

Carey Nieuwhof:

Welcome to this month's training and this month, I want to take you behind the scenes to a really special moment. It's an interview I did in New England with two leaders who have developed a life-giving mentoring friendship. I get asked all the time by leaders, it's like, "Well, how do you actually find a mentor?" Or "Will you be my mentor?" Which most of the time I have to say no to, unfortunately.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But when I sat down with Joshua Gagnon from Next Level Church, a church with over a dozen locations in New England and Florida, and Gordon McDonald, the award winning Best Selling Author of *Ordering Your Private World* and longtime pastor, and I asked them about the friendship that's developed between them over the last five years. So they both live in New England and Gordon pastored for, well, 50 years.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And now at 81 is in the process of just being a friend and a mentor to a handful of young leaders, one of whom is Josh Gagnon. Josh leads the largest church in the history of New England. And you'll get like a window, insight into their relationship together. So before I go there, I want to share just a couple of thoughts with you. And then we'll bring you this longer extended version of training this month as we give you a behind the scenes view of their relationship in this interview I did with them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But connection is so important in leadership. And we live in this really strange time where people have never been better connected, and they've never felt more alone. I interviewed over 700 leaders a few months ago, and I just asked them, "How connected are you?" And the results were really interesting. So 93% of church leaders agreed that they had someone that they could count on no matter what happens, which sounds awesome.

Carey Nieuwhof:

82% of pastors agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that in the midst of this crisis, which we're going through in 2020, "I feel very connected to my family and friends." Which again is encouraging. And 90% of pastors said, "I find my hope in God." So you would think all is well but then I asked them a second, a third or fourth question, I guess. Fourth question was this. Have you felt isolated?

Carey Nieuwhof:

51% of leaders, I surveyed, the same people who said 80, 90%, "I've got people around me." Said that they felt extremely or somewhat isolated in the last seven days. And that's the paradox of our current world. We're surrounded by people but we feel utterly and sometimes desperately alone. And friendships, really good life-giving friendships for leaders, are rare these days.

Carey Nieuwhof:

There's a researcher, Julie Holt-Lunstad from Brigham Young University, who did a study into isolation and loneliness and discovered that being isolated, it has the health, the physical health equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day or having an alcohol dependency. So if you just think that isolation and not having someone you can turn to in leadership is a mental thing or an emotional thing, it's not. It actually has physical implications on your health.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Solitude is a gift from God. Isolation is a tool from the enemy. So I'm going to watch, let you watch this interview. And I want you to see just the beauty in the depth of this relationship. It'll probably create a longing in your heart. Maybe you've got somebody like that in your life, maybe you don't. But when we come back after the interview, I'll give you some steps on how to find a life-giving, how to build a life-giving mentoring friendship with someone you know.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's good to be together with Gordon McDonald and Josh Gagnon from Next Level Church and the two of you have been friends for how long now?

Josh Gagnon:

Four years, maybe now. Five years.

Gordon Macdonald:

Probably four or five years now.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. How did you guys meet?

Josh Gagnon:

It's actually funny story.

Gordon Macdonald:

Oh, I can't wait to hear it.

Josh Gagnon:

Because I don't know if I've ever told you this. Roman, who you know well... We were reading your books and Roman said, "Do you know he lives around here? What if we just reached out?" And I was like, "I don't want to bother him. I don't want to bug him." So Roman actually set up the first meeting. And pastor Gordon was so kind. You said, "Hey, I love what you guys are doing. And I love to have you over to the house."

Josh Gagnon:

And so he was just so gracious. I'm sure he doesn't do that all the time. But he felt maybe a leading there and he had us over to his house. And it was just one of those moments where by God's grace... I think he saw in us a team that was desperate to learn, desperate to grow and a team that didn't look at the those who have gone before us as people that we couldn't relate to, or people who had no wisdom or intelligence how to lead in today's culture.

Josh Gagnon:

But almost I think he saw in us this desperation to want to finish strong and that he could give us some tools to help us get there. And so that's kind of how we met. And I've been an annoyance in his life ever since. And I don't plan on stopping.

Gordon Macdonald:

I remember that morning very, very well. And almost immediately when you guys came in, you made an impression on my wife, Gail, who liked you instantly. And then we went to the lower part of the house, the basement and talked for the better part of two or three hours.

Josh Gagnon:

Yeah, a long time.

Gordon Macdonald:

Yeah. I was amazed at the quality of the relationship that these young men had.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So you met with four of you, right?

Josh Gagnon:

Yeah, the executive team. Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And it is deep, isn't it?

Gordon Macdonald:

It was very deep.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The relationship that they have.

Gordon Macdonald:

Yeah, you talk to one, in effect, you're talking to the other three.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Did you ever have that ministry? Where you had that kind of... Because I think it's very rare what you have here at Next Level. I haven't seen it very often. I haven't had that.

