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Announcer: The Art of Leadership Network.

Cary Nieuwhof: I know too many senior leaders who would say well we'll give them a seat at the table but not a voice and not a vote. Yeah, how would you respond to that?

Kara Powell: That's not a seat at the table. No that's a high chair off to the side. If we're gonna go with the advanced civilization metaphor. That's not a seat at the table. I mean part of what we see across the board and effective youth ministry these days Carey, is its youth ministries who are saying we're not doing ministry for or two young people, but it's ministry with and buy young people like we need different prepositions. It's not for and to its with and by young people.

Cary 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, really glad you joined us.

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Kara Powell is back on the podcast we're gonna tackle from a different angle why the next generation is deconstructing their faith at such a high rate. We're going to talk about combating the toxicity of social media what it's doing to young minds and then what the Next Generation Wishes the church would stop and start doing it's a great conversation. I'm so glad you joined us. Hey, make sure you check out a couple of things before we get into the episode. First of all, for those of you who preach what if you were confident that your sermon would connect and speak the truth every time you preached and you were confident ahead of your sermon not afterwards. Well my online program The Art of Preaching will help you do that. You can click the link in the description of this episode or visit theartofpreachingcourse.com and have you checked out Overflow plus tap? You know your church can tap their phone against the seat in front of them and be transported to the page of your choosing from your giving page to your digital connection cards and a lot more go to overflow.co/carey to learn a lot more.

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Well, I am excited to have Kara back on the podcast. She brings her latest research to the task, which I always appreciate.

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Kara is the chief of leadership formation and the executive director of the Fuller Youth Institute at Fuller Theological Seminary, named by Christianity Today as one of the 50 women to watch. She serves as a full-time family youth strategist for Orange and speaks regularly at parents and leadership conferences. Kara has authored or co-authored numerous books, including *Three Big Questions That Shape Your Future*, *Three Big Questions That Change Every Teenager*, *Growing With*, *Growing Young*, *The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family*, and the entire *Sticky Faith* series. So, preachers, once you've written your sermon, how do you know it's going to land on Sunday?

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The reality is, and I preached for years and years, you don't unless you have a method that is proven to let you know, hey, this thing is ready to launch. And the problem with most of us is we find out afterward. If you ever wondered how people who preach without notes do it. If you ever wondered why some preachers are so clear. While others are not compelling and not succinct if you wonder how you can do this for the Long Haul. How do you keep being creative year after year mark Clark and I put together something called the Art of Preaching course and we've led thousands of leaders through it, thousands of pastors. We will walk you through every aspect of becoming a better Communicator with better preaching skills best yet. It's on demand. You don't have to get on a plane. You don't have to pay for a conference. You can just get into it. So whether you want to ditch your notes for good, find the power in the text regularly, whether you want to get through the confusion to craft clear bottom lines that people will remember and apply to their lives or whether you want to just get past writer's block. The art of preaching is something you should check out. So go to theartofpreachingcourse.com or click the link in the description of this episode. So here's a question for you. What if your church could look more like a contact list payment system that you see in coffee shops and stores where you simply tap your phone or card and payment is complete. Well, the answer is finally here overflow. The world's most powerful giving platform has now reimagined giving once again with Overflow plus tap technology.

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can increase your engagement by 50x compared to physical guest cards or QR codes combined. Head on over to overflow.co/carey. And now let's dive into my conversation with Kara Powell.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Kara it's so good to chat again.

KARA POWELL: Well, it's always good to have a meaningful conversation with you Carey.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Okay, so I want to throw an honest question to get us rolling today. Not that the others are dishonest, I don't know where that expression comes from. But anyway, people have been talking about young people walking away from the faith for decades now, like for a long long time, they've been deconstructing. It doesn't seem to be getting any better, or first, Is that true? Is that a fair assumption and second. Why do you think that is? Why do you think we just see this like Avalanche of young adults walking away and are we doing anything to reverse it?

KARA POWELL: I am an optimist, I think you are too Carey, % but I'm also a realist.

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And when I look at the research on young people, you're right. It's actually not getting any better. It still seems like 40 to 50% of youth group graduates from great churches and great families drift from God in the faith community over a million young people a year are drifting from the faith. And I think you know for us and for our listeners, it's not just statistics. It's personal, you know, these are individual young people. These are our kids, our grandkids, our nieces and nephews, young people we know in our churches, and in terms of why you know, I'm a big fan of the research done by Spring Tide Research Institute and of all the data that I saw during the pandemic about young people and faith. I think the most disturbing statistic that I saw was when Spring Tide did a study of 13 to 25 year olds and only 10 % of 13 to 25 -year -olds a year into the pandemic had heard from any faith leader in the last year.

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One out of ten. Yeah, wow is right.

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Any faith leader, Carey, that's not just Christian, that's Jewish, that's Islamic, that's Mormon, only one out of ten. I don't know if I'm more mad or sad about that, but I'm

certainly both. Now, when they isolated and looked just at Christian 13 to 25 -year -olds, the percentage was higher, a whopping 12%. 12 % of 13 to 25 -year -olds who said they were Christians heard from a religious leader. Now, that's the bad news. Let me give some good news quickly. The other side of the coin, in the same study,

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70% of these young people said they have a new openness to relationship right now. And so I think that is the good news. Is that while young people are still drifting, while we haven't yet mobilized adults to really invest in young people, young people are open to a relationship with a caring Jesus-centered adult. And so that's what we need to work on.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well and that's a drum that you have been beating for years. And once again in faith, beyond youth group, right what you're saying is relationship, relationship, relationship, relationship. I heard a lot of church leaders said we're calling everybody in our membership base just to see how they're doing during the pandemic. I remember that season now, you know.

