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Announcer: The Art of leadership Network.

David Kinnaman: We looked at moms, mothers who have children 18 or under. You know what they said was their most, we'll start with what they like least about their church, is that it doesn't support their emotional and mental health. That was the number one criticism. What do you think they liked the most about churches, and it was 63%, not even close to the second highest rated thing, which was like 32%? Small groups. Moms love community.

Carey Nieuwhof: Welcome to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast, it's Carey here. I hope you are enjoying the fresh start we get at the beginning of a new year and we're gonna continue with episode two of our 2024 Church Trends series. Now last time we looked at seven trends that I identified, but moving forward we're just gonna look at what other leaders see and I've got one of my favorite humans in the world and an exceptional leader and analyst, David Kinnaman, on the podcast today. We're going to look at what he sees in terms of trends. Today's episode is brought to you by Westfall Gold. What if generosity was a part of the DNA of your church? I produced a new course with Craig Grochelle and Chris Hodges and others. You can learn more at advanced.westfallgold.com or click the link in the description of this episode and by ReThink. Senior leaders and executive pastors, hey, ReThink leadership is coming up in April. You can learn more at conference.rethinkleadership.com or again, click the link in the description of this episode. So I've also for those of you who are following along with the entire church trends series. I've got a free Team guide available at the link in the description as well. Everything is moving the link in the description these days. So there you go. David Kinnaman is back on the podcast. We are going to talk about why 84% of Americans are now spiritually open by 25% are still deconstructing why your ministry might want to target women not men if you want to keep families, and a whole lot more. David Kinnaman is a co-author of Faith for Exiles, UnChristian, You Lost Me, and Good Faith.

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He is the president of Barna Group, a leading research and communications company that works with churches, nonprofits, and businesses. Ranging from film studios to financial services since 1995, David has directed interviews with more than one million individuals and overseen hundreds of U.S. and global research studies. And David is just one fine human being as well. So I think you're going to really appreciate this episode. We got, I think, three more episodes in this Church Trends series because I want to turn it from so many different angles so that you

feel prepared for ministry. If you're enjoying this series, please leave a rating and review. And if you would be so kind, share it with someone else that you care about, another leader, a friend, your team, or whatever. So what if generosity was a part of the actual DNA of your church?

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I partnered with Westfall Gold and leaders like Craig Grochelle and Chris Hodges to create Advanced. It's a masterclass video series to help pastors and church leaders grow the courage and the skill to unleash generosity. In the master class you're going to discover how to cast a compelling Vision that invites investment how to make generosity part of the DNA of your church and how to leverage existing technologies to connect with your givers, and you'll learn a lot more. You can find out everything and get access at advanced.westfallgold.com or click the link in the description of this episode. And then recently I sat down with my long time friend Reggie Joiner, an incredible leader, I've learned so much from and we talked about what this year's focus of the rethink leadership conference will be here's what Reggie had to say.

Reggie Joiner: You know, our team spends a lot of time wordsmithing and words matter to us and this year we came up with this phrase, here for it.

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Here actually talks about proximity or being present. For is an attitude of advocacy for the next generation. And then it is whatever life throws at us or them. It can be just the general idea of pain, problems, polarities that are existing in our country, theology, but are we showing up for this next Generation to help move them in their future and that's why we think it's so important for leaders to kind of gather in this space together. And so we're asking the question, are you here for it?

Carey Nieuwhof: I'd love for you to join us. And I'm going to be there in person along with some incredible speakers, Rich Villodas, and others are going to be there go to conference.rethinkleadership.com or click the link in the description of this episode and now to my conversation with David Kinnaman.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: David it's great to be back together again.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Good to see you, Carey.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, so I mean, we want to talk about trends and I always look to your data and I'd love to know like just right off the top, what's the most

surprising thing you're seeing because you're studying so many areas and there must be once in a while where your eyeballs just pop. That's something you're looking at right now. So what would that be for you as we open a new year?

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DAVID KINNAMAN: I think this spiritual openness trend is so significant. We find that three out of four Americans say that they're spiritually open, that they want to grow spiritually. Forty four percent say that they're more open to God today than they were before the pandemic. And that's even higher among younger people, millennials and Gen Z, more than half, 60 percent of Gen Zers, they said they're more interested in God today than they were before the pandemic and we've been sort of scratching the surface on this about a year or so. And even now we have additional data to suggest that as many as 84% of Americans are spiritually open in some way. They believe the possibility that God exists. They're open to Growing spiritually and that just sort of flies in the face of what we tend to think of in terms of a secular time or you know, people just don't believe anymore now, they're open to anything and a little bit of everything and we actually did a big study globally with teenagers. We looked at nearly 25,000 interviews in 26 countries talking to teens in all these global contexts 14 different languages and we ended up calling that the open generation because they were so open to things that we were sort of expecting them to be closed to so I think that's been a really interesting and surprising finding.

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You'll remember the early days of the pandemic, we sort of imagine that there might be a real kind of surge and spirituality pastors were almost like hey guys, it's it's happening. It's happening. You know, we don't want to do digital church, but there's openness people might be open and it really took a while I think for that to kind of to show up in the social research, but it's happening. There's some openness now and I think that should be really cause for a lot of just rethinking how we communicate the gospel and how we think about our ministry, like I said, they're open people are open to a lot of things they're open to you know, Jesus, but they're opened a lot of other things as well. And that's been a really fun thing to track for the last year year and a half.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: So I want to break that down a little bit because you can look at all of the trends and all of the stats, I mean Pew Research and other organizations like that some big studies are showing the rise of the Nones, right? Like people with no religion keeps going up and I think the easy I mean I feel like America is now

living out my childhood. I watched Canada become rapidly post-Christian as a teenager and maybe it was happening when I was a kid like back in the 70s or whatever but you know, I see that happening now in the United States and what is really interesting is it's very easy as a person of faith to say oh Because everyone's leaving the church people are deconverting people say they have no religion. They're all atheists and agnostics. But that's not actually the case. That's not what the data is showing. Is that right?

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DAVID KINNAMAN: That's correct and if this is one of the things that I think is so important for us as Christian leaders to marinate in which is we still live with the long shadows of Christianity in North America.

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Even Canada where it's more secular than the US it's it's still a lot of backstory of Christian belief and activity and actually the Pew data. I don't tend to speak for other data and it's not my place to do that. But I'm quite certain that the rise of the Nones has sort of plateaued a bit the last I saw the last year or two and it's not that that isn't still a factor. It's just that if you if you double click even on many of those people who are Nones they're saying they're spiritually open or they believe that the possibility that there is a supernatural dimension to life exists. So a lot of this is how we measure. spirituality and I think if we kind of zoom out on where we sit today, you know in the beginning of 2024 we're sort of looking ahead looking back towards you know, where have we been this is another election year in the US, you know, goodness gracious, can we survive another one? But I actually think that for those of us in Social research. We're actually looking at do we track are we tracking things in the right way do our questions which were largely developed 50 years ago. George bonus started the Barna group in 1984. So this is our 40th anniversary and Gallup was interesting. It was doing social research, you know for for many years before that, but they had just a couple questions they would ask on religion.

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And so, I think a good question for us to ask is, are we really reading the signs of the times accurately? Do our questions really portray what is happening in people's lives? And I think that's what's been kind of exciting about the Spiritual Open project is because it has given us perhaps another way of scratching at the surface of the kinds of things that are happening for people spiritually. And we just maybe haven't had the metrics to look at that before.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: So it's interesting, you know, I don't know why, because I've looked at that data and even written on some of your data on the open generation, but it just hit me. You know, if you look at the big five personality traits of psychology, and again, I'm not a psychological expert, but one of them is openness versus closed, right? Do you have a closed worldview? Do you have an open worldview? What's really interesting, I mean, you think about me, born in the 60s, you're born in the 70s.

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But we didn't have access to information when we were a kid. Your parents worldview was likely to be your worldview, and I'm just thinking about like even seeing my kids who are 90s children grow up and when YouTube came along and early social media came along I noticed the questions they asked of me dropped because they were just getting answers everywhere. And now you look at everything from career paralysis to, for young leaders, it's like, you know, I didn't know what options I had. It was like, well, I heard lawyers a good job, you know, I don't know you just talked to your parents or your parents friends or people at school. Now, you know, it's the same thing with dating you have an infinite sea of options.

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How do I know which is the right one for me? Whereas I met my wife in school. So I wonder if openness has something to do with worldview any thoughts on that and then I want to chase that rabbit a little bit further until until there's nothing left because I think I think this is a really interesting drill down on that. What about like is that an overall and you can use anecdotal like stuff too. I know we don't have research for everything but like, you know, is that just a personality trait of younger Generations because they were raised with infinite access to information that they're just open. I'm going to travel I'm going to see this. I'm going to try different things. I'm not going to eat the food. I was raised on I'm gonna open up my mind beyond the religion I was trained on or raised in ETC. What do you see?

DAVID KINNAMAN: I think you're you're nailing it on the head which is which is that technology has changed our access to a variety of different ideas. I call it the Gospel According to YouTube or The Gospel According to TikTok.

