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**Announcer:** The Art of Leadership Network.

**Brady Shearer:** He said, I went to the grocery store to pick up my groceries that we had already ordered online. He's like, I was having a bad day. I'm just waiting and I'm just like, they're taking forever to get it together. They finally bring my groceries and the guy looks at me goes, are you a pastor? Because you've been on my TikTok feed this week. And then that happened to him again a second time where he's a bi-vocational pastor, and this person came to him and was like are you also a pastor because you were on my TikTok feed.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** Welcome to the Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast, it's Carey here, and I hope our time together today helps you thrive in life and leadership. Well, I'm excited that we are on episode four of the Church Trend series. We are going to talk to Brady Shearer today. He is the founder of Pro Church Tools. We're gonna talk about everything social media trends that he sees for 2024 how tiktok is disrupting social media the best social media strategy for churches.

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And a much requested subject the new metrics for digital church. So we're going to look at that and you can download the free Team guide for some of the church Trends. I outlined by clicking the link in the description. This episode is brought to you by Church.Tech and my new Advance Masterclass. So, are you still hesitant about using AI Well church dot Tech and I partnered to give you a free guide to debunking 8 myths about AI in the church, you can go to [gloo.us/aimyths](https://gloo.us/aimyths) or visit the link in the description. And did you know that Craig Groechel, Chris Hodges, Ashley Wooldridge, myself, and others, put together a masterclass for you to help you unleash generosity at your church. You can go to [Advance.westfallgold.com](https://Advance.westfallgold.com) to get it or click the link in the description of this episode. Well, I'm so glad to have Brady Shearer back on, by the way, we did a flip the mic so you can listen to the pro Church podcast or watch the videos on YouTube. And yeah we had a good conversation together that I think came out last month. Brady Shearer is the creator and director of Pro Church Tools, and they help churches navigate the biggest communication shift in 500 years.

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He's one of my favorite young leaders, started when he was like early 20s, and he just passed his 30th birthday. But I love what he and the team at Pro Church Tools are doing. So I think you're going to really enjoy this episode. Now, can you believe

it's been over a year since ChatGPT took the world by storm? This year, well, over the last year, we heard a lot of opinions and viewpoints on AI. That's why I partnered with my friends at Church.Tech, and together we wrote a little resource for you called Eight Myths to Leave Behind on AI in 2024. It's published by Gloop, one of our partners. You can access it for free at [gloop.us/aimyths](https://gloop.us/aimyths).

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And we cover all the common misconceptions about AI, talk about real life applications you can use today, to use it more efficiently and effectively go to [gloop.us/aimyths](https://gloop.us/aimyths) and then what if generosity was a part of the DNA of your church, if you've looked at some of the leaders like Craig Groechel or Chris Hodges or Ashley Wooldridge and thought How do they do resources well Craig, Chris, Ashley, and myself as well as Dan Clark and a few others partnered together to create the Advance Masterclass. It's all about unleashing generosity in your church. You're going to hear and discover how to cast a compelling Vision that invites investment. That's Craig's section how to make generosity part of the DNA of your church. Chris talks about that and then I talked about how to leverage existing technologies to connect with your givers. Believe it or not, there's a lot you can do automatically that is really going to improve your giving at your church. So if you want to learn more, you can check out the masterclass and join it by going to [advance dot Westfall goal.com](https://advance.danwestfall.com) or simply click the link in the description of this episode. Well with all that said let's dive into my conversation with Brady Shearer and we're going to talk about all things social media as it relates to church trends for 2024

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Brady. It's great to have you back.

**BRADY SHEARER:** Pleased to be here.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Yeah. Yeah. We're here at your studio. Thanks for hosting us today.

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, you made the travel.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Yeah, that's right, couple hours to Niagara Falls, but not bad. We're in Niagara Falls, Canada, the Canadian side of the border.

**BRADY SHEARER:** Superior in every way.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** It kind of is. You gotta say, like you got to come to the Canadian side to see the falls.

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But we're talking about church trends, and I've been following you for, well, it's been 10 years now, really, for what has become Pro Church Tools, right?

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**BRADY SHEARER:** That's right. Yeah. Yeah. Third time on the show. And, you know, I say this in every show. We don't like to perpetuate the Canadian stereotype that all Canadians know each other. But I think it was on our first visit that you were like, wow, your last name sounds familiar. Was your dad Chris Shearer? Because I went to high school with him.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** 100%. 100%. Yeah. So yeah, I know your dad. And we met when you were still working at a church doing video announcements on the side.

**BRADY SHEARER:** That's right. Yeah, man.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So you're here to serve leaders on the biggest communication revolution in 500 years. The revolution continues. We're opening up a brand new year, 2024. Where are some of the biggest changes that you've seen? Where are they happening right now?

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**BRADY SHEARER:** So, you know 2024 the landscape of social continues to adjust pretty rapidly. We like to break up social media history into two distinct eras. So the first 15 years or so we call that the social graph era and this is the period of social that most of us are going to be most familiar with.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So that's what, 2004 to 2019/2020?

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah. That's basically it. Yeah, so beginning, you know Facebook opens to the public in 2007. And then we like to mark the change end of that era around 2020 and the social graph era was primarily marked by the content that we saw on our phones being primarily influenced by our friend and family connections, AKA your social graph.

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So a few years ago TikTok comes around and introduces a brand new way of doing social media. And what was really interesting about. What TikTok did was it was the first competitor to Meta that was able to actually win. Because previously we had seen upstarts try to take on Meta and become acquired Instagram or SnapChat

comes around like hey stories disappearing social media content. You've never seen it before. Well, we'll just invent Instagram stories and we'll take it over. TikTok was able to disrupt the entire social media seen so much so that every platform followed their cues and this ushered in this new era of social that we call the discovery era. And now the content that we see in our feeds is primarily influenced not by friend and family connections, but personal viewing habits your personal interests and importantly for churches your local geographic location.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Okay, so break that down a little bit more. What do you mean? Because I think we've all noticed this, right? Like occasionally, I'm sort of used to the new reality now, but I'm still like, what happened to all my friends? Like I'm just being fed all of this content, irrespective of who I'm following. And I don't, you know, some people that you follow, I follow maybe, I don't know, 1,000, 1,500 people on Instagram. I may never hear from them in the course of six months. And every once in a while, the algorithm just spits them back out at me again. So talk more about that disruption because I think, I think we all saw it. We all felt it. Probably we didn't like it because it was a way to connect with other people. So what, what would, is it all about monetization? Is that what they're doing or growth or like, why, why would Instagram, Meta, and even TikTok go to a totally other way of doing things.

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah. I mean there's a cynical way of looking at it and then there's also the one where there's what we say we want and then there's our behavior online, okay, and you know what I mean by that is TikTok wasn't the first platform to basically figure out that what we say we want to see in our feed is different than how we spend our time. You know, we know on a negative side that human nature at its worst will drift towards topics and content that really makes us upset and and provokes outrage within us, you know, one of the metrics that also social platforms are looking at is hover time or watch time and they know that we will just look at something that makes us upset and we'll just doom scroll or we'll just marinate on it. I can't believe this person said that, and the social platform's like, I know you say you don't like this but you're spending a lot of time with this so then they can manipulate.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** The cognitive dissonance.