Gordon Macdonald:

There were times when I had it with my staff. But it's very difficult to have a friendship and a staff relationship together. Because you can look at somebody in the face and say, "You're my friend, I love you. I can't imagine life without you. Oh, by the way, we're going to lower your salary." Or "Things aren't working out and we're going to have to give you 30 days."

Gordon Macdonald:

If you're going to run a major organization, you have to face the fact that you have the necessity of hiring and there are times when you have to dismiss. And so that makes friendship a little difficult.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It does.

Gordon Macdonald:

I shouldn't have gotten on the gloomy side of that. I sensed a real fiber of strength to these men.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What made the conversation a long one that day? And what paved the way, Gordon, to a second conversation which led into the relationship?

Gordon Macdonald:

I can only look back and say it had to do with the questions. They knew why they'd come and I was quick to want to respond to whatever agenda the men brought with them. And they came armed with questions. And the questions just bred more questions. And when there's a hope and atmosphere and people are anxious to learn from each other... I mean, that's heaven.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

Who would want to do anything else for the day than just be with men, where you have a common love for Christ and his work. And these guys have things to give to me. When you talk about mentoring, it's not a one way street. It's a two end. And any so called mentor if he doesn't think or she doesn't think that they have something to learn from the mentee, then it's crazy. So it goes both ways. And if you've got that kind of mutual agreement of both ways, it can be a pretty exciting experience.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you remember what your questions were that day? Like ballpark, were they leadership? Were they life questions?

Josh Gagnon:

Life questions, primarily. Yeah. I knew that going in and asking a bunch of church questions because he had pastored the first mega church, you could say.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really?

Josh Gagnon:

In New England, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Josh Gagnon:

So here Next Level is growing and recognizing that we're following in the footsteps of what him and his team did. A larger setting church in this region. And so when we came in, I could have asked questions about the church and growth but I really saw it as an opportunity to look at somebody who could aim me in a direction that I wanted to end up going. He has the ability in my life to aim me in a direction. I'm not even sure I should be aimed.

Josh Gagnon:

And so they were questions just based on integrity, all of my questions. We don't talk much about... Matter of fact, at all... He'll ask questions, "How's Next Level?" But we don't talk about strategy and ministry growth. We never talk about ministry strategy ever.

Gordon Macdonald:

Now, whenever I talk to younger pastors, and Josh and his people would be a key example. I almost always open up by saying, "Now, let's get it real clear here. I can't tell you how to run your church. I haven't run a church for 18 years. I have fine memories. And I can answer questions about how we did things back in 1984. But it's not going to be relevant to where you are. So I can't talk to you about how to run your organization. But if you want to talk about your heart, you want to talk about the quiet life behind the curtains. I can tell you a lot of things. I've been there done that, and it hasn't changed much in 1000 years."

Gordon Macdonald:

So if Josh wants to visit with me, he better pick a subject that's more on the personal side, spiritual side because if he wants to know how to build a church, building, I can't help him.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What makes the relationship so rewarding for you, Josh?

Josh Gagnon:

Well, it's also my wife and his wife, Gail, are also close and Gail has spoken into my wife, Jennifer a lot. And it's a pretty cool thing. And I've never talked to pastor about this. And they probably do talk a little bit about the mutual relationships that they have but it's fun because you will come back from a time with Gail. And it's almost like a secret time. [crosstalk 00:11:05] We don't really talk about. It's almost like sacred... She'll ask when I spend time with pastor Gordon, she'll say, "How is pastor? Did you have a good time?"

Josh Gagnon:

Never does she ask like, "What did you talk about?" She just doesn't and I never ask her because I think it's a safe place where, for me, he's been somebody in my life where I've opened up about childhood hurts. We're at a place with my marriage, he knows everything I struggle with, succeed at, my feelings, my struggles in marriage. And so for her to ask those questions about our time together, I feel a little bit threatened.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's almost like a counselor, right?

Josh Gagnon:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Type of thing.

Josh Gagnon:

Yeah. And so for me, I would say he's been the closest spiritual father in my life, not in ministry, growth or ministry direction but he's been the closest like I had this hurt, I dealt with this, to speak to that.

Gordon Macdonald:

Any kind of [inaudible 00:12:04] a lot.

Josh Gagnon:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What makes it rewarding for you, Gordon?

Gordon Macdonald:

Well, to repeat maybe a word or two from other conversations. I'm at a point in my life where this is God's call to begin with. It's one of those things that an old older men can do better than younger men. So, it's that's where God has called Gail and me to have a mother or father type role and everybody needs that, we've needed it for years. Anyway, it's very fulfilling.

Gordon Macdonald:

It's also quite thrilling to me that Josh and his ministry is centered here in New England. When Gail and I came to New England in 1972. You talk about a spiritual desert. If I had known everything before I decided to come here that I learned within the first year or two, I don't think I would have had the courage to come to New England because it was really a burned over district and had been for the close to 100 years.