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And, you know, we've actually done quite a bit of social research on this, looking at how do people inherit their views of Jesus, let's say. And you know, in the past, you had a more binary decision to make, and we'll use some sort of broad generalizations here, but you'll follow the logic of it. In the past, you sort of were like, do I want to inherit the faith of my parents and grandparents? Yep. Or do I want to do what I'll, like, it's like, or not, you know, it's sort of like one and zero, you know, it's like, yes or no, black or white. And now what I think is true is we see this in our research with Gen Z especially, that they are picking and pulling from a variety of different ideas and sources and the persuasive power of, you know, what we call, you know, what we call, you know like what my parents or grandparents believed is quickly fading. And we see this in lots of different examples. It doesn't just even have to be about faith but it's sort of like there is the sense in which you know sort of following the footsteps of your parents can feel very prosaic and very boring and another way to think about this, you know, we've talked a little bit on some of our podcasts and our times together about digital Babylon and that's a concept that you know that we've written about and studied and if you look at if you look at Daniel in the Old Testament Babylon for him coming from from the Hebrew Community to Babylon, he had a greater level of access a greater question of authority.

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And a sort of alienation from sort of his people his community and I think that story of Daniel was so compelling because we often underestimate how difficult it would have been to be in but not of Babylon so he is renamed Belshazzar It becomes a third highest ranking official in Babylon. He serves for three different regimes Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius. His stories are really profound one. And we wouldn't have recognized him as a Hebrew and in most ways except for his prayer life except for certain ways that he sort of said. Hey this one thing I won't compromise.

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But because of that, when we look then at today's context, that's why I've described it as digital Babylon, because we have greater level of access, greater skepticism of authority, and greater alienation from the communities that form us.

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So a young person goes to bed at night, instead of being sort of read to by their parents, they're comforted by the warm glow of their smartphone, and they're

entering rabbit holes, which are wonderful domains of human inquiry, and ideas, and beliefs, and questions.

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And that's part of what we have to sort of imagine. So you think about the role of a local church, and this is one of my recommendations then, if we'd like, okay, how do we make this really practical? We have to acknowledge that the people in our churches are living in all these domains, these rabbit holes, the gospel according to YouTube, according to TikTok, and we can say more about the power of a persuasive community and what we could do.

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But how can we become curators of gospel content? How do we help them understand a map to the treasure that is Jesus in our world and recognizing that hey, you know, your parents and grandparents Jesus might have been just as constrained as you know, the reason you're trying to break Jesus out of that box is because you should, but he's not everything he's got to be something in your life. And so I think there's a real power that we have as Church communities to sort of think about. What does it look like to do discipleship in this digital age? So I think you're on to something like we're trying to you know, it's almost like you're going from flying biplanes or you know bicycle travel to now being in a jet fighter of all of this information coming at you so quickly and you've got to read and respond to the environment so quickly that's just even a poor analogy, but just it speaks to the speed with which people are living their lives and trying to take in information and respond to the world around them.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: I hadn't really had this thought until right now, we're moving into editorial. But last year, I worked through Tom Holland's *Dominion* the shaping of the western mind and it was a work through. I mean that is that is dense dents material. But I'm thinking about what's happening. Now. I'm also thinking about the enlightenment. So you're looking at human history, you come through the Dark Ages you go through the Renaissance. Then you move on to the Enlightenment and the Enlightenment in many ways was the sharing of information made possible by the connection you saw in Europe, by the, you know, sophistication of the printing press as it really developed over the centuries. And at first it was used to spread Christianity. And then somebody, you know, people like Voltaire, et cetera, kind of asking questions about, well, you know, what is this about God? Or are all religions equal? And you get Kant philosophizing, you know, philosophizing about it, et cetera, et cetera. So you're in the era of enlightenment.

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And I wonder, I would hesitate to call us enlightened at this moment in human history. I'm not sure we're getting smarter. I'm not sure we're getting more intelligent, but it was that access to information.

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And I wonder if what's happening, if it feels to the next generation, like this is a new era of enlightenment, my parents had a very closed view.

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The church was very closed. It was a very closed system. And I mean that was the heart of protestantism is the Roman Catholic Church was closed, now, they're taking it into Buddhism and Baha'i and made up religions, etc. Etc. But I wonder if that kind of access to information is in fact the de facto like new Enlightenment. I don't know what your thought is on that. That was a new thought.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah. No, I think that's a really good observation and we'll do maybe one more active historical thinking and then move into some other practical stuff, but I had a chance to visit London a couple of weeks ago. Probably my favorite city in the world. And about 20 years before I got to go to Istanbul which used to be Constantinople and my travel there with my dad and many people may not realize but Constantinople, the Roman Empire was moved from Rome to Constantinople roughly in the 400s.

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And then it was sacked by the Ottomans in 1400, which means for about 1,000 years. With you know the rise of the Byzantine Empire and all sorts of other parts of human history that are just sort of glossed over and even in my mind like it was a it was one of the most powerful cities in the world. And of course the Middle East has been you know, the cradle of civilization Etc. So even before that, this is the case so modern-day Turkey, you know could say we were sort of the place the crossroads of humanity and Constantinople and then became Istanbul, Fast forward to London and many of the cities of Europe and you could say that London was one of the most significant cities for for several centuries at least and of course English is spoken around the world. Of course, I speak English, so I don't want to have just like an anglophile Centric view of the world, but you know England and it's way of its military, its economic power.

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its way of thinking about governance, the commonwealth. Lots and lots of human history came and went. In fact, when you go to London, you see how all of these ideas of the world were brought back. Even you go to the British Museum and there's quite a bit controversy because even some of the great artifacts of these other civilizations were brought back to London like ants, bringing things back to the ant hill.

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Then you think about American history and the East Coast, and Washington DC and Boston and the revolution, and then the American century, which was the 1900s.

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We came and saved civilization such as it is, if that was worth saving, and we think it was World War I, World War II.

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And then the rise of technology and space and military power. and so here's the end of this little exercise and historical thinking which is I actually believe we are at a really critical inflection point where some of the powers of the old way of thinking which is military, government, financial they're still important. They're not completely buried of course, it matters which which governments which companies have money. But we're now in what I call the TED era, technology, entertainment, and design they are the persuasive powers of our day. So technology entertainment and design is that's what Ted conference the TED Talks were actually based on those three three initials.

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Some people don't know that and I actually think we're in an interesting inflection point where part of what we're seeing why we're talking about how we inherit ideas is that it doesn't really matter what our established leaders such as such as political clergy University professors. I mean, we there there just one voice in a chorus of voices, but we tend to believe these algorithms which seemed to know us better than we know ourselves. It's frightening and so the West Coast, you know, sort of like the capital of humanity is sort of, you know, become California Silicon Valley technology companies always pop up all over and they're in London and they're, you know, in Toronto and their in Sydney and other places and of course, you know China and other places, but I think there's this really interesting moment for us as leaders to think about what does it mean to be faithful in a new era? And how do we think about the persuasive powers of our time? And why is video more persuasive

than the written word? And it's not that the written word won't matter, but why do people sort of tend to sort of take in content that way? And we're in this really interesting inflection point where I think people are really persuaded by those kinds of TED values. And so how do we church live faithfully in the midst of that? You know, we're great communicators. How do we think about digital content? How do we think about helping people to curate all of these digital spaces in their lives? How do we help them? How do we as the church community, even more to the point, become even more personal than the algorithms where we know people even better than they know themselves because the Holy Spirit helps us to help give them a decoder ring for the masterpiece they've been created to be.

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So I think there's some real, in this era of spiritual openness, we have a chance of coming to this work with a bit of a blank slate and say okay, how can we actually help people, you know, really understand what it means to live as humans flourishing humans in this very complex age that we live in and that's going to require our ability to adapt as persuasive communities and I think we're at the front edge of really trying to imagine what that might be.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well, I think one of the challenges with the church of societies become generally more open, which I think you've demonstrated statistically anecdotally. It seems to me like not all of the church, but some of the churches responses become more closed.

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In other words, here's what's certain, here's what's clear. This is bad. We're good almost back to the binary thinking you talked about, you know, that that sort of governed worldviews any thoughts on what is a helpful posture when you're dealing with an open generation because we've certainly seen, you know, if you've got Clarity uncertainty and absolute that's gonna attract a certain subculture of the population, but I'm not sure it's really going to penetrate the secular mindset any thoughts on that.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Well, I do think that some of the churches that are growing are providing a sort of sense of certainty in a sea of uncertainty and they're doing so not with, you know, sort of pulpit pounding and sort of short, you know, sort of bumper stickers, but they really are saying, if we're going to be a different kind of people in this world, we have to have a different kind of set of convictions.

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We have to look at Daniel and say, we are going to be people of prayer in a world that says, if you do this, you're going to get your head cut off.

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And it says, all right, well, we're going to keep doing it. And so I think there is something about, I want to resist the same kind of binary thinking we were talking about, which is that I don't think it's to respond to a sea of uncertainty with just more uncertainty. I do think that people need to be taught how to think, how to respond. There are different learning styles. We have better tools available to us to try to help understand who people are. And again, to be really practical, if we could organize our ministries around really knowing people. There are a ton of great resources to you know, whether it's Enneagram or the Myers-Briggs or the strengths finder, you know a group we've worked with called True Center where you look at people's motivations spiritual gifts, you know, and I actually think Christian communities could be places where we really sit down with especially young people but anyone at any stage of life could be like, hey, we want to try to help map. What are your gifts? What are the gifts? You have to give how will you contribute to the mission of God and in the world and it's not just to come be a volunteer for the church or just to be a donor to the church, but we're a community to help you figure out how God has made you and we're going to try to know you and help, you know yourself so that you can be on mission with Jesus in the world.