**BRADY SHEARER:** Precisely, yeah. So I think a lot of it has to do with yeah, we say we want to see our friends and family, but as social media matured we actually started publishing less on the public feed and instead socials interactions move to the private feed being DMs, being messaging behind the scenes. And so what was

happening was these algorithms like I mean, there isn't actually that much to show people we need to start showing recommended content. From leaders in the space where hey if you follow this person, you might also like this person, which is obviously nothing new in terms of advertising or in terms of you know, content creation, but TikTok really took it to another level where they're like, hey, you have your following table that you probably won't even be in at all. You just keep scrolling and you gotta trust us give us like 24 hours and we'll show you stuff that you like and during the pandemic like, this was me Gary. I I personally love TikTok. TikTok has exposed me to so many different creators different things I never thought I even needed.

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Like, and there's a downside to that. It's like, oh, do you really need to buy that extra Amazon, like, you know, fun little trinket? It's gonna change your life. No, but like, you know, one of the big ones was I got into like skincare TikTok. And there was all these doctors and dermatologists were like, did you know this is how you need to take care of your skin? And I was like, no, I've been washing it with a bar of soap this whole time. And they're like, no, you should consider this. That dramatically changed my life for the better. So there's really two sides to it, negative and positive.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Yeah, so it's more about discovery now. It's more about being known. And, you know, I saw this graph heading into a brand new year. I saw this graph that really fascinated me. It's when you look at people's, when they view social media. Remember prime time on television was always like eight o'clock prime time starts, goes to 11 o'clock. Cause that's when all of the country would tune in etc. Well, social media viewing now peaks in the evening, which is really interesting. So people are using it less as a connection more as an entertainment or information or search place. What do you see?

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, that's 100% accurate. In fact TikTok's Executives have come out and said we are not a social platform. We are an entertainment platform. And I mentioning TikTok here. You might be listening to like I don't use TikTok. My church is not TikTok. I do not care. What's important to understand is that TikTok is the disrupting force that every one of these platforms is following. So irrespective of your beliefs opinions or personal usage on TikTok. It's important to grasp but they are the ones that in many ways are dictating this new era that we're in so they've said we're not a social platform. We are an entertainment platform, And its really curious to even think about the cycle of how we've gotten here Carey, because Myspace which was the platform that I was first on.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Cut your teeth on.

**BRADY SHEARER:** I wasn't there for Friendster, Friendster had a brief like year and then their servers couldn't handle all their popularity. They disappeared and MySpace was like we have servers that can handle all of you. So we jump on MySpace. Myspace was a platform that had no limit on friends anyone could join your profile was like public by default and you had these like overnight internet stars that were being formed on MySpace. Facebook came around they're like we're gonna do it differently, if MySpace is like the Las Vegas Strip of social media, we're gonna be like, you know, the more, you know, tightly taller professional place. You can only have 5,000 friends. Okay. This is not a place, we're not like for celebrity. We're here for an intimate connection with friends.

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And everyone was like, okay, if MySpace is a little bit unhinged, Facebook seemed like a more stable and long-term, okay, this is proper, great. And we've kind of come full circle now, where we're back to entertainment, we're back to celebrity, and we're back to like, let's reach as many people as possible. So it's kind of curious to think about how that came around.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So we had a great lunch, and you, me, and Sam from my team had a great conversation about what's happening demographically with social media. I think we kind of know intuitively that like TikTok is younger, Facebook's older, but you said some really interesting things that I'd love for you to share with listeners about how to target specific demographics. Like, it's not just, are you on Facebook? Are you on YouTube? Are you on TikTok?

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But like you've got to start thinking demographically about how each generation behaves on social media platforms. Can you say more about that?

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yes, so we call this the stratification of social media. It used to be a new platform comes out, we all jump on it, and there's this very memorable Seinfeld skit one of the many where he talks about the clothes that your dad wears. They will Mark that year. He was happiest about himself. Yeah, just like his formative years, you know by how he dresses and we've seen this with music and fashion for you know ever. Different generations dressed differently. Different generations listen to different styles of music. We're starting to see now that we've

hit maturity of about a couple decades now different Generations settling primarily on different social platforms.

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So Facebook the stratification there has been that's where Boomers have settled. Instagram, that's where my Millennial friends. I'm 32. That's where we've settled. TikTok has been where Gen Z has settled, and very interestingly YouTube is where Gen Alpha is beginning their kind of formative social media years, because my youngest is eight years old. So young really young generation where they don't have a name yet. Maybe they stick with Gen Alpha. We were once Gen Y then we got a fun name, Millennial. Sorry Gen Z you didn't get a cool name. Sorry. Gen Zed, and JGenen Alpha, if they keep that name, they're not really allowed social platforms yet, but they're all on YouTube which has shorts and so they're all on YouTube shorts. I see this with all of my friend's kids. That's where they're kind of. So you have like your formative years online on a certain platform.

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And it's like, what happens in fashion and music? It's always almost like a rebellion to the previous era. Right, like we wore skinny jeans as millennials. Gen Z is like, we're gonna relax the denim as much as we can as an affront to the previous generation. And so what happens is TikTok comes around and it becomes this platform that has not been infiltrated by millennials already. It hasn't been around for 15 years and oh, Facebook, I've got memories from 15 years ago. It's brand new. And so a new generation makes it all their own. And so we used to think about these different platforms in terms of their specialties. Instagram was for pictures. Facebook was for connection. Now we can think of it as not about what each platform does as a specialty or as an art form because they all have feature parody. Now it's about the audience and the age demos that are on them.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So we missed Gen X in that. Where's my generation?

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**BRADY SHEARER:** Well, don't we always? Yeah, I know, I know. The forgotten generation. I apologize.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** We're like where?

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**BRADY SHEARER:** Requisite apologies to Gen X for always being overlooked and forgotten. We're gonna tuck you in with Facebook.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Okay, so we're on Facebook, not so much that was really interesting, you know, because I did a survey unscientific survey of pastors and I have a lot of like next-gen pastors 30s and 40s sort of in the art of leadership academy. And I said, where do you go in? The number one answer was Facebook hands down Instagram was second Tick Tock was like barely registering well, so that's interesting and I don't know that you found this or not, but for churches that advertise or people that advertise, where are you getting the best ROI these days?

**BRADY SHEARER:** Well, I mean, what's so fascinating about this is that we've actually stopped all of our social media ad spend because these new discovery algorithms which is where the discovery era gets its name are basically exposing us and exposing the churches that we work with to all of these new audiences without having to spend a dime. So let me give you okay an example of this. So this one church that we start working with a smaller church in the pastor and I are talking on a call and he says I just want people in my community to know our churches here. We've been here for 40 years and people are like, oh, what's your church? Oh, is it that building? They don't even know and I was like, okay, so we start creating content for them. We take their sermons. We turn them into vertical videos. We publish them to all of these platforms where they have discovery algorithms, so Facebook reels, Instagram reels, TikTok, YouTube shorts, within 30 days this pastor has come back to me. He said, I went to the grocery store to pick up my groceries that we had already ordered online. He's like, I was having a bad day. I'm just waiting and I'm just like, they're taking forever to get it together. They finally bring my groceries and the guy looks at me goes, are you a pastor? Because you've been on my TikTok feed this week. And then that happened to him again a second time where he's a bi-vocational pastor and this person came to him and was like are you also a pastor because you were on my TikTok feed. So that's these discovery algorithms.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Can't have a bad day pastor, sorry.

