

CAREY NIEUWHOF

LEAD PASTOR OF CONNEXUS CHURCH

LASTING

IMPACT

7 POWERFUL CONVERSATIONS
THAT WILL HELP YOUR CHURCH GROW

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As anyone who has written a book knows, writing is an exhilarating and exhausting process. This book had some of its genesis in early-morning writing sessions where the ideas first appeared as blog posts. But turning this into a book took more time than I expected. My wife, Toni, has been my best friend for more than twenty-five years, and she has put up with so many “I’m not quite done yet” moments of me writing that I lost count ages ago. Her steadfast encouragement, love, support, and patience are a little surreal at times, or at least divinely motivated. I couldn’t imagine my life without her or without my sons, Jordan and Sam, and daughter-in-law, Alex, who also put up with a preoccupied dad at times. There’s nothing quite as amazing as family, and I’m so grateful for mine.

I have an incredible congregation, staff team, and elder group at Connexus Church. It’s a privilege to have discussed virtually all of the contents of the book with them long before I wrote any of it. I am so thankful that our staff and elders are open to change and are willing to think through the toughest issues we face as a church and culture. In addition, a special thanks to my assistant, Sarah Piercy, who puts together all the bits and pieces of my life into a coherent whole. Without her skill and heart for ministry, I’m not sure how I’d be able to do what I do.

Reggie Joiner and Andy Stanley are two leaders from whom I have learned so much over the last decade. Anyone who is familiar with their work will see their thinking has shaped mine (for the better), and I’m grateful for many conversations I’ve had with them that have ended up influencing the conversations around my leadership table. It’s such a privilege to be part of the community at Orange and North Point.

There is a tremendous team behind this book. Joanna Easley provided very helpful project coordination as our team was spread out between several countries; she kept us all on track. Darcie Clemen has been a fantastic editor. Darcie took the original blog posts I wrote and put them together to form the spine of this book, stitching them together into an intelligent work. She also labored over the podcast transcripts and turned them into succinct written summaries with helpful insights. Her constant attention to detail through all the stages of writing made this book so much better. Kevin Jennings has been a tremendous asset. Kevin’s creative and analytical mind shaped everything from the launch of my podcast to the redesign of my blog to the writing of this book and some future products you’ll hear about in due time. He’s committed to getting the message out to as many people as possible, and I’m so grateful for his hard work and input.

My wife, Toni; Elevation Church’s Frank Bealer; and Connexus Church’s Andy Harvey each gave extensive feedback on the manuscript that improved it. Ron Edmondson, Josh Gagnon, and Josh Pezold also read earlier versions of the manuscript and provided encouragement and feedback that helped tremendously. Casey Graham, Kevin Jennings, and about two thousand readers gave some incredibly helpful advice on titling the book (which has to be the most mystifying aspect of writing, at least for me).

Finally, thank you to all of you who have contributed to the ideas in this book by your comments and conversation around my blog, and podcast, and in the many conversations that happen at conferences when I’m traveling. Your ideas, questions, stories, and encouragement are a continual source of fuel. You have no idea how grateful I am for the courage with which you’re leading.

INTRODUCTION

I love the local church. I mean *love* it. Nothing has the potential to change the world like the mission of the local church fully realized.

And yet, sometimes I wonder why Jesus chose the local church to accomplish his mission. I mean, I know how fickle and frail I am as a human being, and I've lived long enough to see how flawed the church can be. Couldn't Jesus come up with a better strategy? Like leading the church directly, without human intervention? Some days I think that would have been a much better approach. At least as far as I'm concerned.

But that's not what Jesus chose. He picked you. He picked me. He decided he was going to take all of his power, authority, strength, and love and pour them into people who, when banded together in the name of Jesus, form the church. That's pretty amazing, and doubtless is a sign of God's grace and deep love for humanity. If you're a church leader (staff or volunteer—there's really no distinction), you are one of millions of human beings whose normal lives have been disrupted by a call into the noblest and most fearsome of tasks: to share the hope of Jesus Christ with the world he so desperately loves.

As beautifully true as all of this is, it's also clear that the church in the Western world is at a crossroads. What was our reality just a few decades ago is no longer; we are swiftly moving into a post-Christian culture along with the tumble and confusion that accompany that shift. The challenges the church is facing today require our best leadership and our most faithful hearts. It's as incredibly exciting as it is daunting.

So what prompted this book? It has its beginning in both my blog and my podcast. In fact, the idea for the book sprang from the fact that numerous people told me they were using my articles or podcast episodes for team discussions in their churches. If you're a regular reader or listener, you'll recognize much of the material contained in the book. But you'll also see some significant differences.

Thinking in *book* is, in my view, different from thinking in *blog*. I've done a significant rewrite of the original blog source material and woven in a few of the insights from my leadership podcast to shape the conversation. (The podcast interviews in their entire form can be accessed for free on iTunes, Stitcher, or TuneIn Radio simply by searching for and subscribing to *The Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast*.) Additionally, I've added discussion questions at the end of each chapter to help guide your team conversation.

What's the best way to read the book? You can certainly read it as a whole, cover to cover, but tackling all of these conversations at once as a team would be a bit daunting. When it comes to team conversations, I'd suggest choosing the conversation most relevant to your situation, working through it, and then picking another to tackle next. You may choose to have certain conversations and skip others. The book will work that way; I've intentionally left some overlap between some of the chapters for this reason.

In the end, I hope and pray this book will launch your team into a series of discussions that will not only help you lead better but also help you accomplish your mission more effectively. I believe teams that are willing to have open conversations about the most pressing challenges before the church today will have a lasting impact. In the future, the churches that grow will be the churches whose leaders courageously hold the most honest conversations and then take action. If this book helps with that in some small way, I will be incredibly grateful. Because, like you, I love the local church and its leaders.