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And we give people a real sense that ministry is going to be very personal to who they are and then it's on the basis of that and we can do this in small groups. We can do this in a lot of different ways. I think youth ministries and children's ministries could actually be reorganized around kind of helping to coach people and understanding who they are in Christ. You look at second Timothy one where Paul says Timothy, we recognize your family background, you know, you have the same faith that your mother and your grandmother had we know that same beating heart is in you. And we're going to we're going to fan into flames the spiritual gifts that we identified in you and then we're going to say we're going to release you and say God is not giving us a spirit of anxiety of fear. But of power love and sound mind. That is a perfect little model of how we could think about the gift developments of people around us by saying, we're going to help you remember where you came from. We're going to let you know who you are. We're going to help release you into the world to be a non-anxious presence.

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You know, the Mark Sayers phrase that actually comes from Friedman.

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But this notion of like, can we help create people who are a non-anxious presence? So that's a kind of certainty in an uncertain world. It's a kind of like, hey, you know what? Come what may, I know who I am. Even if I have money, even if I have health, even if I don't.

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And I actually think those are the kinds of discipling activities that this generation is just absolutely desperate for. And we're really seeing, you know, across the board, these little signs of life. I mean, Bible sales are up 27 percent in North America.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: I didn't know that.

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DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah. People are, you know, you see the Asbury revival that happened just about a year ago.

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Student-led movements you see the sort of hunger for a deeper way of living of understanding like, you know, we can't just sort of keep spinning out of control this question of how do we rise to the level of the challenges that our society has whether it's corruption or or climate issues or you know, the political landscape which we which we sort of laughed about earlier. So, you know, I actually think I'm extremely hopeful about the future of ministry. I want to instill in our listeners as we look at the data. There's one central point of this conversation. It's like have hope, have courage, you can and are making a difference and it just requires us to be really thinking a little bit different methodologically about how we take this unchanging gospel into a new generation.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: You said something and glanced off it that I want to come back to because I think it's it's a really important paradigm. You talked about teaching people how to think.

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So I see well, there's probably multiple modes of this but there's sort of the dichotomy between teaching people how to think or teaching people what to think.

when you think about the open generation and people who maybe don't attend church, the people were trying to reach is there one approach that you think probably merits more attention like what to think or how to think?

DAVID KINNAMAN: I think it's a both-and world, you know, for example, we're In some cases people need to be shown, you know what to think about these things. We talked about you mentioned it briefly you talk about dating, human relationships are very different than they were when you had sort of binary choices. I'm sitting next to someone in the class, I'm interested in her, she's interested in me, I might ask her out. It's like all the proximity was limited to the physical proximity you had. That was who you could meet. In the online world there, you could literally meet anyone that the algorithm might serve up. I actually think we need a richer theology of relationships and of singleness and of marriage and of dating, and we need to show people kind of what to think, what they can do to navigate that. Then I also think there's a level of how to think.

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We give them the tools so that they're able to say, I think there's a principle that's being applied here in terms of what is the purpose of marriage and what is the purpose of romantic relationships, and what's the purpose of friendship, and what's the purpose of children, and what's the theology of the body, and how we think about those things.

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In my research, it is crystal clear that the vast majority of young people and of just human beings are more willing to be challenged than we are willing to challenge them.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Like open to a challenge of their worldview or what they think or what do you say?

DAVID KINNAMAN: Open to a pathway that requires more of them than we sometimes imagine and and really maybe the other way to say it is that sometimes pastors, you know, it's been easy Church pulse weekly when we host of that, you know pastors have been telling us for a while like how hard it was to get people to volunteer or you know, I mean the pandemic what a absolute you know disaster and all these gifts came from it too, but it's hard. Sometimes you'll say. Okay well, we try to ask people to do things, but then they just sort of bug out.

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But I was say that the kinds of things that we ask people to do that are hard for them to do actually produce certain kinds of fruit in them. Spiritually that is really the end game of what we're here to do like so so by making the bar, you know, Jesus is sort of like, why does the path towards destruction but narrow is the gate to life and I think there's some we have to have a little more narrow gate thinking and not about like just moral rules like you've got to do these things to be good enough to be a part of our community, but there is a there's a set of activities that people you look at how apps or gamified content keeps people moving along a path because they want to keep embracing some of this and so we have to have I think this Theology of helping people move along in life to earn a sort of way of thinking about this, I'll give you a good example in the early church a friend of mine, John Dixon. We've been talking a bit about this.

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He's a church historian, and he was saying that in early church, there's really good evidence that people, before they were baptized, had to have 140-plus hours of catechism before they were baptized. Now, some part of this was because the persecution was so significant that you couldn't just have any old person, any old Joe, no offenses to Joe, or Joe Jensen on my team or anyone else. Joe from Florida.

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Hey, Joe, thanks for listening.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: We love Joe.

DAVID KINNAMAN: And you can't just have any old Joe come and join because they might be a spy, they might be an undercover person who's going to try to infiltrate.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: 140 hours of catechesis should do that.

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DAVID KINNAMAN: Because then you actually gave the content its chance of actually doing the work. Even if it was a persecutor, the whole idea was people were being transformed by the way of thinking that required them to see the world through the lens of the Old Testament the life and teachings of Jesus and you know, sort of the wisdom literature like they literally taught people and this was again, this is kind of hard for me to I've asked John Dixon probably 10 times like before

baptism and he's like yeah before about just I think I think you maybe even after about know before people were able to be baptized. Before we would let them be called a Christian. They had to go through this sort of narrow gate thinking because you had to understand the house that you were about to move into. And this is like to me is like a revelation of like what if we tried to apply totally different cultural context than the persecution that the early church was under.

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But we have to have that same kind of imagination of asking people to take a journey with us. And will the typical Church going child or teenager spend 140 hours over the course of their life in church, they'll spend much more than that. So it's actually not that difficult and ask. But you have to have a scope and sequence. to how people could learn what it is to be Christian and then they can reject that or accept it but it's very different than in my view the kind of Spaghetti on the wall approach and we don't have things sticks. Yeah, we don't have the kind of catechisms for our time that I think are required. And and and so, you know, I think I'm just like so excited about the future of how Christian leaders and communicators and Christian communities can reimagine this role of being a persuasive community. Because it's not rocket science, it is actually just human development, and we are doing good work in so many quarters. But it's going to require some imagination to think a little bit differently because coupled with the hope that I have, and encouragement that I want to give leaders, is this brutal reality that it's a lot harder than you realize to disciple people because these algorithms and digital Babylon and trying to convince your kid that this is really true. It's not working in the same way. You can't just stare them in the eye and earnestly say, this is really true, are you going to believe it or not? Because they have to be persuaded on their own, and we want the Holy Spirit to do that work in their lives. So I think we're at this really important space of recognizing that the persuasive power of our time is shifting away from the stages. It's shifting away from the sort of the established leaders, it's shifting into the testimony of lay people, you know Revelation 12:11 says we overcome by the blood of the lamb and the word of the testimony and there's actually spiritual power and hearing other people's stories. That's another great example of how we as Christian communities can become even more persuasive is letting people who aren't paid professionals tell their story because then younger generations and all of us can sort of stand back in all of what God does in people's lives and how people experience God and and again, there is a real resistance that I am seeing in the research to the professionalization of ministry where it's like, well you're paid you paid to be a Christian Communicator. You're paid to be a pastor you're paid to be a Christian researcher. So we're conflicted.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: So it almost it almost what undermines your credibility? And otherwise, this is what you're supposed to say.

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DAVID KINNAMAN: Absolutely. Yeah, and you don't say it. You don't get paid and if we're being honest care, I mean like I know I've wrestled with this question before like what does it mean to be a professional who is a Christian or whose who's Christian faith also has to be a bit on display? I mean I've had to talk about the loss of my wife to cancer, Jill. I've had to talk about you know, what it means to lead in a complex world. You know, I've had to talk about the journeys of people who've lost their faith, you know through the research. I mean I've had and I've got a lots in front lots of friends lots of family who've been in their own journey, and we talked to people who are you know on their own Journeys like, you know, it's like so often at a conference. I'll talk about passing on the face of the Next Generation and the research that I've done on that and parents and grandparents and others will come out like man, you're talking you're reading my mail you're talking about my kids and like yeah, there's there's a reason it's like all the gates are down, all the walls have been broken down.

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It is a battle for the hearts and minds of a generation because these persuasive tools, you know, like the things that we thought were persuading people aren't getting to the heart of what they think. Now, again, at the same time, the faith and vibrancy of what God is doing in young people is profound. And it's like these things can be both true at the same time. Like there's a type of openness and a kind of almost like, I always hesitate to use this term, but kind of revival that seems to be breaking out in certain places. Yeah, and so like let's keep fanning into flames those places of spiritual vitality.