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I'm sure I didn't talk. Well, I know I didn't talk to every Church leader. But what is it, you know, there's that there's that kind of sense. I guess the question I'm sort of fishing around for is Is a really as simple as a personal relationship like is that one of the pieces of glue that keeps someone stuck to Christ rather than come to this amazing pizza night or hang out at a great event or come away on a retreat with us like relationship is so critical or is that just one more symptom of a larger problem that you're kind of highlighting there?

KARA POWELL: Well, I think relationships are absolutely critical and I think it's just one more symptom of a larger problem, and so let's talk about even in the let's say in those situations where there is strong adult relationships. What else do we need to work on or what else might be challenging for young people when it comes to connecting with churches? Why else are they walking away from the faith? I'll give you two quotes from two students.

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One young person, a 13 -year -old who's actually the daughter of a youth pastor, who said this, why should I tell others I'm a Christian?

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Christians are jerks. And I think that is how young people perceive Christians and the church today as unkind or being even more direct, we're kind of being jerks these days too often. Now, I love the church. There are so many bright spots. I could talk an hour about all the great things about the church. And there are a lot of instances of us not modeling the fruit of the let's say that. Let me tell you what another 15 -year -old said.

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Which I think is also a reflection of what we're missing with the church, this 15 year old said I'm tired of the church answering questions I'm not asking. So are we really listening and empathizing with this anxious adaptive and diverse generation?

CAREY NIEUWHOF: What would be an example of some classic questions that we would try to answer in the church that you think today's young people are just not asking?

KARA POWELL: Yeah, you know, I don't think It's some. but it's more where we question it so, you know on any given day and any given week young people are asking questions about what are they going to do on Friday night and what are they going to post on social media what job they're going to get this summer, you know, whatever. It might be. Those are their daily questions, but what bubbles beneath those questions, we think are questions of identity belonging and purpose. Who am I, identity. Belonging, where do I fit, and purpose, what difference can I make? And so, how do we how do we make those questions more overt as we're talking with young people? And then how do we show them that Jesus is answers are the best answers to those questions. And so, you know, it's going deeper with young people and really peeling back the layers and understanding their true losses and longings.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, um, okay, what are some of the reasons that you would say young adults and teenagers are walking away from Christianity, because I mean everybody's paying attention to deconstruction. We're trying to figure it out. It's not getting better. But I'm with you. I'm an optimist. I think we can turn this thing around.

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What are some of the stated reasons, and then you are one of the reasons I love our conversations, you're a researcher. What is the research telling us?

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KARA POWELL: Yeah, yeah. Well, it's a lot of what we've already been talking about, lack of adult relationships, the church being viewed as unkind, hypocritical, unloving, the church being viewed as irrelevant. I think one of the really interesting trends when it comes to faith deconstruction, well, first off, a lot of what we read about when it comes to deconstruction is more happening in the young adult stage than the teenage stage. And even with teenagers, though, they do have doubts about their faith. According to some research we did a while ago, about 70% of graduating seniors from youth groups admit to having significant doubts about their faith.

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um, and you know that can cause us to freak out like, oh my goodness, you know, they have these doubts but here's what's been so interesting in our research and Carey, I would say in in the 10 years of research we've done at the full youth Institute, maybe one of the most surprising findings we've had is that when young people have the opportunity to express and explore their doubts that's actually correlated with greater faith maturity. So it's not doubt that is toxic to face its silence that is toxic to faith. And so in our new Faith Beyond youth group book part of what we're trying to do is give adults the tools to know how to build the trusting relationships.

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That are needed with young people so that young people can get to that point where they can they can raise the questions that they're wrestling with when it comes to God in the safe place of the church.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Is certainty an enemy to faith? Is that something that is turning the next generation off?

KARA POWELL: What I would say is instead of certainty I think curiosity is a better posture with this generation.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Because when we come in with like absolute answers and black and white thinking which seems to be on the rise among some adults like as culture becomes more ambiguous more complicated more post-modern, you see a lot of people going clarity, like clarity is not certainty, they're different but sure, you know sure absolutely without a doubt. This is the way the world works and this is who God is and I don't know I mean, I sense that that isn't resonating with young adults and teenagers as much anymore.

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KARA POWELL: Yeah, yeah. I'll say this. Some of my best conversations with young people, whether it's my own kids or other young people, teenagers and young adults, it often starts with me or them, but sometimes it's usually me saying, I wonder. I wonder about, I wonder how your belief about this connects to your experience here, and just being curious about different parts of their life. And I think especially asking about how their faith is connected to different parts of their life. I wonder how, you are under a lot of stress, you're dealing with mental health challenges. I wonder how your relationship with Jesus helps, if at all, in the midst of your biggest times of stress anxiety of depression, you know, I've had some really fascinating conversations with young people. Where I can help them think about what they're experiencing what they believe and one hand what they've read in scripture on the other and I wonder how these two go together for you. So yeah, I think being curious instead of confrontational goes a lot further with this generation.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: I can see a lot of adults over 40 hearing the question. You just asked and feeling maybe a little bit intimidated by it or should I even go there because you said how your faith in Jesus, if at all, yeah, you know in dealing with and you're like whoa now, I've opened the whole like they're gonna start deconstructing. They're gonna walk away. They're gonna go you're right. It's not helping at all. And now I'm an atheist. So yeah, and that's what I want to explore a little bit because I think there was a style of Christianity a way of thinking about our faith. It's like, you know, God said it Bible, Bible said that I believe it whatever that mantra is. I can't remember on the spot, right?

KARA POWELL: That settles it, yeah.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: That settles it. There can be no room for doubt in that kind of framework and I'm just wondering what you would say to parents, church leaders, mentors who are afraid if they are that open that the whole ball of yarn is going to unravel in front of their eyes.