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This is what I have to remind myself on a regular basis.

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It's if I'm having a bad day on a flight, at an airport, at a restaurant, it's like gotta a smile.

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**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, absolutely. This is why I work online and never leave. I see you've been globetrotting, you've been gallivanting around the globe.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** That's right, you just stay right here in Niagara Falls.

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, absolutely.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Yeah, okay, that's really good. So how do you do that? And I know you've got a whole thing, but people are like, let's talk about hacking that. Because we were talking about that at lunch again as well. And I think it's fascinating. So most of us, we just post, maybe we find a hashtag or something like that. How do you create content that gets discovered?

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**BRADY SHEARER:** So we always like to give the prerequisite. Hey churches, you've got fewer resources, smaller budgets, fewer creative minds at your church relative to a business or organization. But you have an advantage that virtually no industry has and that is your senior leader is spending a huge part of their week, if not the majority, creating content for a sermon, which means after we all started filming in the pandemic if we weren't already, we're all sitting on a gold mine of content that we can repurpose for social media. The key is of course that one-minute segments that let's say we pull from the sermon we post as a vertical video on social it's absent the other 29 or 39 minutes of contacts from that full-length message.

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So what we tell pastors is you want to look for the intersections of faith and culture. Where can the good news cross paths with the lived experience of the typical person in your community so that when you publish that piece of content, it has the ability to reach a broad audience because it is broadly applicable. It can't just be so insider baseball that a person without affiliation with Christian faith can't approach it but it also can't be so disconnected from the Christian faith that he's like, oh clearly, you're just doing that like reach people. The great thing about scripture is that it is broadly applicable to all people in all time periods, whether it's hope purpose eternity forgiveness parenting finances pull from anyone of those categories. And then what we do is we write up a hook inject that into the first three seconds of the video. So

this is just a title on the screen that would say something like, you know, three words. You never want to say to your kids as a parent.

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I got to know those three words.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So that's the hook that then pulls you into the clip that then, and you know, you've had some success in getting very small churches to blow up on social. So talk about the hook and the value of the hook, because I've seen a million social clips, but sometimes it takes 10-20 seconds to figure out what they're even talking about. What's the value of a hook?

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**BRADY SHEARER:** Well, the value of the hook is that it instantly contextualizes the post. You need to make a promise to somebody. Attention is the most valuable commodity that you can possess. It doesn't matter how great your story is, we have the best story ever told, if no one's listening. So you have to basically earn that attention. So we do that with these hooks. We're basically making a promise to the person holding their phone and saying, hey, if you give us the next 20, 30, 60 seconds of your time, this is what we are going to tackle. And if that promise is compelling enough, then they give us their time. And then it's now our responsibility for that piece of content to deliver on that promise.

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It's pretty easy relatively to make write a great hook but can you follow through on that promise? You know, if I say three words that you shouldn't say to your kids like not only do you need to tell me those three words in this video. But hopefully they're like giving me that Eureka aha moment. They're not just like hey don't curse at your children. Okay. Thanks.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So this is interesting. I've talked to a number of pastors and basically the programming staff around them and there are some pastors who are starting to write their messages with social in mind. Is that something you advise? Is that something you think? Oh, no that can get really weird if you're in the room and if you would do it, how would you do that?

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yes. So this question comes up pretty commonly with churches when we begin working with them. Well, we always say to them is we don't want you to feel the need to adjust what you're doing in person for online.

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That's our job. That's the person that's working on social. That's their job. You've got a 30 to 40 minute message, let's say. There is gold in there. I promise you. It's our job to find it. Now, with that being said what tends to happen is churches will kind of see the content that tends to perform well online and then that will inform what they write next. It's just natural that that would happen, right? Here's an example. There's this one church, and they were following some of our tactics and strategies that we teach on our YouTube channel and what they found was the content that was resonating the most with their audience was parenting content and they got on TikTok pretty early and this is one Church in Texas and we have a whole podcast interview with them if you want to dive into their story.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** We'll link to it in the show notes.

**BRADY SHEARER:** They noticed that when they published parenting content that was what was really driving Engagement online.

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And so then if you go to their Instagram or TikTok, what you'll see is like, it's just all parenting content. So I asked them like, do you guys like preach like exclusively on parenting now? They're like, no, but like that was what was performing well on social. So now people come to us and they're like, what does the Bible say about being a good mother? What does the Bible say about being a good father? Hey, there's no endless things that we can talk about related to that subject matter. So they've just kept going to the well. So we say this about social, repeat the best, forget the rest, continue to test.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Is that a good strategy? I'm trying to figure out, are you saying they should have done that? Just more and more parenting stuff?

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, absolutely. So long as we don't forget that continue to test addendum. Because you will try things on social and they'll bomb. That's okay. Don't feel like you have to do it again. Like if you're publishing quote posts and they're just not connecting. Okay, great. Just you've done it enough. You gave it a good chance, try something new. If you have something that hits you can go back to that again. And again that format that subject matter, but don't forget to continue to test because there was a time when that hit of a post or that subject matter that really seems to resonate with your church or with your community. You weren't aware of it yet. So what subject matter, what angle on faith, what way of presenting the gospel have you not yet uncovered because you have a continued like testing that?

So we always keep you know, 10% of our of our social calendar. Let's try something we haven't done before you and we were talking about some of those posts at lunch like stuff that we haven't done before but seems to be trending online, let's try and if it bombs it bombs, it was only 10% of the calendar.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Let's give us some more examples more examples of like experimenting and content that's connecting.

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**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, certainly. So we I will say parenting content just seems to work for every church all the time. So feel free if you have not yet exhausted that to to go to it. It's outstanding.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So let me drill down on that then before we get to the other ones because I think one of the challenges is if you think about parenting content most churches would do maybe one parenting series a year and then maybe there's an odd story or illustration. And so that's a 12th of the calendar. Does that mean that your social feed just keeps going back to that series or what do you do when your next series is on prayer or the next series is on you know the Book of James or the gospel of Matthew or something like that? Like how do you how do you navigate all that?

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, so you mentioned it right there. You said an offhand illustration. This is something that we have come to realize working with, you know, all these churches one-on-one is that it's not the content the pastor expects that we pull from the message.

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And sometimes pastors are like, you know, it's because maybe my scripted stuff or my notes, they're not as good. It's the stuff that's off the cuff. You know, maybe it's the Holy Spirit or maybe it's just the fact that like, that's the best stuff.

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But that's not what I really wanted to take away from this message. It was this point specifically. And I always remind them of how directors tend to work. And I was listening to a reaction pod to a David Fincher film this morning. I was talking about one of the climactic moments where they told one actor to do something and they didn't tell the other actor that he was gonna do it. These are professional actors. Some of the best actors, like Academy Award winners. And they purposely wanted

to get the reaction from the other actor that he didn't know what his other guy was gonna do.