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Uh, but this requires a fun and I think a new wineskin thinking, because we can imagine that the church can reclaim its credibility in powerful ways. And one good example of this just super practically speaking. We see this over and over and over is as a professional Christian, if you get your paycheck, from an organization that is oriented around a faith mission of a local church a Christian business or nonprofit. those in your family don't quite understand what it is you do exactly and and that's an hour on Sunday. Yeah, exactly. And so if that's true we have to say like, okay, we're kind of a we're kind of a marketing team for we're kind of a multi-level

marketing team like we hear from the skeptics, like we are researching people all the time who are like, hey that youth pastor was paid to be my friend.

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So we're conflicted and if we if we at least acknowledge that it doesn't mean we have to give up our jobs and our paychecks if we're called to this ministry, right Paul says you in person should be paid for working and he actually but he goes through several instances in the New Testament. You'll remember where he'll say things like now I didn't ask you for any money so that you wouldn't see me as conflicted. I found my own way to pay. And so I think he's addressing some of these things. So I'm just acknowledging that in an era of the center of what I want to just sort of say to our listeners today is like we have to think about being a persuasive community and new and fresh ways.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: So you saying professional clergy might be a thing in the past?

DAVID KINNAMAN: No, I'm saying they'll be an important part of the future, but they will be their role will be curators and their role will be helping to other people to tell their stories better.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Gotcha.

DAVID KINNAMAN: And effective professional ministry and clergy will mean that we have to say, I'm a little conflicted because I'm asking you for money. And I think there's ways, even in the political space, some of my best friends who are pastors say it's really hard to disciple people who are also big contributors to your organization. Because then they can't help but think kind of in a business transaction with...

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: If I challenge you too hard with what you're giving.

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DAVID KINNAMAN: So I don't think those are broken systems, but they have to be re-engineered. They have to be thought of. We have to acknowledge what that might look like as we think about sort of the persuasiveness, the credibility that we have. And then at the core of this, my friend Glenn Packham is...

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Let's talk about sort of being creedal Christians. We regain credibility by being Cradle and true to the Creeds. So at the heart of the incredible is believing really believing what we have signed up for what we're what we believe right? Like really like this is the this is the way do you use a Mandalorian raise but there are all these other ways to imagine. Could we more regularly feature testimonies from people on our Sunday morning worship services of lay people of brief interview of something. God is doing in your life. How are you seeing God showing up. How are you hearing from the Lord? There's a lot of one of the one of the coolest findings will be actually talking about this in the next couple months, but one of the coolest findings from our research is that the resilient disciples say that they hear from God and they have experienced the reality of God being alive in their in their life and and habitual churchgoers and others who walked away from Faith are much less likely to say they believe God speaks in a way that's personal to them. So if we could simply amplify the number of ways we tell people here is how God is speaking. Here's how he's speaking to me. How is he speaking to you? And again, I think professional clergy are essential to that but they're not the only people who can say and we just have to admit that they have something that hearers, listeners, those in the congregation are like, well, aren't you supposed to say that? Aren't you just paid to do that? And so if we could say, well, I believe this, and let's hear from some friends, right, Tiffany and Jeff or, you know, and Diane, whoever, like how is God speaking to you right now? And tell me about this miracle of what happened. And when we start to, you know, we overcome by what Jesus did and the word of our testimony, like there is actual spiritual power to people's stories.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: So everything we've discussed so far is dizzying, and we've got a lot more to discuss, but I remember some research that came out that you've written about, I've written about, from 2020 to 2022, the state of pastoral health just took a deep dive. I mean up to 42% of pastors seriously thinking about leaving ministry, not just their calling, their emotional health, spiritual health. The number of friends that pastors had I mean everything just I think we called it a five-alarm fire and some of the projects we worked on together. Where is that sitting now as a new year opens? And what are you seeing in the state of pastoral Health any update on that front?

DAVID KINNAMAN: Well, the five-alarm for fire has gone down to maybe a three-alarm fire. It's still there's still some flashing yellow lights. It's not probably the the red lights that we saw, you know two years ago. It's down now into the into the low 30s the percent who say they want to quit. Oh, so it's it has it has subside but it's still third of us.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: But remember some people have self-selected out now, right like of that 42% Yeah. The number of them left the number of leaders I talked to now, can you believe the pandemic's four years ago?

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But who are like? Yeah. We have a whole new team running. Sometimes it's new senior leader other times. It's like yeah, a lot of the other team just kind of tapped out. We got a new team we're running, so you're seeing it as a three-alarm fire?

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah. I think that's a fair statement. But it I think invites us into a New Journey about past pastoring and I have you know, such a huge heart and the team at Barna we were doing a resilient pastor and initiative with Glenn Packham and other really caring godly people who want to see pastors hearts and souls sort of revived for this next stage of the journey and it is a set of concerning findings just to spend just a half a minute on that like pastors under the age of 45 ethnic minority leaders who are gifted in strategic thinking and those who are struggling to build trust with their congregants were some of the most likely to want to quit.

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And so even like the notion that those who are gifted in strategic thinking, they're just like, hey, I can't keep moving forward in an environment where it cannot be transformed, right?

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So I think the kinds of leaders who are really feeling the pressure, we still have a lot of work to do because, yeah, I want to say in no uncertain terms, the role of pastors are so essential to the vitality of the church. I mean, you can't have one without the other. It's just shifting, and we have to sort of recognize even some of the themes that we've been talking about. So we've actually got sort of a number of recommendations for how we think about reviving and supporting leaders. Number one is just recognizing that be as healthy as you can as a leader. Cultivate deep mutual friendship, invest in family, whatever brings you fun, and sort of reminds you of how small you are in the world exercising gardening hiking traveling reading for pleasure. Anything that reminds us that our lives are so short can help us just sort of stay in the game that for me, you know, three plus years bereavement. It's just like I've had a lot of fun. I've just I've hiked, I've done drawing I've done things that just have no real like productivity to them and that's been critical to me. I think second we all have to retool for the next stage of ministry and recognize that this next season is going to require agility kind of openness to you know, not controlling

things some of the themes we've talked about. How can you become a curator of a persuasive community and you're not the only person on stage. You're not the only person who is a who can testify to the power of Jesus in our in our lives. That's that's the headline from what we've been talking about. And then finally it's this sharing the load, you know, it's I think the more we can actually have team members laity all sort of, you know, not on the sidelines watching us do the work, but actually, you know, like you're a coach, you're getting people into the game and playing your identifying gifts and talents. You're helping them understand how God has made them to be a masterpiece in Christ Jesus and getting them to use those gifts and giftedness out in the world and celebrating them for that. I think we're going to have a really beautiful season of ministry the more we can become those kind of healthy leaders who look to to Center others and Center Jesus at the middle of all that.

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DAVID KINNAMAN: What has kept you resilient? You have been through a personal journey, you know, Barna, how long have you been president now? 17 years, 16 years?

DAVID KINNAMAN: About 2007 was when I was named president and then I took over the company more officially in 2009. So it's been coming on 15 years.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: So I mean you've had to reinvent, you've had to rethink, you've been through a pandemic too and a lot of things changed. What's keeping you resilient personally and through Joe's passing?

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DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah, my friendships number one. Just so many amazing people that I just I love. I was driving across Dallas last night to see my friend Scott and I just was like I was feeling the surge of gratefulness for him and we sat down and gave each other huge hug and then other friends surprised me and that was great.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Some of us came in for a surprise.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah, that was fun. So, you know friendships are really cool. So and and and integral to being a single person in a way that I think For those who are listening who are married, it's not that you don't need friends. You absolutely do need friends, but there is something about being partnered in life that's different than when you're single and that's one thing I could sort of say to our listeners is

like some of the lessons that I'm learning are different because As a widower, I'm having to think about, you know, being a single dad, you know running a company on my own making making plans got a great team around me. But you know, they're still decisions to make and sort of like you got to kind of like, okay. Look at the mayor like, what do I want to do right now? I've had an incredible spiritual director Dwayne Groveman.

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For a number of years six, six seven years now, walking through brain cancer and death and bereavement and leadership and just like where is God showing up in my life? And so listening to the Lord, you know, the scriptures have come alive to me in new ways in the season, but then, you know in addition to friendship and just the Friendship of God and all this has been, you know, a lot of physical activity and working out and hiking and I've got some physical limitations I can't run anymore because of a lower back problem. But like I'm finding other ways to redirect that energy, you know, just having fun doing, you know, collecting art and you know, sort of outfitting my townhouse and enjoying sort of new things. I move from, California to Texas about a year and a half ago, and even that sort of like forcing myself to learn some new rhythms and new new ways of thinking and you know, sort of imagining, you know what this next stage of life and leadership and ministry might look like has been as big a lot of journaling a lot of writing, some drawing, you know, just like enjoying enjoying life for what it gives and There aren't too many benefits of losing someone to cancer but one of them is you realize how short life is and so you're just like every meal every get every day is a gift like really Jesus mercies are new every day and I'm really I'm finding a way to experience that in a tangible way that I can't quite even put words to.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: What I'm hearing underneath a lot of that is high intentionality. I think sometimes you know, I've been through seasons one of my goals at this point in my life is to try something new every year like maybe adopt something new in in the quiver or whatever because it's so easy to and obviously your life disrupted in ways. Nobody would ever hope for or plan for but it seems like you've been really really intentional in that any word to leaders who are sort of stuck in a rut maybe in that 32% who are still thinking I don't really know, like talk about how intentional you have had to be to find that life because I'm not sure it just comes automatically.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah. I appreciate you asking. Well, I first wanted to get acknowledged that I've had a lot of good friends.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah but friendship is two ways.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah. Yeah, that's right.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Like you you would have to have taken the initiative on some of those, and you're great at that with me. You'll reach out. You'll send me a video, you'll send me a text if we haven't talked in a little while, like you're great initiator.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah. Thanks Carey that, well you're a true friend.