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KARA POWELL: Well, first off, Carey, I've been to 26 grades of school, okay? I've done a lot of school. I have a master's of divinity and I'm a PhD in practical theology. I'm a faculty member at Fuller Seminary, and the average 12-year-old can ask a question about God that I can't fully answer.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, fair.

KARA POWELL: And I don't think that's a bad thing, because I think if we could fully explain then God wouldn't be God. God would just be a cool person.

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So the fact that there are elements of God that we can't explain actually gives me confidence in God's goodness, or God's otherness, God's holy otherness. So I see that as a powerful thing. But when that 12-year-old or that 17-year-old or that 22-year-old asks you a tough question, what do you do? What do you say? And let me just tell you, my go-to phrase and I've used it with my own kid and kids including. I mean maybe one of the toughest times I've had to use it was one of my closest closest friends was diagnosed with stage four cancer. Dire. She did an experimental chemotherapy process. It was agonizing for her physically, but I remember leaving my daughter's birthday party and stepping outside of the pizza place on May 8th of a year a number of years ago and calling her because she was getting results back and as I'm standing outside the pizza place, she's telling me Kara, the Cancer's gone. Cancer's gone, the Cancer's gone, like the doctors are amazed. It was the results were even better than the doctors expected, biggest miracle our family had prayed for and seen at that moment. six months later She's in our living room.

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She has a seizure. Paramedics come take her to the hospital. and as they x-ray her as they MRI her she had, the cancer's back and tumors have riddled her brain and her spine and there's no experimental chemotherapy that's going to do it. She passes away about a month later. So went from biggest miracle our family had ever seen on May 8th. And again, I remember because it was my daughter's birthday to six months later a seizure in our living room and a month after that going to be with Jesus my daughter who was probably 12 at the time when she when we told her that Chrissy had gone to be with Jesus. She was mad.

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She was mad, Carey. And she said, why would God heal Chrissy and then let her die? She said, a person wouldn't even do that. Why would God do that? Twelve-year-old.

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And so, thanks to our research, this was the phrase that I used. I didn't try to explain it away. I just said, I don't know, but. And those are the four words. I don't know, but. And as Christa is my daughter who was especially angry, as she sat down next to me and we were both crying, I said, I don't know, but here's what I have found to be true about God. And eventually, I don't know, but here's what Paul says in

Romans 5, that suffering leads to perseverance, perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope. So that phrase, as we're, when we're, not if, when we're journeying beside young people who have to have questions.

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Four words, I don't know but, and then we point to our own experience. We point to something scripture, or we say I don't know but let's get together with somebody in our church who I know things about these questions a lot and we can have coffee and ask him or her so that phrase, I don't know but has been game-changing for me and for all sorts of leaders and families who've been tracking with...

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well and you know, it leads me to if you think about the style of apologetics. That was I'm going back to and thank you for sharing that by the way, but going back to church leaders answering questions nobody's asking, that's something I think about I still preach occasionally and I'm like I got to make sure I'm not answering a question that nobody's asking I think that's a very real issue and it's true and personal conversations. It's true in pulpit conversations. But if you think about how apologetics was done for a long time, it was very logical very head driven.

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I'm not sure that that is I'm not saying throw that out. I mean, I think if our faith doesn't stand up logically, I mean your researcher you have a doctorate I went to school for a while too. You know, I'm supposedly we're supposed to love God with our mind. So I'm not throwing logic out the window, but it seems like I could come up with this bulletproof argument. I'm going to present to a bunch of teenagers and they're gonna go. Yeah, but at the end of the day, that's just not my truth. That's not my experience. That's not my worldview. That's not how I see things. I don't know. Are you noticing a shift even in the way the next Ggeneration understands processes logical arguments? The lawyer asks, yeah.

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KARA POWELL: Yeah. Yeah. And I'm a logical thinker too. Like I'm overly linear.

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I'm linear to a fault.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: I have no swerve in my linearness, Kara. All right.

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KARA POWELL: Right. Yeah. And I'm married to an engineer. You're married to an attorney.

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We've got a lot of logic with us and our spouses. And I love that part of me. And there are some young people who do gravitate toward that. I think how I would answer your question, Carey, actually what comes to mind is one of my favorite quotes of the last few years from our mutual friend, Reggie Joyner, who says this, a kid might forget what I teach them, but they'll never forget what God does through them.

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And so yes teaching is important and you know, I want all young people to be taught well. I want them to be taught not just what to think but how to think so, I think that's part of it and how do you stay curious stay growing and how do we pair that with what this generation is hungry for which is the chance to really make a difference the chance not just to hear and sit but to go and do and so I mean that's what we're seeing some of the more effective youth and young adult ministries do is to to hand the keys over to young people. Sometimes literally sometimes might affordably and let young people take their passions take their gifts make some errors along the way and really lead.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Do you know is there a style of logic slash rational arguments? I mean, you know 15 years ago Dawkins and Hitchens and the Christian apologists were sort of all the rage that were sort of the new atheists and then you know, and that was a very intellectual cerebral kind of moment. Do you see a form of dialogue because you know truth has become more subjective in post-modern culture and not everybody buys. I agree. There are some who are definitely buying into a logical framework, but I guess I guess I the question under the question Kara is what is persuasive?

KARA POWELL: Well in our new face Beyond youth group, we offer a five -point compass. One of the points of the compass is teach for transformation. So how do we really teach for transformation? And we have a number of principles we spell out. I think the one that jumps to the top for me, as you ask that question, is the power of a good question.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah.

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KARA POWELL: And one of the mantras, and I'd give myself a B at best on this, Carey, so I'm working on this. One of the mantras we try to teach leaders and parents is when it comes to young people, never make a statement if you can ask a question instead. So never make a statement if you can ask a question instead.

