model agnostic. It's like this is what God did, I guess he did it and, you know, we'll see what the future holds and that was very refreshing to me. Was there anything else that he wanted us to know about his clay feet?

[01:14:42.600]

COLLIN HANSEN: What's the address? I mean, I'll I'll just go back to that. Um. I just don't go on to go back to that comment. You made right there about the differences between a small church and a big church. Um personality. Wise with his it wasn't a business-oriented thinker. I mean, he's very much a theologian philosopher and apology as you didn't think in those management terms. But you know and he would have thought community-based smaller churches would be more effective at evangelism. But of course, the challenge was. Where do you meet? Where do you have space? So part of what Redeemer was able to do was build one. And now, in process to major church buildings that will last Lord willing until Jesus comes back, or for generations, which is a signal contribution. Not because you mean it does help to have a place to meet. I mean, you can do all kinds of things that way and church was allowed to do that.

[01:15:39.900]

He wanted people to know why he did things the way he did them, but he wanted them to be inspired to in faithfulness to Christ, in obedience to God's word, in the leading of the spirit to find their own way. He wrote this textbook on church

ministry, Center Church, where the entire premise of it is, here's how I think about things in terms of theological vision, But you're going to have to work it out in your context, so he just didn't think that his way.

[01:16:16.300]

I mean, how many people Carey, I guess you ask the question. What did you want to say about his clay feet.

[01:16:25.300]

He spent much of the last years of his life, through Redeemer City to City, writing things about their church planting movement around the world and getting critical feedback from young global multi-ethnic leaders. How many people at the Pinnacle of their leadership influence are sitting down and listening and asking for young people to tell them why they're wrong? That's not a common thing for leaders when you can just go around the world and pontificate. I mean he could have gone anywhere and just told people whatever, and they would have clapped for him but instead, he sits there and says you tell me what you think because I'm learning from you because you're a different generation, a different place, a different gender.

[01:17:20.300]

That's significant. So part of the clay feet was simply, he was willing for people to sit there and say, yeah, Tim, I don't think that's gonna work anymore.

[01:17:29.200]

Maybe that works in New York.

[01:17:30.000]

Not gonna work anymore and say, oh, okay.

[01:17:33.100]

All right. Well good to know. That's rare.

[01:17:36.600]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Are there any other factors characteristics qualities that you think helped him live a life that that was, you know, I would say had integrity. Integrity is, it didn't fall apart, right? So he had clay feet. He had some mistakes. He wasn't a great, you know manager, I get that.. But he had a successful marriage.

Yeah. There wasn't a double life, right? Any other factors that really contributed to that?

[01:18:02.900]

COLLIN HANSEN: Well I do think the wife factor is so significant there. Because having somebody who is not impressed with you and then the sense of not being awed by you, it kind of doesn't let you get away with that. I also think that being in New York was really significant for him because it did allow him to not see himself as a big deal because it's a city full of people who are a big deal. It's also a place of people who think that they're a big deal. So, it was an interesting contrast in many ways. He would have been more famous and, of course, he toss out a Dallas or an Atlanta, or something like that. Of course, he would have been more famous, his church would have been bigger, and all that sort of stuff. But even London, even London. It would have been a different situation for him compared to New York. So simply the discipline of respecting your context.

[01:18:55.500]

To understand it's actually good to be in New York because it's not the kind of place that allows me to be very impressed with myself because it's a hard city.

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It's expensive. It's, I mean we might think of it as being exotic and that's the precise of the place that you would go if you had a big ego it's really not like that at all as a kind of a place that crushes as many dreams as it will crush is way more dreams than whatever it creates. And so I think and I'll say one last thing here from Kathy and she loved her saying this. She said if you want to know how to plant a successful megachurch let me tell you what it is.

[01:19:40.900]

Okay, here it is.

[01:19:41.500]

She says do this, figure out where God is going to send a Revival, and just move there a month earlier.

[01:19:51.200]

Just a way of saying they were so deliberate about what they did. And yet, without the spirit didn't matter. The analogy Tim always used with all kinds of things was,

we collect the wood and we put it in a pile. And we pray that the Lord would bring fire. So he was just a wood-collector. And that sends going to New York's like we're just collecting the wood. If the Spirit doesn't work, it doesn't matter. And so the Lord works through the means of our faithful, persistent prayers. I mean, Kathy, I just I love this about her. She would say, I wrote the most pathetic, whiniest, terrible prayer letters in the history of church planting. And those women prayed for me. And that is why our church grew. And then she would say, yeah, don't listen to my parenting advice. We are the self-described worst parents of all time.