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Because even in filmmaking it's often the improvised, the unexpected, that's driving the realest responses. Why because it's real. So what happens is you've got all your notes and then in the moment you decide to go down what you know, the pastor calls. It's the bunny trail or the rabbit hole and you just start talking about something and when we watch that back, and this is what's so valuable but having someone that watches from afar we're almost like the proxy for the social media audience. You can get so close to creative work that you can't really see it with fresh eyes. We pull something out and we're like that was the that was the moment right there. That wasn't even in my original notes. And so once you can start looking for that, you don't have to manufacture it in the actual message because if you know, it sounds like that's a bit of the resistance like do I have to like put this in? No Let It Be organic that stuff will come out.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Okay, that's super helpful. What else is like connecting right now?

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**BRADY SHEARER:** So we found really short vertical videos are doing really well. And so what the tagline we encourage with. Our team is like work harder to make the video shorter one of my favorite quotes and I'll try to do this off the top of my head is Mark Twain. He says I sat down to write a short letter didn't have time. So I wrote a long letter instead. Is that condensing to condensing thoughts and ideas into something that shorter is actually more challenging. Sometimes we see churches that are like, why was this video only 30 seconds when it could have been 60. I was like well 30 if it gets the whole thought through is actually superior. So we're working harder to make videos shorter for sure. Another thing that we are working with is carousel posts.

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And carousel posts, at least on Instagram, have a really valuable place in the social calendar because when someone opens the app, they might see slide one and maybe they don't interact with it. Then they'll open the app later that day and they'll see slide two and they get kind of a second chance at a post that they initially neglected. So we see on our carousel posts, huge engagement. And for pastors, these are great because you can basically take long-form text and turn them into multiple posts.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** The old blog post is just eight slides now, right, with the single sentence. You know, and that's funny because the algorithm does that to me. I'll click on a carousel, which is the swipe left things if you're wondering. We'll link to some examples in the show notes from your team. But what's really fascinating is, you know, I've been through one or two and then I get distracted and the next day they're back and I pick up where I left off. So that's something the algorithm is serving up right now. How do you, because I can imagine we have so many communicators listening to this podcast or watching.

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And I can see them saying but my thought can't be reduced to 30 seconds. You know, it's more complex it needs a setup, you need to make the point, what would be an example of something that would be a thoroughly excellent 10 or 15 second reel.

**BRADY SHEARER:** So one thing that we've begun experimenting with and this is this is brand new on your show. So we haven't even talked to our audience about this yet, is we will take let's say that same hook three words that you should never say to your kids and we'll put that on the screen and we'll make that the entire video with just a single prompt on screen that says read the caption. So say, you know three words to not say to your kids read the caption and we'll make that video five seconds long.

[00:29:18.000]

And then the caption is let's say 2000 characters right where we're diving into that thought, which you can rip straight from your notes, let's say, if you have something pre-written or dig into the archives right now. This is one more other important point before I get back to this specific content format. We're not trying to take your messages and create recaps with these videos. We're using your sermons as Source material to create stand-alone pieces of content. And this is something pastors often miss is like, hey the video that we made it wasn't the really core point of the sermon and I said that's intentional. We pulled something else from it because interesting and that's what makes your archives like a gold mine and material so you can reach into like oh a year ago. I preached a message, you know, go back to it mine, you know the well for something else but back to that content format, you know, we take those 2000 characters. It's in the caption. Why does this content format work? Well, because when someone clicks the caption to read through, what are these three

words and why and you can go into depth there. You've got like 2000 characters, let's say.

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The video that's only five seconds long is looping seamlessly. The audio beat that's looping on beat is happening. And so the signal that Instagram is seeing is man, this video got rewatched, like 3X on average relative to a longer form video. Now I will say, okay, let's be honest here. This, I'm actually surprised Instagram is still letting this happen in this specific format. Like it does kind of feel like something that's like gaming the algorithm. Sometimes we think of the algorithm as you know, like the all-knowing AI that's running all of our lives. Sometimes it is as simple as like, you know, dog with a clicker.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Okay, stratification of platforms. So Facebook, Instagram, et cetera, according to generations, what do you do? Like if you want to reach young families, do you go double down on Instagram? If most of your congregation, I would think this would be the case for a lot of people, is on Facebook.

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Do you just stick with Facebook? Do you keep posting to all platforms? Like how do you handle that when, and I think you're right. It's gone from everyone's everywhere to know we've stratified Now by generation on platforms. So what do you do with that with your leader? Trying to get your message out?

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, the age-old question. Do you make choices for the audience you have now or change to a hypothetical audience that you know you need to reach because your church is aging? I mean, it's it's what almost every small and mid-sized Church the ones that we focus on serving are dealing with at least on social there are some benefits for us talked about TikTok being the disrupting force that every other platform is following what that means is if we create one vertical video we can publish that too Facebook reels, Instagram reels, TikTok, and YouTube shorts back in the day. You could watch my videos read my post say don't don't cross post. Every platform has their own specialty. You can't just take a Facebook post and publish it to Instagram and expect it to perform similarly. It won't.

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But now that these discovery algorithms are driving everything and vertical video is the format that every platform wants more of one post can now go to four different

platforms. So when we start working with the church, they'll say like what platform do you think will perform best for us? And honestly, I can never give them a straight answer. We have seen churches where YouTube shorts was the one that they gained the most traction, others that are like, we're an older church and yet TikTok is where people are recognizing us from, Facebook and Instagram, maybe a little less surprising because Facebook has been the platform that most churches have the biggest audience on yeah and Instagram. Hey us Millennials the ones that were disappearing from church, or I'll start to come back to church because we had kids and we were like, you know what I need the Lord again and so, you know that platform making sense for for young families in churches.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So tracks so church leaders are not always the earliest adopters. Can we just say that? You know, we're not really ahead of trends. We tend to be a little bit behind.

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What are some trends that you think church leaders can afford to overlook right now? And then what are some trends you think they can't afford to overlook right now?

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**BRADY SHEARER:** So my my unpopular opinion on this has always been I Will always choose present application over future speculation. Mm -hmm. And this is something that continually rubs my audience the wrong way because they will come to me and they will say what are your predictions for the next social platform? And I'll look at them and I'll say I don't care because there is so much opportunity on these platforms right now and I always make a real estate analogy I will also make the Canadian pioneer analogy because we've got two Canadians in the room right now You know look people came to this country and for whatever reason they were like, I don't care how cold it is, we're gonna find a way to live here. Yeah, exactly And what they had to do was they settled on land and then they said this is where we're living and we're gonna figure this out.

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So we've settled all the land on the globe. The internet is still we're still figuring out all this new land and every time a new platform comes up. It's like we just made it to a new state that is yet to be settled a new part of the world that is yet to be settled and so look at all this amazing real estate and everyone wants to buy it up that's like this and we're in this place where it's like hey, there is all this amazing land. It is



cheap the real estate. It hasn't been and you're going you have but what's over this next hill right, like, I don't know, we're here now. Do it here now, because the inverse to your question is like what can church is not afford to ignore the platforms that right now. Everyone is using to reach new audiences the platforms that pivoted and basically said if you are a local organization like a church, we are going to disproportionately distribute your content in a five to ten mile radius of your church's building.