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Young people are getting information tossed at them shoved at them all the time instead of being you know, one other source, that's just shoving information. How do we ask questions that show our curiosity that keep young people curious and it helped young people think a little bit more about how what their experience in the Life relates to what they're reading about in scripture.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: What would an example of that be because I mean very Jesus, right? What must I do to inherit eternal life good teacher? Why do you call me good? Yeah, like, you know, like he's always answering a question with a question, which we are not trained to do we are, you know, if you look at senior leaders in particular, we're trained to be the answer people. That's why you're in that role. So I want to explore that. What would be an example of asking a question?

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KARA POWELL: Yeah, well part of what we think is really helpful when it comes to teaching for transformation and practicing together is to use the springboard of current events. Like this is the beautiful thing. Is that every day, every hour, there's something happening in the world that gives us an opportunity to process, what does it mean to be a Jesus follower in the midst of this? And so I mean we offer a simple three question framework Carey, and faith beyond youth group first off when it comes to a current event like what's happening. So let's first off get on the same page about what's happening whether it's political, whatever it might be the same page about what actually happening.

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What's happening? What does it mean? So, can we get a little bit deeper? And then my favorite question is, what is God inviting us into? What is God inviting me or us into? I don't know if you've done spiritual direction, Carey.

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I love spiritual direction. I'm in group spiritual direction.

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I've had spiritual directors. And basically, that's the essence of spiritual direction, is a really good conversation asking, what is God inviting me or us into? And so, there's a pretty simple three -question framework to try to help think logically and also think practically.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Okay. No, that's good. And I know one of the other things I do sometimes if I'm presenting in a classic apologetic setting is ask questions about the Christian faith. What are they? What are they thinking? But then also ask questions about the alternative like okay. So if this isn't true what Paul says then what is and are you happy with where that leaves you? So we're detached. We're removed, and then it's like okay. Yeah, I guess Detachment isn't what I thought it would be. So where does Detachment go? That's even more right? Like, you end up in a pretty dark place pretty quickly. Somebody once said, yeah. Most people's worldviews are three questions away from totally collapsing.

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I think it's true, you know, so you believe nothing happens after you die Kara, why well, you know, I don't know. I just think you go nowhere. Well why? Well, you know, I don't know. I mean you just there's no evidence of Eternity. Well, why? And they're like, okay stop this conversation, please like can we move on like and and that's you know, your researcher and that kind of thing. But if you talk to most people three wise and they're like they're lost. Yeah, and so I'm not doing that manipulatively. But yeah, I think you're right, questions are really really powerful. Of course the personal questions, you know, what is identity belonging purpose? Those three. All right, so you do open up in your new research you talk about character, and sort of, talk to us about the role of character too, because I think we've seen that really strained and tested in the church. Everyone's been talking about authenticity for years, but we don't seem to be able to quote, pull it off. That's a joke. But you know, this idea that people are longing for authenticity, but it seems to be so elusive. Talk about character and what the next generation is thinking about when it comes to that.

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KARA POWELL: Yeah. So I think there's a ton of misunderstandings about character. So, you know, we tend to think of it as a list of do's and don'ts. That's

especially how it's taught at elementary age, both in school and sometimes even in Sunday school. I think if I can be super direct, Carey, I think some parents of teenagers, well, we've heard from youth pastors is they feel pressure from parents to produce nice successful virgins like that who don't do drugs and don't drink, don't sleep with anybody. And that's the definition of character. All that is leaves us wanting right and so those are flat Haulover versions of character that nobody's gonna give their life to so the way that we define character after spending a lot of time searching scripture as well as with some really amazing youth leaders is we define it as living Jesus' goodness every day by how we love God and our neighbors.

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And so it's centered on Jesus and Jesus is goodness. And it's got this practical manifestation of its how we love God and how we love our neighbors because part of what we were seeing in in our faith Beyond youth group research is for a lot of young people at best faith is confined to youth group. It's the 75 or 90 minutes when they're in youth group. And so if we want to have a robust Faith that's not 70 minutes, but seven days a week then it needs to be connected to loved and connected to living out. Jesus is goodness. And that's where character is is a really wonderful bridge to help walk across toward Faith Beyond Jesus group.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: I think you make this argument, right, the 70 to 90 minutes of youth group or, you know, church for adults, which I imagine kids probably attend youth group more faithfully than adults attend church. So you get a little more math in your favor in that direction. But you think about the influence that social media has, that the mainstream culture has, which is decoupling faster and faster from any semblance of Judeo-Christian ethic. Yeah. What influence, because it's really easy as a parent or as a leader to blame social media.

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But what impact is social media having on deconstruction and people walking away from their faith?

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KARA POWELL: Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, kids are exposed to all sorts of things, the good, the bad, and the ugly on social media. And I think there's some ways that social media shows young people doing positive things. I do want to start with that. Like, my kids have learned a lot of pro-social behaviors from social media but having said that there's a lot more. There's a lot more toxic messages on social media than

positive and and maybe even what's what's most dangerous about social media, Carey, is it's seeming correlation with mental health. If you look at what's happened with mental health and anxiety depression and even suicidal tendencies. It's right about the time when cell phones became ubiquitous very common smartphones in particular that some risk behaviors dropped risk behaviors involving other people partying drinking etc. Those actually have dropped a little bit. That's the good news, but the risk behaviors related to mental health have dramatically increased they were increasing before the pandemic and now and by most accounts, they've doubled or tripled and so and I don't think it's a coincidence that social media which shows you everything. You're not a part of. And and helps you compare the worst of what, you know about yourself with the best of what everybody else is projecting. I think those are some of the reasons that social media has left young people feeling not enough which which hurts their sense of identity which hurts their sense of belonging and hurts their sense of purpose.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: So I mean, what do you do? I mean, I haven't parented teenagers for a few years now, but I remember even when our kids were younger it was a battle about screen time and gaming and the whole deal, but I mean if you're raising a teenage boy right now, and I don't want to be gender specific but chances are that your children are not gaming with people in the room, but gaming with people online. Is the whole like limits thing gone because social media is so ubiquitous now and our phones are everywhere and their devices we need for school work like how do you handle that? Because you can't, I don't know. What do you do?