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I think there's I think there's something that has been interesting around, yeah, just deciding how I want to live in this season Andy Crouch one of my friends. Said something really interesting a few years ago that I really took to heart and he said, you know a lot of us sort of say about our retirement years to go travel the world and do things and think thoughts and enjoy life. And you know, I took these last few years as a time as a time. I mean I worked and I worked pretty hard but I also took it as a kind of early withdrawal on retirement and it was bereavement and it was sort of sabbatical and it was like if I want to travel to go do something I want to do that I try to invest in my kids just you know cheering them on you know, 24, 22 and 19 so that are really interesting stage of life.

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But yeah, I think intentionality is really critical. And when you really immerse yourself in Ecclesiastes and you say, what am I doing all this for again? I mean, like, just keep rereading.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: My favorite book, perhaps.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah, keep rereading that, because it is like, it is an ointment for an ambitious soul. And most of our listeners, they're here because they want to learn how to lead. And like the Word of God helps to change our compass towards ambition. God made you ambitious. He wants you to go do the things you were made to do and to be a masterpiece. But he also doesn't need you to do any of it. And when you start realizing that your center is that he just wants to be your friend, that he just wants to be your father, that he just wants to help speak to your heart, and the more you can testify to that like God has shown up and just profound ways because I've been able to slow down. I move at a pretty fast pace, but I've been able to slow down. And really important ways to listen to listen to other people's stories to pay attention, you know end up. giving money to fundraisers for people who are sick more than I would have ever done before I end up paying attention to, you know, to

other you know, you know to other people who've been through loss because it is like, oh I can see you now in a way that I just would have never been able to before and I think yeah, it's been it's been really a pleasure to do that. Silly little like example, but after Jill died, I actually sort of felt like life slowed down so much. And now as I'm sort of returning back and I've got I'm so much enthusiasm and hope about where the church is. Some of what I talked about earlier in our time together was really around this idea of creating persuasive communities for the future and that's really what I you know, I want to devote the next number of years of my life to doing because I think they're new tools and new ways of thinking about that and new new patterns. It's not rocket science, but it's like we haven't quite figured that out and I want to be it a small part of helping to decode our current moment. But at the center of that I remember thinking about the end of The Matrix movie with Neo, you know, sort of like he starts to unlock, you know that he actually can't be killed by the bullets.

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And so, like, death doesn't scare me now, you know, like it doesn't, like, walking through what Jill went through and seeing her courage to go through some of those really, really tough things.

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It's like, wow, that was amazing. Next week, next month, next year, it's just all a gift.

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So let's go have the best time you can possibly have and lead as faithfully as you can. Don't try to strive and ambitiously build something, because God doesn't need you to build anything. He just wants your heart. And that's been some of the lessons I've been learning. And I just keep, and I get it wrong often enough, and I had a lot of challenges this summer in certain ways, just realizing, you know, my deep need for a savior, my deep need for, you know, like, my ambition was getting the best of me. It's like, oh, I got to slow down again. So at the very end of the movie, you'll remember in The Matrix, if you've seen it, you know, Neo's like...

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He's almost dodging these bullets because it's like everything has slowed down. So I feel like life is a bit more in slow motion for me. Even as there's a lot of pace to it. It's like the things that would ordinarily bring a lot of anxiety. I'm like, you know what? It's really like that's like the 67th worst thing that's happened to me this month. It doesn't really matter, you know.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah. Do you think sometimes and I can see this because you know in church. Our faith gets fused with our work and also with our community. It's kind of The Perfect Storm as I think about it. Do you think sometimes we take it too seriously or take on burdens that God never intended us to bear?

DAVID KINNAMAN: 100%

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, how have you seen that?

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DAVID KINNAMAN: Well, I think that's what we're invited into in this in this season of pastoring. You know, you've taken this journey yourself and you've talked about it pretty publicly both having burned out at times and then citing to you know, go create a company and not leave the local church. And I know we've had enough private conversations where you're like you sometimes feel conflicted about that because you sort of feel like a burden for local church leaders, which again, you know for the listeners like I know Carey pretty well and like this man loves you, wants to see you succeed even even feeling conflicted about, you know, running a Communications company is that he would just as soon jump back in try to lead people to Jesus in a local Church community. I think that is a beautiful tension to manage in our site ourselves and I feel the same way like I'll keep running Barna, I'll keep doing things, but if God calls me to do something else, I'll gladly lay that down to be faithful in whatever God's calling me to do. So I think that real courage to lead and to try to do some things, but try not to look at what other people are doing. And I want to say this without any cynicism or criticism, because I know how unique a local congregational model is. But God doesn't need you to be successful to bring people to Him. He doesn't need a big church, a small church, a medium-sized church.

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I think we're at an era where if we're really honest with ourselves as pastors, we're not actually doing some of the things we're asking people to do.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Like inviting friends to church or building into people who don't know Christ.

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DAVID KINNAMAN: Or like if we said the core value of a Christian is to be a part of a weekly gathering.

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Most of us don't go to another gathering where we can just be who we are and not not a performer not a not a persuade or not of not a professional. And like I'll go to a really beautiful Church Pastor Jamie Miller. Here in Fort Worth Texas, you know, he's asked me to speak a couple times or do things and he's very sweet. But I'm like, hey, I maybe someday but right now I'm just I'm just here.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: I'm like going to be Dave.

DAVID KINNAMAN: I just want to be in the community.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: I have that longing right now.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah, and so the reason I say that is because if we're really honest the expression of the church is really beautiful people who work in Christian Ministries who are part of why I am who are on campuses at Christian college and universities, they're participating in the vibrancy of the church around the world.

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And I love what God is doing through congregations and in congregational models, but it's not the only way that people experience Jesus and if we're being honest most that's true for us as pastors because we're part of a broader community of of Christians who are doing this and so it's like it's okay that we're not going to another church as a lay person because we are actually part of the church. So I think this picture of what the church is today. You know you look at people who are part of discipleship communities or who are on campuses or who are part of you know, kind of embedded residential communities, you know, and like the church is really like alive and vibrant and even sort of some of the reports that we hear from people around the world and you know in non-western cultures like the churches just exploding and God is on the move and places.

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that, you know, like it's just remarkable. And so I think we can really have a lot of confidence that God is up to some new things. And we get to be one tiny voice in this great chorus of what God is up to.

[01:00:06.400]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: It's a great perspective. What other trends are you seeing in terms of churches that are growing again now versus churches that are maybe struggling a little bit more? We can talk about vibrancy, health, not just the external metrics, but what are some other trends that you're noticing when it comes to church growth, church decline, church health?

[01:00:25.500]

DAVID KINNAMAN: Well, I think each church has its own story to tell. And I think we've talked about this a little bit. Some are actually really booming by virtue of the number of people that seem to be engaged. And that's to be celebrated. Some are really still kind of sputtering along, and that's okay too. Like that's, God isn't honored by more people. He's honored by the so you know, I think we just have to keep resetting our metrics of success towards what is faithfulness not as what and faithful and fruitful, but sometimes fruitfulness doesn't necessarily show up in the way. We would think oh, well, this is more people and that's been a huge thing in the last four or five years our work with with glue and this idea of flourishing people. Are you helping people to grow in obviously their spiritual life, but also their relational well-being their their financial and Vocational well-being, you know, their emotional mental health, you know, sort of are they becoming the John 10:10 life and life to the full more abundant people.

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And there's some really good ways to do that. Like, you know, we actually have some tools the church pulse which is a free assessment you can take how are people doing and are we helping them to become even more faithful and fruitful in their lives. And so the churches that are really growing are rebuilding from the ground up in terms of the way. They think about ministry just so that it's not like hey, we got a higher percentage of people this week than we did last week and we're you know, we're they're actually thinking okay, how do we actually disciple people because at the center of some of our problems as the church in North America is that we haven't really disciplined people as deeply as we imagine and the pandemic kind of helped to show that my friend Mindy Galloway said, you know, the pandemic, her metaphor for the pandemic was that, uh, everyone was skinny dipping in the surf and then, uh, the tide went out. And we were like sort of naked and ashamed as we realized, like we're all, we're all a little bit more emotionally needy. We're all a little bit more thin. The pretenses of what we imagined our life was built on, uh, we're sort of stripped away. And I think that's, that's why we have, it's at least part of the reason why we have a moment of spiritual openness is people are trying to rebuild their lives in a different way. And we should be really cautious not to rebuild our churches in the old way.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Oh, that's good.

DAVID KINNAMAN: We need to rebuild our churches in a new way, just like people are trying to rebuild their lives in new ways. So if we are not able to go to the deep places to help people build deeper wells.