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And so forget about what's next like go and serve and work on these platforms now because the opportunity is immense.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So who is that that's serving you up if you're local which platform is doing that right now?

**BRADY SHEARER:** all the platform is, well discovery algorithms. So Facebook Instagram and tiktok all have heavy local components.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So if you hashtag Niagara Falls where we are right now,

**BRADY SHEARER:** You don't have to hashtag because your account is based in a certain location, so they already know where you are and not because they're like tracking you because you told them like, right, right.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Okay, um any trends so that's that's really good. And if you think about going all in on be real like whatever happened to be real it had its 30 seconds and kind of disappeared threads. I don't know what you do with threads, but it was exciting for July of last year and that was about it.

**BRADY SHEARER:** Well and into the stratification that we've talked about, Threads, while I don't see a future for it being like the next big global platform, and those might be behind us for a while, Threads is starting to carve out like, hey, we're not going to replace Twitter, but like people like us for this reason. And they're starting to carve out like an audience that's like, hey, we're going to stick around.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Who's hanging out on Threads?

**BRADY SHEARER:** You know, broadly speaking, a lot of maybe the left-leaning political folks that felt like X kind of turned their back on them. But there's a ton of creatives on Threads that are creatives love new social platforms because they haven't been like marketed to death yet. And so they're kind of like, I can just like be my creative free flowing self right now. Of course that will not last, but.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Any trends that they shouldn't overlook? You've kind of answered both with that question. You know, don't worry about what's next. Focus about what's right now. Anything else that comes to mind in that category?

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**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, we've talked about the stratification of social media. There is one platform that just has every generation on it. And that is YouTube.

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YouTube has been around since 2005. So it's you know coming up on its 20th birthday which seems like a lot but is still it YouTube in the culture I think is dramatically overlooked for its power and influence. The the the the the the the Vise grip that YouTube has on every generation we talked about Gen Alpha kind of like getting their start in Social on the YouTube kids app and now YouTube shorts and then YouTube is also the platform that if I talk to my grandparents, they're like, oh, yeah. I watch your YouTube videos, grandson, when you post them because they're freely accessible on the internet. I don't need an account. I can easily access them. YouTube has continued to support its creators unlike any other platform. And so you have some of the best content on their because people actually can make a living on it where other platforms are kind of just getting like the leftovers from creators because they can't really earn a living there unless they're doing brand deals. Let's say or things like that.

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YouTube is already probably being used by your church as an archive, but there's so much more that can be done. I would point to both Life Church and Elevation that are following the strategy where they will basically find a six to 15-minute portion of the message. They'll take that out and they'll retitle it. So let's imagine you were doing a post about you know, Jesus's death and Judas's betrayal and maybe you know, the title of that sermon series is like, you know Grave Digger or something some ridiculous sermon series title that we give, well, that's not search indexable whatsoever. But if that one part and said, all right, we're gonna make this video. It's going to be called how to handle betrayal.

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Now, that is something that is search-worthy. We're gonna create a new thumbnail with our pastor's face and then big text like, how to handle betrayal. And we're

gonna publish that on our channel. Now, in the same way we've talked about vertical video, repurposing your sermons, you're repurposing your sermons for YouTube in kind of a medium format. And this is what podcasters have been doing way before churches have followed suit.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Right, taking an excerpt.

**BRADY SHEARER:** We sit down for two hours and look, there's a lot of great conversation in a Joe Rogan. Let's pull out one piece and then republish that.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So, anything else on social that you think we should cover? We covered quite a bit.

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**BRADY SHEARER:** I think the biggest question that people have about social is, and I know it's the biggest question because for 15 years they've been asking me, is, you know, cool post, but like, how does this help our in-person ministry?

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And I will be honest, in the era of social graph, it was very challenging to answer.

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In the discovery era, it's a lot more straightforward. So if you will I have actually created this framework for this we call it the Social Ministry Mountain. If you want to download the PDF and go to Pro Church, tools.com slash Mountain because it's it is a nice diagram to see and look at it. But I will paint you the picture. There are four layers on this mountain, just think of it as a triangle at the top of the triangle is the summit we call this the crossover. The crossover is when you can tangibly point to your online efforts translating to in-person. To get there, there are these three layers that we have to scale, and we call it a mountain think about climbing a mountain. Okay, you got to get to each layer one by one the base layer we call no weeks off.

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Every church that affects life change online does it differently, but the one constant is they're all consistently creating great content for their community. And what we found is very few churches are actually able to achieve this layer on their own indefinitely because what happens is we all wear multiple hats in ministry. So you get a burst of inspiration you watch a video of mine. You're like, oh we have this great idea, but then you get pulled onto a different project and you're attention.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** This was a great series, but the next one? Ehh.

**BRADY SHEARER:** Ugh, that's the giving one. I don't know, and then you stopped posting and then you don't ever get to see what the next few layers of the Social Ministry Mountain might look like because you have to start again from the bottom. No weeks off. You're not an influencer. You don't need to post every day find a sustainable Rhythm that your church can achieve indefinitely even if it's just once or twice a week, that's fine.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** You don't even post every day.

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**BRADY SHEARER:** Two to four times per week really and it's my full-time job.

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This is what my profession is dedicated to okay Once we've got no weeks off then what we're looking for is what we call a viral for me post so level one, no weeks off, level two, viral for me. A viral for me post is Anything that you publish that reaches 10x the audience of a typical post of yours So if you're normally reaching 200 people a viral for me post is one that reaches 2,000 And because all these platforms are rewarding good content with extra organic reach. This is realistic The more of these that we stockpile The sooner we can get to the third level the final level before the crossover and this is called the 10x growth rate.

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The 10X growth rate is defined as it's a lot of numbers. I know. You should stay with me. Okay, stay with me. 4% growth on any social platform. So 4% new followers pretty modest on its own but when you combine it with no weeks off and it compounds over five years that will add up to 10x growth. So 500 followers today becomes 5000 in five years and I just want to really emphasize this in the previous era of social this type of growth would have been unrealistic unless you had an extremely famous Pastor or spent a ton of money on ads, but it is now realistic for any church of any size and then the final level from there is the crossover. You can see crossover events at any point along the Social Ministry Mountain, but the higher you get up the more predictable they become, the more frequent they become, these are visitor cards being returned. Hey, heard about your church on social, conversation in the lobby with the pastor, oh, we were following your Church online before we came and visited in person or the one that we already mentioned that we're seeing more and more very curious pastors being recognized in their community throughout the week grocery store. doctor's office wherever it might be

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So that is fascinating to me. So the social graph era, 15 years ish. And in 2020. We're now in to the Discover discover era where you can be discovered pretty naturally on social any idea how long that's gonna last? I know that's impossible to predict the future.

**BRADY SHEARER:** I just told you I don't want to make predictions Carey. How long will it last? Yeah, this is this does someone change the algorithm? Yeah, you know there is that kind of like, pervasive idea, oh, social is changing every day. This is one of those macro changes. It's not like a micro change that's gonna be undone and reverted. We have been on the trajectory towards recommended content being a huge part of our feed for many, many years now. It's just that there was a platform that came out that forced Metta to do something different.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Right, which was TikTok.