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KARA POWELL: Let's please not believe the lie that limits are gone. Okay, so thank you for raising this question. And in fact, I mean, there's some technology like iPhones, there's whole family systems where you have more control over putting limits on your kids. You can actually control more and more of what they're exposed to and how long every day, how much time they get on particular apps, they have to ask you for more time than that, etc. So I absolutely think limits are imperative and they're important, but I would say that's secondary. What's primary is ongoing conversation about who we are as Jesus followers as a family if it's a home context and how do we use our phones to love God and our neighbors? And of for other things that aren't loving to ourselves either so it starts with really good honest conversations, but then yes absolutely limits are imperative and you know, we recommend whether it's through the kind of technology that actually let you have limits or whether its limits on no phones in bedrooms at night, no phones during meals.

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Only a few minutes of checking your phone in the car and then the rest of the time we're in the car, we're gonna talk to each other. So I'm youth groups try to put particular encouragement boundaries on how much kids are on phones and kind of a covenant. We're all going to do this together way. So yes, we absolutely believe in limits.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: So limits are not dead. That's good to know. What do you say to the child who or teen who doesn't know how to live without a device in their hands or back pocket? You're a mom too.

KARA POWELL: Yeah, yeah. I think it goes back to identity, belonging, and purpose.

[00:37:05.500]

And, you know, whenever, that is not my kid's situation, but there are other situations where when my kid is doing something that doesn't totally make sense, it doesn't, it's not like them. It's a little askew from who they are. And I stop and ask, okay, wait a second. And by the way, this is not just true with my kids. I do this now with my colleagues. I do this with myself. If I'm acting in a way or feeling emotional heat about something that feels a little not like me, like, why is this such a big deal? I stop and I ask, okay, what's going on? Is this a pursuit for identity? Is this a pursuit for belonging? Is this a pursuit for purpose? What am I looking for? Or what is my young person looking for? And how can I help them get it some other way? So my hunch is the young person who can't step away from their phone and has to have it with them all the time, that's probably a belonging.

[00:38:01.400]

Uh, looking for belonging, there are some psychologists who think that belonging is our primary drive. It's a little bit ahead of identity and purpose and so I spent on the age of the kid, you know be different with a 13 year old than a 17 year old, but I'd be thinking and talking with my kid about. Okay. What what real relationships can we develop who are some of your favorite people? How can we have them over? What would you like to do etc, to try to facilitate more face time to get some of that sense of belonging not just from not just from that that device they have but from people in person synchronously.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: No that's a good point, you know, if you're going to be the orchestrator of the limit, you can also be the orchestrator of the alternatives as well.

[00:38:43.500]

KARA POWELL: Yeah. Yeah, and that's that's a lot easier with 12, 13, 14 than it is 15, 16, 17, 18-year-olds, but that's where Carey, like starting these habits for parents, step parents, Guardians and grandparents. I mean 10, 11, 13 like start the habits early. So that is more and more natural at that age and as kids get older.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: I know your specialty is teenagers and young adults and feel free to pass on this question, but I just see it more and more it's been around for 10 years or so, but the tablet like the iPad or the iPhone as the babysitter for very very young children, like literally as soon as I can hold a device parents are like, well, this is how you'll behave in the restaurant. This is how you'll behave on the plane. This is how you'll behave at church. Any thoughts on that? I mean, the studies show that probably screen time before the age of two is really not healthy for the development of brains. Any advice for young parents who maybe see technology as the pacifier? And listen, you know, our parents used the TV, so I get it. And I may have used devices from time to time too. So I'm not claiming clean hands. But from the research, from what we know, from your observation, when you're looking at childhood development and formation, what would your advice be to parents of very young children, preschool?

[00:40:06.300]

KARA POWELL: You're right. That's not my primary area. What I would generally do when I was a parent of young kids is my pediatrician was pretty quick to give me what the most recent recommendations were which was exactly what you said, nothing before two, a limited amount of time after that. And so you know that meant for me as a working parent who yeah, sometimes if I had an important meeting you bet I turned on Sesame Street or you know, whatever it was for my kids. Like I did use it if I needed to have a really important conversation, but I had to kind of dole that out very strategically when I most needed that babysitter so to speak and not make it a regular habit. So I would say pay attention to what you know pediatricians are recommending and align with those guidelines.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well and imagine, you know, the reason I asked the question is what you learn in your early years as coping mechanisms.

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That hard to break, like, you know, I'm an emotional eater. Food from the time I was very young was associated with comfort and pleasure and all of that thing. So it became very easy to be an emotional leader in my teens in 20s, etc. Etc. So, yeah. Okay. Well, let's let's move into new areas. Then it's not all bad news. Gen Z some of them are sticking around in gen. Alpha is rising when you think about because it's

interesting, you know in 2024, the oldest Gen Z turns about 27 depending on how you debate it. So we're not looking at high school kids, we're not looking at college kids. We're looking at full-fledged adults.

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How do you see, if they could reshape the church, and to some extent they are, what are they doing? What do they wish we would stop doing? What do they wish we would start doing? What are you seeing as far as architecting next generation of church?