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Dig deeper wells. I don't think we're going to be the places of of comfort and restoration. Let me just talk about one study we did with moms and that's called the Mom Co. We looked at moms mothers who have children 18 or under. Do you know what they said was their most we'll start with what they like least about their church is that idea is that it doesn't support their emotional and mental health. That was number one criticism. What do you think they liked the most about churches, and it was 63%, not even close to the second highest rated thing, which was like 32%.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah again, I'm clueless.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Small groups. Moms love community. Preaching and teaching was number five on the list. 23%. So moms need Community more than they need more content. Now, it doesn't mean the content is unimportant. It just means the content has to support community. And so I think if we started to see ourselves as community facilitators, how do we hear the testimony of other of other moms? Because they have an internal monologue all of us as human beings have an internal monologue your beautiful day. You're not beautiful. Today. You're insecure about these things whatever, you know, you're you know, I think that's part of what I'm saying my in my internal monologue has really changed in the last five years because I lost my wife, the worst thing I could have imagined, and I'm still here. God is still good. So to me life is still so beautiful. And my interior monologue has changed fundamentally because of what the word of God and friendships have done in front the Friendship of Jesus in these years.

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Now, if we could help to amplify my story alongside a chorus of other stories, moms who are saying, you know, I thought I was inadequate, I thought I wasn't a great mom, I thought I didn't have what it takes. And in the company of other Christians who say, no, the story you're telling yourself is not true, and here's a better way to think about your life.

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So this is what the church can be. This is a place where we can help people build deeper wells, because it's like all of a sudden, it's not that they're just looking at the internet, like, how do I make sense of being a new mom?

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How do I make sense of, you know, all the inadequacies that I feel? Instead, they're turning to community, and they're turning to Jesus, and they're saying, no, we can actually be better moms. We can be better at what we do. And this is one of the clear findings of the research, is that while pastors want to help women in their communities, they want to help moms, nine out of ten pastors are men. They don't quite get the issues, like, and I've experienced this, they don't quite get the issues of singleness.

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Because most of them are men, most of them are married men. And so, you know, they'll be up. I was at a church on Valentine's weekend and they're giving out gift bags to all the married couples. You know, like hey, we love we love married couples and some my single friends and I were sitting there looking at each other like well, sucks to be us I guess and so pastors have a real task to figure out. How do you speak to the broad spectrum of people that are there and then how do you show up in a way that really doesn't tend to prefer one class of people the married.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: And that single this is not some state of deficiency.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Correct. Yeah, but moms are conduit for energy into other people. So if you say guys here's what we want to go do they will mobilize and resource and explain they're going to be behind you. They're gonna be the best evangelists for your church for Jesus. And so, you know, how do you partner with moms to help them understand the masterpiece that their kids have been created to be so you start to see some of the threads we've been pulling together. Helping young people, helping moms, helping parents figure out how their kids are wired in light of Jesus' message in the world is one of the great gifts you can give and I promise you will mobilize you'll attract parents and families. If you just simply say, we're not just here to kind of build the church attendance machine. We're here to build a masterpiece identification.

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Because Jesus has made you to be something special in the world, and He wants you to go serve Him at a great sacrifice in the world. And I'm just here to tell you the data says this is what Gen Z, what young people are like, they're waiting for. They're hungry for that kind of vision.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: They're waiting for community. They're waiting for connection. You know, it's interesting because scarcity drives value. What is valuable? Things that are scarce, right? That's true in life of the intangible things.

That's also true financially. Wide is the path, narrow is the gate. Yeah, but you think about like 20 years ago, content was scarce. It was hard to get. And we were raised on a model of preaching. Community was everywhere. And community has taken a huge hit over the last 30 years, 20 years, 10 years, 5 years.

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And content has been exploding. So I totally get that moms are like we have enough content like we know where to go, we can be very well fed. There's a million free Bible study plans a million YouTube talks like, you know TED talks like we can go anywhere and get great stuff. What we're dying for is relationship, community. So you're talking about rebuilding your church along those lines prioritizing things that are scarce.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah. That's right.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Now, that doesn't mean you stop preaching correct because we still have to teach people how to think we gotta show them what to think etc. But that's really helpful.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Maybe one little double click on that, preaching and teaching are really critical and you'll never hear anything other than that the proclamation of the word that Jesus comes and walks among us like the preaching of the word is something sacred special it will never be replaced and any time in human history and we should just acknowledge that it's not the only rhetorical tool that people need to learn. So if you were trying to teach someone how to play the piano, for example, you don't just preach at them, you know, you you have to sit down and they have to do some work and I actually think that's the other thing. I'm sort of referring to here is that to be a persuasive community you need preaching you need homiletical tools. You need Jesus to be proclaimed as the daily bread. And you need other kinds of more didactic or structured thinking because people need to know how to play their part in the great Symphony of God's work in the world. They have to learn how to play the piano. So when it comes to like relationships and dating, you know, let's just be honest. Most people don't come every weekend even if you do a great sermon series, they're going to hear a little piece of it. So people need some structure they need, you know, you've got to put some two-by-fours up in the buildings that they're living in. You've got to sort of see where all of this fits.

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And that is, I think, a great opportunity for us as a church community. So moms, it's like, it's not just community for any purpose. It's community so that they know how

to live in this calling of motherhood in a biblical way, in a way that says, here is what it means to be on mission with Jesus. And that's amplified through teaching and preaching, but it's not only through preaching and teaching. So I think, by the way, moms invite us to a both-and thinking that I think a lot of us, at least as men, I could speak for, tend to be a little more either-or thinking. And I think moms are a powerful force in our church communities. We actually see in the data some of the idea that if you win the man, you win the family, it's actually more accurate to say if you get the mom, you have the heart of the family, you have the persuasive heart of the family, that people look back to their moms as the much more shaping influence on them in terms of faith, and that's not that's a sad indictment on men and in some ways but like even Paul in second Timothy says, I remember the faith of your mother and your grandmother. Crickets in terms of where the men show what about Dad?

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah. No, you know this might be a few years old, but I remember the studies that say who determines who buys the family vehicle and you would think it's the guy, you know, Car Guy no, it's the woman. Yeah, and it's like this thing gonna work with car seats or this isn't gonna work with three kids if we have a third kid, right and and so Adept salespeople kind of realize okay. This guy thinks he's driving the decision, but she actually is so how do you do ministry? You've already partially answered the question, but what does it look like to win the heart of a mom in a Ministry then knowing that you probably then have the family?

[01:11:43.700]

DAVID KINNAMAN: I think it's the facilitate great community, to ask for their input. I mean we are in an era of personalization and of participation. So if your church is not a place of personalization and participation you find that people will tune out because they think you're trying to like, you know enroll them in your plan. So I think I think you know creating Community creating structure for them to experience The Godly Community giving giving boundaries to how that can work. But but inviting them into the into the mix, you know again, I'm convinced that we have so many resources and our communities and in our tradition to help people understand who they are made to be and what makes them unique and how we can deploy them on mission in the world.

[01:12:33.300]

And that's actually an incredibly salient question for parents, like, how do I direct my kids to the right educational paths and the right kind of developmental opportunities? If anything, we idolize our children in our society today. So we need a kind of Ecclesiastes style, trying to have the best school, the best output, the best job

for your kids is chasing the wind. So stop bringing your own narrative to your kids' lives. That's part of the deformation and the reformation of what it means to be a parent. And so I think churches are critical to that because, you know, part of the reason we have a problem of discipleship with young generations is because we have a problem with the way the parents thought about. You know, what it means to be successful like missions is much less viewed as an important career not because young people don't want to do great things in the world because their parents said hey, you know, like if you yeah, why would you want to be a doctor? Why do you want to go Africa? You know, why do you want to go on you? Do these other kinds of crazy things like you should get a good job and then maybe someday if you want to, you know, go on, you know, so parents have really deformed some of their kids and I just look at the mirror. I feel like I've you know, I've got all the PowerPoint slides to go all the answers of how to raise a kid and you know in faith and like something like I've made plenty of mistakes so, you know that we're all we're all we're all sort of guilty as charged, but I think I think this idea of helping moms and dads say we're going to help you provide. Like this is a good example of a pedagogical you know, how we teach people you can preach your way but you but what if we had a structured way of helping young people figure out their gifts and callings and parents had a lot to gain from being a part of a Christian community where you are actually like disciplined into who you are made to be in the world that kind of personalization and you're participant in Gospel Mission, you know, you look at the book of accents like we're out there in the world taking great Journeys for God trying to figure out where you know where God is calling us next. The book of Acts is these human stories of people on mission with Jesus, you know, I think I think this generation wants to be inspired by that kind of, you know call to the world and it may not look like, you know missions of old but it might look something like missions that we've that we you know, we need we need more of that kind of vision for the Great Adventure that it is to follow Jesus.

[01:14:57.500]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: You've long been an advocate of churches getting behind the people that they serve in terms of helping them figure out their ministry in the workplace, their vocation, their calling. I'm hearing that theme come up again.

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Anything else you want to say about that? Because I think that's really good. You know, when I was a pastor for 20 years, it's very easy, you know, to sort of have a come and see approach, come to me, come to me, I'll equip you.