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**BRADY SHEARER:** We had never seen that before. Meta was just like all oncomers, swat you away until they couldn't. And they invested billions of dollars into building a better algorithm to compete with this new one that was taking them on.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Well, I saw another graph recently where it's like hours viewed of Netflix in a typical day and then TikTok. And it was like, it was crazy. It was like the Earth and the moon like Netflix was so small compared to TikTok, but you said something really interesting to me earlier before I started filming. You said, you know, you went all in on TikTok found it a little bit difficult to gain momentum. What is your counsel for churches on TikTok? Because it really is a younger like late teens early 20s demographic on TikTok and a lot of churches are struggling in that area. Should you bother with TikTok? What your thought?

**BRADY SHEARER:** I will preface this by saying that I am sympathetic and understanding of people that are worried about TikTok both sides of the aisle in America are open to restrictions or an outright ban on TikTok. They've been talking about it for a while nothing's happened as of yet. I have never had a social platform in my own country. So I'm always giving foreign countries my information and I get that the People's Republic of China is different from the United States. I'm being a bit glib here. So with that being said, we recently pulled our audience and keep in mind our audience is people that come to me to help their church with social and digital. So this is not average church. This is like the social media savvy part of the church

world. And I asked really adopters is your church on Facebook? 90% Yes. Is your church on Instagram? 90% Yes. Is your church on YouTube? 90% Yes. Is your church on TikTok? 10% Yes. I truly was blown away. I did not anticipate that I have been recommending churches since 2018. You can find YouTube videos get on TikTok. We grew our platform to 100K on tiktok pretty quickly and it's really stagnated and I think a big part of that is that church is really haven't made the leap to that platform. and it frankly it it makes me sad because I think about a generation. This is their platform.

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And they are being disciplined on that platform, not by us, because we're choosing not to go there.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** People are like, well, what do you mean by being disciplined? Let me read between the lines. I think you're saying they're being disciplined by consumer brands, by influencers. So in other words, it's sort of the point David Kinnaman makes. You're being disciplined, you're just being disciplined by the internet.

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, precisely.

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There are ideologies, there are worldviews, there are value systems that they are being disciplined into at their most formative and impressionable ages.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So only 10%, you know, that's almost identical to the statistic that Glu and Barna discovered for pastors using AI intentionally every day. About 10 % of pastors say they use it daily or weekly. So TikTok and AI, same category, same level of adoption.

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**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, and emerging Tech, you know, like you said, we're not typically the the industry that jumps on it and you know what, fair, you know, what else is another there are other slow adopting Industries education Healthcare politics is not just religious institutions like Methodist churches, but we're typically so that's fine. They're this feels different to me though their feels like there's this resistance to TikTok. There's this vitriol towards TikTok. I think a big part of that is just like, you know American Pride we are not going to help another country. Yeah

again, I'm sympathetic to all those things. I'm just as sympathetic to an entire generation again being left by themselves on their, this is their platform. This is the one that is going to be there. It's as if no church was on Instagram. It would be great.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Yeah. Yeah would be you know, that's a really good point. So would you recommend most churches open up a TikTok account?

**BRADY SHEARER:** Like I said earlier if you're already going to be creating that vertical video content if nothing else, start the TikTok account and publish it there. That Pastor that was getting recognized in person. He went to the grocery store the part of that story that I didn't tell you was that they that guy said my wife and I are new to this area. We're wanting to find a new church. We're coming to your church this week because he saw that pastor preaching on TikTok.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** And was this pastor like a 25-year-old pastor?

**BRADY SHEARER:** No, young 40s, I'd guess.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Yeah. Yeah, so not exactly the target demographic for TikTok,

**BRADY SHEARER:** No, some smaller church, you know.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Cool. Okay. I want to talk about Church online. So everybody went on line in 2020 for years ago, right? That was a rude awakening. It was something like 30% of churches were online pre-pandemic now, everybody's online. What are the trends healthy and unhealthy that you're seeing in Church online.

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Well, what we always emphasize with Church Online is how are we allowing people to take their next step towards Jesus? I think that there's a lot of understandable friction and concern about Church Online, like, oh, does it create even more of a consumer on the other side?

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But then the other, you know, the counterargument to that is like, well, we want to be able to reach people, and we're not here to litigate Church Online, and we've done that enough over the last few years, so we'll skip by that.

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I was talking with, we had Life Church on our podcast, and I was talking with them about what they do with Online Church, and what I found most fascinating with what they said, and I'll lean on their expertise there rather than my own, is that they

have 131 services online every single week. And they're not on-demand services, they're ones that you join.

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And the reason for that is because they have a team of 400 volunteers that are on the services that you can chat with that you can request prayer with, so then I asked them I was like, okay 400 volunteers like so how are you equipping as one of the most influential churches in the world like these volunteers to like engage on the front lines of ministry?

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Yeah, great question.

**BRADY SHEARER:** And so Christina Ross the host team pastor at Life Church that we're talking with she was like, well one thing that we do is every week we have these pre-written scripts that are related to the subject matter that Pastor Craig, or whoever is preaching that week, is preaching on, so that way like when we make prompts in the chat, it's not just like let's worship. It's something that's related to what's coming. That's kind of cool. I was like, I'm gonna press on this. Now, what happens when someone says what are your beliefs on this like what you got? Just like these volunteers like answering this. She's like no. No what we have instead are links to calendly where you can book a call with a pastor. And she said after my podcast today, I have four calls that people made on Calendly, book a time with the pastor and we sit down with these people one-on-one to talk through their issues or concerns or whatever. They need to talk to a pastor about and I'm like, okay. I understand that Life Church is big but it's proportionate and they're almost certainly bigger than you are relative to their resources because they have such a huge footprint. So that means that they are prioritizing using online church as a springboard to talk to people one-on-one online but like as pastoral care. So look at their emphasis not like you would think maybe this big church. Maybe I was cynical about this all big church. Like it's just about watch our brand, see our amazing programming, no, it's all the springboard for Spiritual engagement for Spiritual practice for community pastoral care.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** It's so good to see what life church is doing and directing people if there's no life church in the area to like getting baptized Locally with another church, etc. Etc. What are you seeing for normal -sized churches like as far as church online? Let's think of a church of 200 people, which 85% of churches are smaller than that.



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So best practices worst practices for church online?

**BRADY SHEARER:** So my my opinions on this have been historically controversial, and haven't changed too much despite the pandemic. But my belief is that for most small to mid -sized churches there are superior options to invest in than online church when it comes to Fulfilling the mission of your ministry and to me that's what this is always about effectiveness.

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Not at the expense of efficacy but effectiveness so long as it aligns with your mission. Hey Life Church, you know anything short of sin. Let's go there. So we've talked about a ton of strategies for taking your sermon and repurposing it for social media in ways that will reach people the discovery is built in and baked in. It is one out of 100 churches that will prioritize that over an online church service. And I think that if you choose to prioritize online church, I get it, you know, we all basically look at the church down the street and go, I'm not an expert in this, church is hard. There's another Sunday coming. Did you know that there's another Sunday coming? I think that's what they do. It seems like that's what most people are doing. Why would I try something different?