[00:42:03.300]

KARA POWELL: You know, when we define this generation, Gen Z, there's three adjectives that we land on. This generation, and these come from looking at all the research, academic and popular. This generation is anxious. We've talked about mental health. This is arguably the most anxious generation we've seen in the U.S., but this generation is adaptive. They are creative they are entrepreneurial. They are visionary and this generation is diverse. They love diversity. They expect diversity racially. And ethnically we crossed the line in the US in 2020 and it's everything else that happened in 2020. We crossed the line and now half of those under 18 in the US. I don't know the Canadian numbers Carey. Yeah, half of those in the US under 18 are young people of color. And so, you know what this generation wants in a church is they want to church that's going to be welcoming of people who are different. They want a church that's going to be tangibly loving others. They want a church that not just going to sit but it's going to act.

[00:43:21.800]

Um, so I mean, this is where Faith Beyond youth group and that theme is actually perfect for this generation because they don't want to a faith that's only about 70 minutes in youth group. They want a faith that expands beyond the walls and expands beyond Sunday morning. And so I'm very optimistic about this generation's potential to show us new ways of loving God and loving our neighbors.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: So if they're in their all-in.

KARA POWELL: Yeah, yeah if they're in their all-in they They're passionate, they're creative. They're whole hearted in in what they do.

[00:44:10.400]

I just think there's a ton of potential. They still need adults, and this is where, you know, with some of the work we've been doing with the TenX10 collaboration,

we've been getting to know some amazing Catholic leaders and just coming to understand the Catholic perspective on mentoring, which is often these days referred to as accompaniment. Like, young people still need adults who are accompanying them, who are journeying alongside them, but they need those adults who are handing them the keys and open to their new ideas instead of trying to control them and have them fit into what's always been done.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, and that kind of leads nicely into another question I wanted to ask you, which is the average senior pastor is pushing 60. Now, if not 60 years old and it's really easy as you get older. I'm still a little bit younger than that, but you know to go anybody under 40 is still a kid. Well, is that really, you talked about this in previous research projects that you've done? Do we have to just throw the keys earlier like you think about OpenAI? Sam Altman's like 38 and I mean the people who are literally changing the course of human history are in their 20s and 30s coding away. And we're figuring out the ethics as we go along like an almost. No other industry do we invent young adults like we do in the church. So, you know rant on that or answer the question that wasn't a question that was a statement.

KARA POWELL: Doesn't it just break your heart Carey that you just said in no other industry do we infantilize young adults like we do in the church.

[00:45:53.100]

And this is where I think there's deep fear of change. There's desire for control. So, you know, I know that there's a lot of talk about pastoral succession. Yes, and I as there should be if you look at the data. I think it's not just about young people quote stepping up. It's also about those who are older making room for young people and young people's ideas. And you know, I have to ask myself even as I've been talking with you here today. Am I really handing the keys over to younger leaders or am I just talking about handing the keys over to young people?

[00:46:40.700]

I was just talking with a youth pastor at a church a couple of weeks ago, and students came home from summer camp all excited about prayer, and students wanted to pray, pray, pray. And so the senior pastor said, okay, this weekend, we're disbanding the adult prayer team, and we're going to replace the adults with students. And so in the post-worship service prayer time, when they called up the prayer team, it was teenagers and young adults who came forward to be the prayer team. And I mean, the young people felt so honored by that. And here's what's awesome, is the congregation loved it. There are now adults waiting to be prayed for or with a young person who wouldn't have gone forward with an adult. Are there

questions of maturity sure is this long-term sustainable? I don't know but like just the idea that the senior pastor was willing to pretty quickly make a change and pretty quickly pay attention to what their young people were passionate about and give them an opportunity to step forward in that, bravo to that senior pastor.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, and then what is stopping that from happening? Like you mentioned the importance of having someone to mentor you someone to Journey with you? Why not infuse 17 year olds and 25 year olds on that protein on a regular basis or you know with the youth band lead our worship one weekend recently. They were fantastic. They were every bit as good as as the main band and I love it when they get integrated into the main band. They just happen to come from our student ministry that particular day, you know, and I know I know too many senior leaders who would say well we'll give them a seat at the table but not a voice and not a vote. How would you respond to that?

KARA POWELL: That's not a seat at the table. That's a high chair off to the side if we're gonna go with the infantilization metaphor. That's not a seat at the table. I mean I part of what we see across the board and effective youth ministry these days Carey, is it's youth ministries who are saying, we're not doing ministry for or to young people, but it's ministry with and by young people. Like, we need different prepositions. It's not for and to, it's with and by young people.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: And that feeds into the succession crisis that you hinted at. One of the things I'm becoming increasingly nervous about is not only that senior leaders are not bumping out early enough, they're staying too long. But I'm wondering whether there is a supply of young leaders who are saying, spending my life serving in the church is a really good use of my life. And by that, I mean stepping into staff positions and senior leadership positions. Do you have any research on that? Or do you have any impressions about whether there's going to be a pipeline of young leaders to replace the aging leaders on staff? Or are we in for another wrinkle in that crisis at this point?

[00:49:53.200]

KARA POWELL: Yeah, I actually don't have data at my fingertips to answer that question Carey, but I'll say that I'm in ministry today because God called me, number one, but number two because when I ran for student body in 11th grade student body president in 11th grade and lost my youth pastor said hey, why don't you start volunteering here at the church? And he and his wife poured into me. The very first job I did was I cleaned the youth kitchen. The second job I did was I made the youth

ministry bulletin with the old clip art. Oh, yeah, white out and tape and all that. I mean those were my early youth ministry jobs as a 16-17 year old and he, both Mike and Christy. He and his wife were both very proactive and seen my gifts giving me an opportunity to lead when I proved faithful they gave me the next step, and so, you know, I think we can talk about and we should talk about academic pipelines non-academic pipelines, etc. And if we get more personal, let's hold up a mirror and have each of us ask ourselves, who are we training to do our work? Who are we inviting to take a next step to grow in their own Ministry development?