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But, you know, you sit in a pew every week, and I do, and, you know, it's a very different place when you're sitting there, and I have a great pastor as well, Jeff's doing a fantastic job. But, you know, I can't help but think if I was doing it over again, I might do it differently. Any more thoughts about how churches can equip laypeople to realize their calling?

[01:15:50.000]

DAVID KINNAMAN: If you're a pastor who thinks you've really got a nailed when it comes to equipping people for ministry in the workplace. I would ask you to really think again we find so few leaders who are really doing that well. And so it's just it's just want to be truthful and honest about that. I mean most Christian Business Leaders, they're just like, I go to church because it's what's expected of me and they get out of it what you know what they need. They you know, there's there's again, I'm not saying into the cynically. It's just that I see a picture of the community of Jesus. these Apostolic leaders who are entrepreneurs these others who are in in the world people who are teaching in public schools and who are in in the the trades and who have a vision for how God is wired them and that they're being equipped and trained to go out and do work to be Pastors in their own Community or spiritual influencers to tell their stories better. And the weight of the day is that most churches just really have a hard time. So we hear from Business Leaders and entrepreneurs and those sort of faith and workspace all the time who say what could we do to help churches? Do better at this and then we hear pastors who say we're already doing it. No, we got like we got we got this guy and he's on our board and he's a lawyer and we got this guy on our board and he's a developer and it's like it doesn't it sound interesting that like the people that you put on your board. and as older is like you tend to think of them because of what they've accomplished out in the world and you you want them to help, you know, balance your books or be an advisor because you got legal issues within the church.

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And so if we're being honest, sometimes we're pulling people into the Death Star because we think they can provide us with, you know, they can provide us something. And again, I don't mean this cynically, I just, if the weight of all of the voices that we are hearing at Barna is we're a good, like, intermediary, we're trying to translate across these different portions of the church, if the weight of all of these entrepreneurs and Christian business leaders are saying, church, please do this better, and if the weight of all the pastors and leaders that we talk to are saying, we're already killing it, there's something lost in translation. And so what about doing a survey where you simply say, Hey, where are you guys working? What could

we do to help equip you in your industries? I bet you if you try to draw a pie chart, if you work at a local church, you try to draw a pie chart on the back of a napkin, what percentage of the people are working in different industries? What percentage of people are retired? What percentage of people are working from home? What percentage of people have a good sort of integration of faith and work? Is there a sacred secular divide that's happening within their within their mental space. Do they understand their spiritual gifts and how that gets applied out into the workplace today are they vocationally oriented towards helping their kids understand what they should do in the world and the right size of these things. This is all part of this theme of vocational discipleship that we have talked about quite a bit. Thanks for asking. And so I think there's a I think there's a real, you know, just the best way I could ask a leaders like hey, if you just talk to Christian Business Leaders in your community. The only thing I will say is I don't think the Christian Business Leaders understand what it's like to lead in a church where you're responsible for everything but you can control nothing.

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And I understand having grown up in the church. My dad's a very very effective pastor and he you know, like like the church is not a business. The church does not operate on the principles of like growth principles that you know Business Leaders, like well, we just did this, this,, this so I do acknowledge that Christian Business Leaders can have a mindset that's like well if we just did this, this, this, it would all work out. But I'm just asking leaders to say if it's possible that these Christian Business Leaders are telling us and I've heard now for several decades. That the church isn't working. In the way, they think it could it's not they're just critiquing you. They're asking you to imagine a different and better way to be the church. And just like moms need the church to be a place of Community Christian Business Leaders. and those in the workplace need the church to be a place of community for them to work out how to live this and if you change your thinking and said just what could like, you know, the classic Kennedy quote like, ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country ask not what your congregation can do to build your church, your board, your volunteer core, like yes. There's all those things are important roles to fill but ask not what these people can do for you but what they can do for the kingdom of Jesus out in the world and You know the very nature of a cup the very nature of a congregation is we congregate To be separate from the world and that is a great, you know place of like we need to be formed differently But I'm just I think I think there's a real invitation that these leaders are offering us these people who are working in the workplace in the

marketplace To think differently about about what a church does and how it how it forms them for life and mission in the world.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: So I want to ask a few more questions lightning round all right can as we wrap up. Any other data that's really got your eyes open and that you're focused on as we head into a whole new year?

DAVID KINNAMAN: I'm doing a lot of work on perceptions of Jesus and why we keep Jesus in our sort of human-sized boxes. And you know, he often looks a lot like us we make him in our own image. So I've been working quite a bit on on that. Like what is what is Jesus perceive to be and how do we actually free him from...

CAREY NIEUWHOF: The Americanized, Westernized Jesus?

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah, exactly. And it turns out Jesus is he promises that whom the son sets free is free indeed. So as we free Jesus, he frees us to be all we can be and so we're finding quite a bit of of things based on I think that's pretty pretty fun. You know, we're also trying, you know, we were talking about this before we start recording just, it's less about a trend we're seeing but more how we're thinking about the trends. We've been working on making our data more bite-sized more video based or calling it Barna Trends and we'll have some some things to talk about that in in the coming in the coming months in terms of ways that Barna is sort of rethinking how we do content packaging.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: How you get your information out there, yeah, we're rethinking that as well I mean the blog isn't what it used to be I still enjoy long-form content, long-form podcasting, but yeah sure bites of video where we're both making some big changes.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah, and I think I think then you know, it's just seeing the the power of gamified content of a journey you're asking people to take thinking about, you know, what we can learn from the sort of the developer, like app developer, video game developer world.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: People love progress, man.

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DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah, and so just recognizing there's a way of thinking about the journey people are, we're inviting people to take, is there more creative ways we could be thinking about that? I think that's the visual world that we're living in. We continue to do quite a bit of work on the sort of spiritual open audience, which

we've talked about, and how to have, prepare people for really meaningful conversations. In an era of spiritual openness, people want to be able to talk about their faith, and so we need to give them tools to listen without judgment, to ask the Holy Spirit to join us, to not force conclusions, but to also be really...

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You know convicted about about the need to talk about Jesus and people are hungry to do that.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: It's kind of clear but open right that whole idea that I know what I believe but I'm also not going to force it on you. I'm going to ask questions. I'm gonna probe. I'm going to be open to your worldview, and I think you know in this age too when you when I think about what's effective at least in my context in terms of You know post-christian context it's not setting up the straw man argument. It's creating the steel man. Like these people are not stupid. They're very smart. They're very intelligent. Perhaps they haven't thought through things at a deep enough level that it's going to be a convicting worldview, but to take their views seriously to really honor them and not insult them and believe that they're somewhat intelligent.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah, right and I've come to even even though it's not my journey interview. A lot of people who have de-converted or deconstructing their faith. We're doing a lot of work on faith deconstruction.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: What are you seeing there?

DAVID KINNAMAN: A huge percentage of people say, it's about a quarter of all Americans say they've deconstructed the faith of their childhood, younger people are more likely to say that's true of them. I think it's sort of different than just regular doubt like whether God is real they're sort of saying, you know. Is there a business model underneath this? You know, what? What was my Christian School background? Like why did we, you know, learn certain things about the world that just don't seem to square with reality. I think memory is a really interesting thing, like the neuroscience of how memories change as we pull them up. So even in that, as we study people telling their story and their backstory, we have to acknowledge that people sometimes remember things accurately, well, they always think they're remembering them accurately. But when you pull up a memory and sort of analyze it, it changes every time you remember it.

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There's like quite a bit of neuroscience about that, the science of memory.

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And so people will look back on their conversion experience and say, I was emotionally manipulated to become a Christian.

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Um, you know, the chord progression the music was just right, the lights were out, and they actually look back on that and they're like what? Did Jesus really talk to me, or was I just you know feeling, was it just a vibe? And so, you know, we have to sort of convert people heart my body and soul is some of the stuff that I'm sort of describing earlier is like we have to we have to give people. an emotional connection to the Lord we have to get them an intellectual and and way of thinking about their working their life and and what it means to be a Christian. We have to give them a relational context in you know, like there's there's more being converted than just, you know, sort of saying the sinner's prayer and I think that's a huge opportunity for the church.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: We've been talking a lot about overall ministry and approaches to ministry, anything on church finances or even AI or anything that you've got your eyes on?

[01:26:39.100]

DAVID KINNAMAN: AI, I think it's a really fun and interesting, you know, I've seen some of the content you're putting out that I think is really solid which is let's use it as a tool but also pay close attention, you know, most of the weight of our data is suggesting that people have quite a bit of skepticism about it about one in 10 adults say they've used it often. So it's still not a very common.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yes. It's a pretty low adoption in the church world.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah, but the whole mixed feelings about AI 29% say they don't trust it 35% say I'm curious about it 21% say I'm fascinated by it. But I think it's going to be a new way of you know, you look at sort of just digitization, mobile technology, social media, you know, smartphones, we're at a new kind of inflection point, I think, with content. One of my friends, Mark Miller, had this really interesting observation that he thought that God sometimes uses these kinds of trends to humble us and to say, you know, you weren't all that. And he was like, I wonder if AI is sort of our way of God's way of sort of saying our idolatry of content and our ability to create is not just about being human, it's about, you know, now the algorithms can do that.