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So what we're always interested in are the churches that are like, well this seems to be more effective for less cost of resources and time and volunteers. So let's try that instead. So my recommendation would be you know, instead of producing maybe this nicer polished online church service. It's okay to have a private feed or a private stream where people can check out your church and by check out. I mean, oh we're part of this church, but we're traveling, we're part of this church, but we're bedridden, we're part of this church, but we're out of town and we still want to feel like we're part of it great set up the camera let them watch it. But to put together a really nice polished online church service that leaves a great first impression and that the cost to entry is higher.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** You got to be a certain level of church in terms of production and excellence to be able to pull that off beautifully.

**BRADY SHEARER:** And I'll leave this here. I understand. It's an unpopular opinion and most churches are already invested in this but look we spent the 10 G's, so we're not going to stop now. But my Foundation to believe that is not changed pre-pandemic post-pandemic, mid-pandemic.

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Maybe mid pandemic doesn't count pre and post discovery on social media and reaching new people the opportunity there is so much more immense than with online church

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Let's talk about AI, so big big developing story. What are you seeing in terms of trends for AI in churches?

**BRADY SHEARER:** So we put together like AI policy for churches that we thought was useful because what typically happens is we would have a conversation with the church and they'd be like how do I wrap my mind around this new technology and its implications? My belief on that is always let's set some parameters to like put this like in a box that we can at least approach And then we can kind of work within that and I wanted to make sure I didn't get these parameters around. So it's really just two questions that you can ask yourself parameter number one, why are we using AI? And to me my answer is AI can be a useful shortcut.

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Parameter number two, what are our boundaries for AI? And then what I've always said is we will not use AI as our exclusive source. So here are a couple of examples of that that's just parameters abstract examples. I think if you were to write a description for your church. We are Life Church in, you know, Tulsa Oklahoma and we are passionate about reaching people that are far from God. Put that into AI have them it rewrite it. And now you have a nice paragraph for your churches about us page on your website, you know, you might sit down and you look at your about us page and what's supposed to go on and about us page. Maybe you don't know.

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As long as you're not using AI as your exclusive source, and you're not because you wrote a sentence for it there. Is this really chilling case study of this there was this lawyer named Stephen Schwartz, I think was his name. And he was an American lawyer and he used ChatGPT in a case that he was trying and he used it as a search engine. Hey, what are some cases that would support the verdict that I'm trying to get? They try the case and he's fighting these until the defense is like we don't know what cases you're referencing. And it turns out and this was in the New York Times. This is in some hallucinating. It turns out AI just invented it. Yeah. Yeah. So like using AI as a search engine seems quite untrustworthy and so like as long as you have the

source material and then you're asking it to Riff on it. We love that because then it becomes a shortcut you could have done that yourself. You just saved ten minutes.

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**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** The other thing I've been thinking about, we did a whole series on AI, and I don't want to go too deeply into it, but we did that a few months ago on the podcast. But I've also been thinking about the loss of the creative brain.

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Like you and I were talking earlier before I went on mic, I find it fantastic at generating alternate titles. For example, I have something I want to call an article or a caption for a website. Like give me 15 variations of this, be creative. Boom! It's like, whoa, that's pretty amazing, like stuff that I wouldn't have thought of myself, on my own. But what I'm worried about is if that becomes, because we all as writers or thinkers stare at a blinking cursor, and then if you're just staring at AI or like, write me an article on, do you lose that, that like initial mover of this is where my message is gonna go. This is where this video is gonna go.

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I wonder about that. Have you thought about that at all?

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, certainly like the intangible elements of like the creative process and how it might hijack that in a negative way

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Because it's hard man. It's hard to produce content. You know that you've been doing it for a decade. I've been preaching for 30 years and there's something about that wrestling. I think that I don't want to lose in the midst of it.

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, and I think that for me the boundaries that I put in place is I let AI do the grunt work that I don't want to do there's a there was a famous in our company a famous thing that I asked our employees to do once we were moving our website archive from one to another and we had our podcast and I was like guys, you know what we should do? We should transcribe every podcast and we've been podcasting. Like we we had a lot of 750 shows.

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And this was five to seven years ago. And so it wasn't quite 750 shows that but we used the tool and this was like early AI and what it did was it would transcribe for like three dollars instead of like for sixty dollars if you had a person do it and I had every single one of our employees go through and look at that three dollar

transcription and fix it. And we spent like three weeks on it and they still talk about it. Like remember what you made us do you made us sit down and do? Nowadays AI does that instantly in the video applications we use almost to perfection. So that's the grunt work that I love that AI does that. Lightroom for photo editing? It has begun using AI denoising. So instead of just a denoise slider that goes less noise. Yes or no zero to 100 scale. It will intelligently detect noise detect what kind of noise because there's different type of noise right color. It could be Luma which means like brightness values and it will intelligently denoise.

[00:58:21.300]

You can upscale, enhance an image that isn't gray. Here's one way we love using it. We will, after we create a vertical video for a church from a sermon, we wanna create a cover, like a thumbnail. But typically, the frame that we're working with, like that's not a professional photo. We'll grab a frame and upload it to a tool called Remini, R -E -M -I -N -I, might be Remini, and it will upscale and basically like polish, basically like resurrect that frame into as if it was like taken with a full HD image.

[00:58:53.000]

And you know what? One out of 10 times, it makes the preacher's face go berserk. But nine out of 10 times, it works perfectly and takes just seconds. So we love, that's another reason, like oh, I love using AI for that.

[00:59:05.300]

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Okay, um metrics I get this question a lot and I'm not sure how to answer it. I mean historically churches have been well how many people showed up? What was the offering? And new members baptisms, etc. Etc. Digital metrics seem to be all over the place any thoughts on the numbers that you should be tracking in 2024 from what we know now?

**BRADY SHEARER:** Yeah, there is still not a perfect metric to say x amount of views equals this much. Future giving of my church. This many butts in seats. This many souls saved. Of course, none of these things are quantifiable. And because we serve in church where our missions are dedicated to the existential matters of life, you know, look Carey and I've known each other for a decade, you know, we're quaint says that's I don't actually know anything about Carey truly. I can't no one can know the heart of someone else truly. And so how could we then say that digital can necessarily perfectly translate to something?

[01:00:04.700]

That's not meant to be despairing and it's also not meant to question at all the status of your soul, Carey, I saw your face when I said that.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** I'm like, I just had a rough night last night. I'll be fine.

**BRADY SHEARER:** The Social Ministry Mountain that we went off of earlier exists to basically broadly put you where are you on those four layers? Are you already committed to know weeks off online? If you are, that's great. If not, that's the metric. You need to Define your efforts by first viral for me. Have you had a viral for me post just to be clear only about three to five percent of the posts you publish are going to be viral for me. My Instagram went from at the beginning of 2023 40,000 followers. I had been on Instagram for 10 years. I'm in a small niche of church in digital at the end of 2023 around 90,000. I didn't change much that was just the discovery algorithms pushing it pushing all that content out. Here's what's more amazing, only three to five of my 200 posts that year were viral for me posts. It was that sliver that were the catalyst for all the growth.