[01:20:49.200]

Which is not true. But what was true is the sense that we don't control life but we have faith in God who does. So you could do all the parenting things right, and it doesn't turn out very well for your kids. You could do them badly and Tim and Kathy would say they didn't really have great parental instincts or characteristics, but their kids turned out pretty well. There was a humility there and a humility before God is that God, you're the one who ultimately makes Makes these things work or not.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: This has been so inspiring Collin.

[01:21:24.400]

Thank you for doing the hard work of writing a biography and drilling down on so many sources, written and friendships, and the whole deal.

[01:21:36.000]

I am very honored to have met Tim on three different occasions. And really, if we started the podcast and never had, he was always on my, I don't think I'll ever get Tim Keller, but to be able to three times in the last three years has been incredible. And I just want to thank you so much for giving us insight and some real-world insight, like the clay feet. Hey man, my feet are clay.

[01:21:57.900]

All of our feet are clay. And I think a lot of people listening to this one to finish well, and you gave us some really good insight into maybe some of the ingredients on how that might happen.

[01:22:08.400]

So thank you Collin.

COLLIN HANSEN: Thank you, Carey. It's been a joy.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: So the book is called Timothy Keller, it's available everywhere you get books and Collin where can people find you online these days?

COLLIN HANSEN: I'm at thegospelcoalition.org, or on Twitter, Just CollinHansen.

[01:22:25.100]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Great. Thank you. Well. That was a delightful and really, you know, kind of fun and humanizing. And I hope it was helpful to you as well. I want to thank you so much for listening to this series. We've had some great feedback to it. And we're going to wrap up the integrity series next time with a special Tim Keller episode. Now it's not a hagiography. I'm not trying to, like, put them up on some big pedestal. That's impossible. But I mean, he is one of those people who one hundred years from now people are still going to be reading, had a huge impact on my life and millions of other people. And what we're doing is we're taking my three interviews with Tim over the last three years. And you heard, how special some of those were in this episode and we're putting them all together. And I'm giving a bit of a tribute to Tim. So we're going to wrap it up that way. And here's an excerpt from one from the next episode.

Tim Keller: So let me give you the best answer I can.

[01:23:22.600]

Liberal democracy, which is how, I'm using the word liberal very broadly. Liberal democracy, which is how our constitution was written. How are you know, how our country was founded, was the idea that the government is neutral when it comes to religion and religious beliefs. It does not impose religion and religious beliefs on people. It doesn't impose a worldview on people. It doesn't say, it doesn't hook up to Catholicism or Christians or you know, Lutheranism or whatever. And, therefore, it's big on freedom of association, freedom of speech.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: That's next time on the podcast. Also coming up, we've got Kevin Kelley, Sharon McMahon, Bradley Lomenick man, Brad and I had a great conversation. Miroslav Volf.

[01:24:15.400]

Arthur Brooks, Grant and Cheyenne Skeldon, who else have we got? We've got John Crist, Judah and Chelsea Smith, Russell Moore, and a lot more coming up on the

podcast. And, again, I want to thank you for listening. If you enjoyed it, please share it with a friend. Showed us out on social and well, subscribe, you miss all the podcast episodes that you don't subscribe to. So if this helped you, please subscribe, share it with a friend and I want to give you one more thing before we go because we're committed to helping you. For those of you who preach or frankly, for those of you who communicate, I've got something that can help, it's a preaching cheat sheet. So you can go to preachingcheatsheet.com to get your copy for free and what you can do, it's sort of my hacks, I'm a public speaker, I do a lot of preaching and also a lot of public speaking around the world.

[01:25:03.900]

And when I am creating a talk and getting ready to deliver it, these are the very things I used to make sure that it is top notch. It's decades of experience condensed into a single sheet that can help you get clearer, get your prep done faster, and make sure that you know, ahead of time that this message is probably going to connect. So go to preachingcheatsheet.com. Check it out now. And thank you so much for listening, everybody. I hope our time together today helped you identify and break some kind of a growth barrier that you're facing.