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And so is there something about our idolatry of content our idolatry of being able to be creators now AI is not doing what humans can do in almost all of the really generative brand new, you know, truly original pieces of aren't thinking but it is making it really simple to do what was incredibly complex before and and you know again, I think there's some really interesting both theological implications practical implications of how we build our communities again, even some of these questions of building persuasive communities is going to be more difficult in an era of AI, people are going to have many more, you know, if we The Gospel According to YouTube If I thought that was challenging just wait till the Gospel According to AI, you know, yeah, it's interesting.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: You know, I've been thinking about this a lot because I've been a user of chat GPT for well over a year now and I'm noticing I'm getting lazy and it still has my name on it. I've written it, you know, even with podcast interview questions chat. GPT is pretty decent like I'm making me think but I'm like, it's almost like that debate remember in elementary school. Are you allowed to use calculators or not? And the teachers were like, no not until this age because they want you to figure out in your brain. This is how multiplication this is how addition subtraction division works, division was always a hard one for me. Not a mathematician. But anyway, you know, it was like no you need to learn these skills now. I've used a calculator every day in my life that I've had to do any maths since I was I don't know 14 or 15, but I wonder if it becomes like that and then is it a necessary first principles skill for you to continue intellectually, to keep your agency, to keep your creativity, to keep some semblance of self in there, and even openness to the Holy Spirit? Or you just do defer all that to a set of prompts or whatever is next in AI? Like, I think it raises some really great questions because I think it could result in a lot of intellectual laziness on the part of those of us who create.

[01:30:06.400]

DAVID KINNAMAN: I'm on the board of a university and I think a really helpful conversation we had recently was let's let the tools do the tools that help us avoid busy work and then make sure that the places where we're really trying to advance student achievement and development and learning, we say these are off limits for ChatGPT and AI.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: So do the hard creative work and then let it sort out your calendar.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Correct. Now, it's simpler said than done. Yeah, but I think that idea so I think I think it's true that our society and Gen Z doesn't, no one likes busy work for the sake of it. Although we could also say there are sort of Virtues in doing certain things for for the purpose of how it changes our relationship to the work. So sometimes busy work has you know chopping wood or you know you that's maybe not even defined as busy work but like running the long form, you know calculations. I'm a firm believer that people Use the tools that are available to them to make their lives as livable as possible to be, you know, like we're highly adaptable species.

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And so I think ChatGPT is here to stay and it's gonna be like tools that are going to make our lives infinitely easier. We're gonna find other ways of creating, you know, roadblocks and barriers and other things that are easy. So I just think that as we even think about how to train people like imagine if at your church you had a short series of talks on the difference between real and fake, and authentic and inauthentic, and original and unoriginal, and truth versus error, or falsehood and then recognizing that You know young people actually, they're like the human eye is pretty Discerning not just like AI-generated images but like what do we how do we actually understand? What is real what's fake in our world? And that's an example of some you know, you may not may or may not preach that might not be a sermon, but it could be sort of a one -on -one class where you're saying we're gonna help this generation think about Where do we deploy these tools? How do we think about technology? How do we think about real versus fake? How do we actually understand when we say someone's really authentic? What does that mean? And why do we sometimes feel like someone's a little inauthentic?

[01:32:26.300]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, at our church, I'm doing a message in a week or two after this podcast releases on relationships and AI. What is the difference between a real human relationship and a virtual relationship or a chat bot? Relationship or a sex bot relationship or all of that where you know, and this isn't in the future. This is actually happening right now. You can have relationships with people who aren't real. What happens to your soul? What happens to you? What how did God design human interaction? Like those are all very real questions that people are now struggling with or need to struggle with.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah, and I think that gets to the heart of the Christian Community is helping to identify what does it mean to be human in light of what

Jesus has said with revelation of God through scripture and the wisdom of the church through the centuries.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well anything else before we wrap up it's been great.

DAVID KINNAMAN: It's so fun to do a podcast in person with you

CAREY NIEUWHOF: The real David Kinnaman the real Carey Nieuwhof together in Dallas.

DAVID KINNAMAN: And now we should announce that this is just an AI-generated conversation where my voice and your voice have been put through through the algorithms and it just turns out that here you think you've been listening to us.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: It's so real now. It's crazy. Like I've seen some of these I was telling you about a friend who sent me an AI generated thing of him speaking French. He doesn't speak French and I'm like it's so convincing but this is the real Carey and the real David. Hey, people are going to want to connect with you, David. So where where are you online these days? Tell us about the Barna Group and where they can find all of your latest good stuff.

DAVID KINNAMAN: Yeah, thanks. Well, we're shifting a lot of our emphasis in the coming months and years towards not just describing what's happening, but really providing solutions and examples of best practices; insights to action. So that's a barna.com. We would love to invite people to be subscribers to our Barna Access where you get all the best of Barna. They'll be some new tools in terms of the trends subscriptions sort of little bite sized piece is as well that people can be watching for and yeah, I'm available at Twitter and Instagram and you know and the rest and you know, really excited about what's next for our company. And for how God is orienting us towards really trying to figure out the domains of digital discipleship. What does it mean to build persuasive communities under the light of the gospel?

[01:34:51.400]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: As always, David, thank you. It's been great.

DAVID KINNAMAN: My pleasure. Thanks, Carey.

[01:34:55.700]

Carey Nieuwhof: Man, I love that one. Hey, we have a whole lot of episodes that I've done live in person on the road, and this one's also on YouTube. So, we have a growing YouTube channel. I think the next few are all filmed in person. Anyway, regardless of whether we film it in person or via Riverside. A lot of you are like, what

technology do you use? It's Riverside. You're going to find it on my YouTube channel. So, if you prefer to watch or you want to share that, make sure you check it out. It's just Carey Nieuwhof on YouTube. You can find it there. So, we want to thank our partners for this episode, Westfall Gold. If you want a generous church, I partner with Craig Rochelle, Chris Hodges, and others to create a masterclass for you. You can go to advanced.westfallgold.com or click the link in the description of this episode. And then Senior leaders and executive pastors teaching pastors campus pastors join. Me and Reggie Joyner and others Rich Villodas at ReThink Leadership in April. You can go to conference.rethinkleadership.com to register today. Well coming up, we've got a lot of wonderful things. And by the way, we've also got show notes you can go to careynieuwhof.com/episode623, we also have transcripts with links to everything we talked about in the episode. We are going to continue with part three of the Church Trends series and I'm going to sit down with political scientist Ryan Burge. I am loving his research. He's written a few books including some books on the Nones and we're going to talk about the rise of the Nones, Christianity, is it becoming a luxury good, the threat to democracy with the decline in religion, and why the Nones are very reachable. Here's an excerpt.

[01:36:26.400]

Ryan Burge: So my understanding of what non-religion is is changing pretty significantly in the last couple years and really what I'm zeroing in on, especially in the last year or two, I wrote a post for my subset called Religion as a Luxury Good, which went viral, quote unquote, whatever that means, like not like millions of clicks, but you know a lot of clicks for me. And so I make this argument that religion has become part and parcel of people who have done everything right, quote unquote, and what I mean by that is college education, middle-class income, married, with children. If you check those four boxes, it's also called the Golden Path, that's what a lot of conservative like Economists call that the golden path. If you meet if you meet those criteria your chance of having good income, you know good outcomes as much higher you're much more likely to go to church. This is what people don't understand is like the more education you have the more likely you are to go to church.

[01:37:23.700]

The ideal combination of income and education, our college degree, four -year college degree, may be between \$60,000 and \$100,000 a year. So for me, what we're seeing to me is the haves and the have-nots are growing larger and larger every year. I think this is a serious problem, both pastorally, but also from a social science perspective.

[01:37:46.400]

Carey Nieuwhof: Also coming up on the Church Trends series, Brady Shearer, John Mark Comer. And then we go back into regular mode with John Ortberg, Cara Powell, Adam Hamilton, Craig Grochelle, Jamie Kern Lima, Jenny Allen, and a whole lot more coming up. Well, if you're like me, you're always looking for ways to stay informed. And about a year ago, I launched something brand new, my On The Rise newsletter. And I have a blast putting this together. You apparently have a blast reading it because we hear about it all the time. And it's just a curation of maybe half a dozen things that I have found interesting that week. I would love for you to check it out. We talk about Trends. We also talk about things like, you know, the original Taylor Swift or Google website. I'll send you a link to that stuff or I'll show you the best restaurants in America and the best sandwiches or we can talk about some obscure facts that I've discovered. Anyway, it's great sermon research. It's also I think there's so much content out there. How do you find the best stuff? I hope you really enjoy it. I'll also link to 10 talks. I'm enjoying and more so bringing you the best content from around the web. You can join about 100,000 leaders who enjoy it every Friday in their inbox. Go to ontherisenewsletter.com. You can get started today for free. Thank you so much everybody. Really? Appreciate you being here. If you're new hit us up. Hey, it's a new year new patterns. Number one, subscribe. Number two, shout me out on social. I'm Carey Nieuwhof, tell me what you loved about the episode or what you'd love to see and we'll catch you next time on the podcast and I hope our conversation today helped you identify and break a growth barrier you are facing.