[01:01:10.300]

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Only three to five, it blew it all up.

[01:01:12.200]

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So have you had a viral for me post? That's kind of, and then if you have, are you at that 10X growth rate? Are you growing at 4 % each month? And then catalog, document, and shout it from the mountain in the pulpit every single crossover event that you can. You don't necessarily need to announce it from church, but in your staff meetings, that family, they came from this. Make sure that you're celebrating when you do see those crossover events because they are worth celebrating. So that's how I like to do the metrics.

[01:01:39.500]

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** So that's way better than just looking at the views you had on YouTube or the number of comments you would have on a typical post, et cetera.

[01:01:46.800]

**BRADY SHEARER:** It's more holistic.

[01:01:48.400]

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Yeah, okay. What have we not touched on that you think we should talk about when it comes to trends on social, digital in 2024?

[01:01:58.200]

**BRADY SHEARER:** Oh things that are worth talking about. Let me see if I wrote down anything else in my own notes. Hmm That was a good one. I like to think of the discipline of digital in the terms of learning the violin and playing tennis. This is a helpful reminder to people as they like dive into this and they get incredibly frustrated as they will surely do. The violin is a discipline that you can read about and learn about and understand that this is how this works. Tennis is a game where you can know your own skills and abilities perfectly, but they really only matter in the context of your opponent. What's amazing about tennis is like, you can hit the perfect 120 mile-per-hour serve in the perfect spot, and when your opponent knows it's coming. They're already prepared to beat you on that point. So then you have to anticipate what they might do.

[01:02:51.000]

And then adjust by their anticipating your anticipation it becomes this amazing game of cat and mouse. This is what digital ministry and social ministry is. You approach something and you're like, this is what I think will work and then it does until it doesn't. This is what I think will work. It doesn't I don't think this will work it does and you keep getting these inputs from like what you put into it. It keeps coming kind of coming back you get this concept and for me, I'm a bit of a sickle. This is why I love it so much. Like it's this just video game. It's this game that I it's this mountain that I can never climb fully the Social Ministry mountain right you get you that It's just it's fascinating and so understanding it in that way is really healthy because what churches and pastors tend to do is they come to it. They're like I did what I was supposed to do and it didn't work didn't work.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** I hear that all the time.

[01:03:40.000]

**BRADY SHEARER:** It's not the violin. It's a tennis match. And you tried something and you learned something from it. So now you have to get back to it. And the churches that do this the best, and this is why No Weeks Off is the foundation. No Weeks Off, if you commit to No Weeks Off, you will get the feedback from what you're doing. You will see the stories of life change. You'll understand what's working, what's not working. And then you'll continue to learn. And it's this never ending, you know, it's just like preaching, I'm sure.

[01:04:05.700]

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** I mean, do you find this, you kind of hinted at it earlier too, even with preaching, it's the off-the-cuff stuff. Most of my breakthrough moments have been accidental. They've been accidental. It's like, well, I didn't think that would work. Or I thought this would work. I thought this was gonna be incredible. I thought it would crush. I thought it was amazing. Not even my mom liked it. And then, you know, you do this thing, it's like, I don't know that we should even publish this. And then boom, it blows up.

[01:04:29.400]

That's the one? Yeah, it's like bands. It's like that would be the hit. Are you kidding me now? I guess we have to play that song every show until we die. Oh, yes, we do. So Brady, this is great. You join us so much value. Where can we connect with you?

**BRADY SHEARER:** So prochurchools.com is the website. You can search my name on any social platform. If you're Gen Z join me on TikTok. If you're on Instagram, Millennial on Instagram? If you're Boomer, we're on Facebook, and then for everyone join us on YouTube. Podcast is there in video form and then our main channel as well.

**CAREY NIEUWHOF:** Awesome. We'll link to everything in the show notes. Brady, thank you so much.

**BRADY SHEARER:** Thank you.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** That was a rich conversation and we've got it on YouTube. Also, we got show notes for you as well. You can go to [careynieuwhof.com/episode625](https://careynieuwhof.com/episode625) where you will also find transcripts we offer those absolutely free. Thanks to the partners that we have on this podcast and if you've been enjoying either this episode or this series, how about you let a friend know maybe share this episode with a friend post it to social sometimes especially if you tag me and we see that you posted it to social we will repost it on my channels. So I would love for you to do that and thank you for leaving ratings and reviews really makes a difference. And of course if you're new to the podcast as a lot of you are typically in January subscribe and you'll never miss an episode and you're not gonna miss the next one or you're not going to want to because I've got John Mark Comer back on the podcast. We're gonna wrap up the Church Trends series and we talk about all things discipleship why we can sermons and services aren't resonating like they used to, and then of course as I always do with John Mark, we get into the personal stuff. I met him at his home in La we had a great conversation. We are going to talk about real motives and also why he's no longer traveling and speaking.

[01:06:21.000]

Yeah, I think John Mark Comer is someone who is on trend and a little bit ahead. Here's an excerpt.

[01:06:27.900]

**John Mark Comer:** Part of my underwhelm with Sunday services is just that I'm, you know, not that far down the spiritual path, but I'm not 25 anymore. And sitting through a sermon series on whatever is not as life-changing for me at this point in my journey as it was at that point in my journey. I'm a little bit less emotion-driven now at this point. The problems I'm facing and my, you know, sin that's in my body are much deeper and are not solved by information and inspiration for the most part. I need, I'm way too messed up for that. And it's a much, much deeper stuff that it's working, that Jesus is working on in me now.

[01:07:06.000]

And then I think part of it, and this is embarrassing, but there is just the American Consumer mentality that is the air we breathe. It's like breathing secondhand smoke. I can't help but imbibe the consumerism of our culture and in a TED Talk, internet-based, podcast world. You know unless if you're local preacher is John Tyson, or you know a couple years, you know, not that long ago Tim Keller. It's pretty hard to not be a little bit bored.

**Carey Nieuwhof:** That's coming up and then back to our regularly scheduled programming and we'll kick that off with John or Virgo. Oh my gosh. What a great Rich conversation. I had with John can't wait to get that into your airpods Cara Powell's all so coming up Craig Groeschel, Jamie Kern Lima. We've also got Jenny Allen and a whole lot more coming up and if you want to continue the conversation on Church Trends, I'd love to get your feedback. So obviously we did my seven Church Trends to kick it off. But now I'm just talking to leaders. I really respect and admire and getting multiple perspectives to hopefully help you and your team gain an edge and really make progress in your mission. If you enjoyed this, would you shoot me a note at [carey@careynieuwhof.com](mailto:carey@careynieuwhof.com), tell me whether this is something you want us to do on a regular basis. It's an experiment first time we've done it. And of course, I've got the Team Guide for you at the link in the podcast descriptions. So if you haven't yet accessed that stop listening right now look at the link in the description and you can download it for free for you and your team. Hey, I'm really grateful we get to do this. Thank you so much. You guys are the best audience in the world. I'm so thankful for you. And well, I hope our conversation today helped you identify and break a growth barrier you're facing.