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, and if we have that engagement early on when they're 14, 16 18, it's going to be a much more natural and organic move into ministry. All right. Well, you're in this brand new project called TENx10 and I want you because we've seen initiatives come and go to engage the heart of young people, but talk about the mission behind 10 by 10, and then why is it different than what we've seen before?

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KARA POWELL: Yeah, about five years ago, 40 leaders gathered at Fuller Seminary and looked at what was happening with young people. What you asked about at the start of our conversation carried the drift. And we said, are we satisfied with that? The answer was no. Do we wanna work together? The answer was a unanimous yes. And so for the last four or five years, we've been praying and developing partnerships and asking God and each other, okay, what can we do together that we can't do separately? And so from all those conversations, as well as raising funding, TenX10 has been born. And the mission of TenX10 is to help 10 million young people have a faith that matters in the next 10 years.

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So if a million approximately a million young people a year drift if we can reverse that and have a million more stay then what will that mean for our country and part of why I love TenX10, the name is because of John 10:10. In fact, that's when I realized I loved the name where Jesus talks about the abundant life that comes from following him and that's always been one of my biggest prayers for young people that they would know that only Jesus satisfies and that's what we want this generation to know. So now there's over 100 different denominations and organizations Mainline, Evangelical, Catholic, Orthodox, across ethnicities across cultures who are coming together and saying we might disagree on other things but we agree on Jesus and we agree on the importance of young people and that's the glue.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: Wow, so what's different or maybe another way of saying it is what are some of the key just briefly key elements of TenX10 because it's like young people you should come back. That's not it like what are you what is what is the DNA of it?

KARA POWELL: Yeah. Well first I would say we're fully collaborative, we've come to realize that any organization any denomination at its very best if it works on its own can see a 10 change and what's happening with young people and we want to see a 10x change. We want to see a multiplicative change. And so if we want to see a 10x change then maybe we should do what Jesus prayed in John 17, one of Jesus' last prayers and be the unified church. And so it's fully collaborative. We're always looking to do things together. Secondly, it's diverse, as I mentioned already. Theologically diverse, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, ethnically diverse, Latino, Asian -American, indigenous, white, African-American, and on and on it goes.

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And I think I'd probably add one more thing to that list, Carey. Not only is it diverse, but we say explicitly that we're centering leaders of color.

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There's a lot that has been developed, and I'll say I've been part of developing in youth ministry, a lot of resources that make certain assumptions about resources, about culture, geared for larger churches, more homogeneous contexts, white contexts.

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And we're saying when we think about who TenX10 is for we think about part-time or even volunteer youth leader at a diverse Church who has about 30 minutes a week for training at most and so we've got 30 minutes to train them a week. What do we want to offer them? And that, I'll tell you that keeps us concise and that keeps us real for sure.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: So let's say we do nothing over the next decade. What does it look like? What happens?

KARA POWELL: Churches continue to shrink churches continue to age. Here's a new category that I've only read a little bit about, you know, we hear about the Nones. I always feel like I need to spell that out. We've heard a lot about the nuns thanks to Pew and how much they're growing. There's a kind of a corollary there

which are the ums you MMS who are young people who have a church background and appreciate the church, but are not connected with the church right now. So you ask them. Are you involved in church? Um, I like that I like that they start yeah, isn't that true? I mean totally about young people, you know, there's a lot of ums, so I think the nones continue to increase, the ums continue to increase.

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Again, I'm an optimist, so maybe God will use this smaller remnant, but I think church's budgets are going to get smaller. And without the energy of young people, I continue to be concerned. We can't do nothing. We can't do nothing.

[00:56:52.200]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Yeah, I agree. I mean, the writing's on the wall in many respects. And something like 50 % of churches are declining right now actively. And you magnify that out over a decade, and it's not good. Who's talking about the ums? Was that just like a buzz phrase that you picked up or is it like a research group?

[00:57:10.800]

KARA POWELL: I would have to get back to you on that. Yeah, it was one article I read that I need to look into a little bit more.

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CAREY NIEUWHOF: No, it makes sense, because are you Christian?

[00:57:20.300]

KARA POWELL: Um, yeah, I was.

[00:57:24.200]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well, and you know, we both track with David Kinnaman and Barna pretty closely. There's a real rise in spiritual openness that is decoupled from church. In other words. It's not like everyone's an atheist and everyone's an agnostic. It's like there's a lot of and you know in some of the research it shows that the people who don't attend church are more Orthodox in some cases and people who do it's like go scratch your head over that one, but it is interesting. So this is not a would you agree with the research and what your research is doing like this is I think Barna's stuff. But like this is a spiritually open generation open generation.

KARA POWELL: Yeah, I'm surprised I haven't quoted Barna's research on that so far in this conversation, so I'm glad you did Carey, because I think some of what's really

interesting is how many positive characteristics young people in their study used in describing Jesus.

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And then when they describe the church not so much right, so yes, they're very open to Jesus. Not so open to the church, which is where you know, we have our work cut out for us to earn trust back with with this generation. I was reading one study of young people. They are twice as likely to say they've been hurt by organized religion as they are to say they trust organized religion. So this is a generation that we need to re-earn trust with.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Well, it's kind of back to Mahatma Gandhi, right? I like your Christ. It's your Christians I'm not so sure about. Yeah, very little has changed in that respect. So I'm making the assumption that most of the leaders listening this podcast want to reach young people and the Next Generation anything we haven't covered that you feel like hey pay attention to this before we go, make sure you focus on this. Anything else you wanna say?

KARA POWELL: I think we've covered quite a bit. This is a bit out of left field, but I'll just share it.

[00:59:28.400]

Something that I think will be interesting to see with data, and this relates to technology, some of what we were talking about before, is, and this will be of interest to your listeners, is young people's giving patterns. Because church-going young people are not seeing giving happen. I remember, as a child and a teenager, the sound of checks being ripped out of checkbooks.

[00:59:53.900]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Oh yeah, wallets opening.

[00:59:56.100]

KARA POWELL: All over, we're all over the worship center, offering bags being passed around, it being a really important ritual. And now, because so many people are giving online, including me and my husband, young people are not seeing much giving. There's some data that suggests that this generation is a giving generation, but I'm not sure that they're going to give in the 10% tithe amounts, even churchgoing young people. So so, you know part of what Dave and I have done as parents is really tried to talk with our kids about our giving because they're not seeing it. So but we talk about it. They know who we're supporting. They know what

we're supporting in the church, you know in general as well special things. So I think we need to talk more organically about giving for this generation that's not having it modeled like previous generations have had at model in front of them.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: You know, I hadn't thought about that because we don't have the art was the the act of taking up an offering anymore because so much of our giving is digital and then there are kiosks in the lobby and a lot of churches have moved to that model. I hadn't really thought through the theology behind dropping that and yeah you brought up, as you were talking I'm going back to when I was a kid and remembering the sign the sounds and the move of that and then also feeling the pressure to drop something in and it's like well I've interrupt this in and I can't go out Friday night and what am I gonna do? And you know, we, Toni, my wife and I, we Embrace tithing early on in our relationship very like sort of foundational. So I mean, I sorted that out as an adult but yeah, you don't really think about it is like I'm I've got a presbyterian background you're at Fuller. It's like the fourfold order of worship. Right? Like that was a part of the act of worship. So yeah, really really good to know and then what do you do? You just like, all right, everyone pull out your phone.

[01:01:47.700]

A lot of it's automated now, right? Which you want. You want it automated.

[01:01:52.600]

KARA POWELL: So maybe it's more spotlights on people sharing the joy of giving, or maybe it's more spotlights on how money's being used. Like, I'm not trying to get us to swing back to in-person, you know, synchronous giving, but I'm trying to get us to think about how do we help giving become, and tithing 10%, etc., become an ongoing discipline and practice for young people when they're not seeing it, which is usually one of the primary factors to young people adopting a practice.

[01:02:21.700]

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Kara, it's fantastic. I always love this conversation. Thanks for being so open and just leading the field. It's called Faith Beyond Youth Group is the latest research, the latest book. You wrote that with Jen Bradbury and Brad Griffin from Fuller. And just want to thank you so much for all of your work. And tell us where people can find you online and also more about TENx10.

[01:02:44.000]

KARA POWELL: You bet so and I want to first say that Faith Beyond Youth Group. We actually have some special resources just for your list, of course, so then we can put these in a show notes but if listeners go to faithbeyondayouthgroup.com/carey and if you're listening to go there they can get stuff, free guides that we've created just to help them with their teams develop faith beyond youth group. They can pass on to the youth leader at their church. Then we'd love to encourage people who want to see this new curation and creation of youth discipleship resources including resources that we developed with Barna group for senior pastors.

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Sermon outlines, research briefs on young people, planning meetings on how to reach young people that we developed with Barna, go to 1010.org.

CAREY NIEUWHOF: Okay. Fantastic. Thank you so much Kara, really appreciate you and all the work you're doing.

KARA POWELL: My pleasure. Thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof: Well, that was really enlightening wasn't it? And we've got show notes for you. You can find them at careynieuwhof.com/episode628. We also have transcripts for you. And of course, we can do this because you are such supporters of our partners and we want to thank you for that. We don't take it for granted. If you're new and you enjoyed this episode make sure you subscribe and then maybe you've been around for a long time. If you enjoyed this episode tell a friend like give us a shout out on social text the episode to a friend and of course if you've never left a rating review, please do so.

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[01:05:14.500]

Well, the next episode has been long overdue. I finally have Tod Bolsinger on the podcast and we talked about canoeing the mountains, how to lead change when you really can't see ahead, disappointing people at a rate. They can absorb and how to handle sabotage and the anxiety of leadership here is an excerpt.

Tod Bolsinger: The definition of leadership I like the most comes from Raul Hyphets and Marty Linsky. It is, leadership is disappointing your own people at a rate they can absorb. And so when you realize is that none of us got into ministry to disappoint people, like right? I say there's a God we love and there are people we love we're gonna introduce the people. We love to the God. We love by Building a Church. They will love what could possibly be disappointing?

[01:05:59.500]

Until you realize that to build a church for the people we love who do not know the God we love means messing with the church that people have loved a long time.

Carey Nieuwhof: Also, can we up in future episodes? We've got Adam Hamilton, Jamie Kern Lima, Craig Groeschel, Jennie Allen, and a whole lot more coming up and the best way to make sure you don't miss an episode is to subscribe and hey, if you haven't checked out my Friday newsletter, I would love for you to do that today. I find there's so much content and it's just increasing day after day after day year after year, so much of it is AI-generated now that well, honestly, the quality isn't very good. How do you cut through the noise to find the signal? That's why I send out On the Rise. It's curated newsletter the best stuff. I found on the internet for well that week and I will send it to you every Friday, free of charge, easy to subscribe easy to unsubscribe. Join 100,000 listeners who get it every single week you go to ontherisnewsletter.com and I hope to see you inside the On The Rise newsletter. So just go to OnTheRiseNewsletter.com and you can get started today. Well, thank you so much for listening, everybody. Hey, I hope today's episode helped you identify and break a growth barrier you're facing.