Gordon Macdonald:

And so when I got here and began to realize what was happening, and in those first few years, I was able to team up with a group of five or six other leaders. And we began to do some things that created a revival like spirit. And then, for example, peaked out with Billy Graham coming to New England for 10 days and doing crusades and every one of the six New England states and to know that I'd had a privilege of playing a role.

Gordon Macdonald:

Well, you go on, you keep moving through the years and you discover that now we have this wonderful church planting movement going on all over New England. And Josh's ministry is one of the most vibrant examples of that. None of that was possible in 1980. So it's thrilling to me to see that the next generations have picked up our little ideas and fanned them into a bright shining flame. And are doing things that we could have only dreamed about.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So there's that. What are some things? And I know sometimes it's like a chemistry thing. It's just there or it's not. What are some of the things that have made... I'll tell you why I wanted to do this short interview, is we get the privilege of talking to thousands of leaders every month, every day, almost who are in business space, and they're all looking for mentors. They're all looking for what you have. And sometimes they buy coaching or whatever but it's not the same. And so what are some of the principles? What are some of the things that you do that have kept this a regular, rich and rewarding relationship for the two of you?

Gordon Macdonald:

I'll start with somebody has to take the relationship seriously and shoot it up the priority list to virtually number one, two or three. I can't tell you how many times people come at Gail or me and they'll say, "Could we get together? Could we talk? I really need to talk to you." And we've learned over the years, never to say, "Okay. I'll call you." We always say, "If you want to talk, I'd be glad to respond. But you call me."

Gordon Macdonald:

And then I'll often say beyond that, "Pick three dates that are good for you and I will pick one of those that fits me." What discourages me quite frequently is the number of times people are really hot to say, "Could we get together? Could we talk? I really need to talk to you." And you never hear from them again.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

It's a kind of Peyton dishonesty that's based upon the moment of enthusiasm. They've heard you speak, you told a funny story or you said something that was very convicting. And in that moment, the whole thing grips them, "Oh, man. Gordon knows something I need to know. Can we get together?" But a day later, they're on to other things. They've got 20 different important things and only time to do 13 of them.

Gordon Macdonald:

So because this is seemingly such a casual relationship, it's easy to say, "Well, can I postpone? Can I cancel?" Or not to do it at all. So for every really good mentoring relationship, there's 20 that fizzled. And it's one of those places and I just don't want to claim it's in evangelicalism but that's my world. And in my world, I've noticed over the years a certain dishonesty about all our intentions. And by the way, I say that because I was one of the dishonest ones for many years.

Gordon Macdonald:

And Gail used to say to me... She said, "Now, I heard you say to him, we've got to get together. I'll call you." And Gail would say to me, "And I know right now, you're never going to do that. You're going to get home tomorrow, you're going to look at your schedule. The next weeks are filled, you will forget that you ever made this commitment and finally, this guy will say [inaudible 00:17:29]"

Gordon Macdonald:

And this other guy, he's going home and he's going to say to his wife, "Gordon wants to get together with me." And he'll wait for your call, and it's not going to come and then he's going to realize Gordon's a liar. He spoke out of his intentions but he didn't deliver. So, in my second half of life, one of the things I've really had to learn is, if you tell somebody you're going to do something, turn heaven and hell up and side down to be a man of your word because we're not a movement where people keep their promises.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's a good principle.

Gordon Macdonald:

Was that too harsh?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Highly convincing and I'm learning that and it is really hard to do. Because I guess what that means Gordon, is I either shouldn't say, "Hey, let's get together. Let's grab lunch." Or if you ask me... So do a bit of roleplay here, I say to you, "Hey, do you have any time to get together?" But let's say you look at your calendar, you know you don't or you know it's not going to happen. What do you do? You just say no, in that moment? Or how do you handle that?

Gordon Macdonald:

Well, first of all, I'm going to ask, "If we got together, what do you think we'd talk about?" That's going to give me a measurement... I have a lot of guys will come up and say... Forgive me. Who'll say, "Could you look at a manuscript I'm writing and tell me whether you think it could be a book."

Josh Gagnon:

That may have happened.

Gordon Macdonald:

And I'll say that, "At home, on my desk, I have a to do list. And I have a not to do list. And I've tried over the last year is to ask myself, what are some of the fun things in ministry, which I ought not to be doing?" And one of them is editing books. When Josh began to write he would like to have had my reaction. I'm scared to give him any reaction I might have good or bad because that's just my opinion. I am not an editor, I'm a writer. Now, if he handed me his book and said, "Rewrite it the way you would write it." If I was going to do that, I could do that.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.



Gordon Macdonald:

But it wouldn't be Josh's book anymore. A good editor keeps you as the author and they only juggle the text around to make it more readable. I can't do that. So when someone comes says, "Can we get together? I want to talk to you about a book idea." I'll normally say, "That's just something I don't do." So that's an appointment that's not going to get made. If they were to say to me, "Could we get together? I just need to tell you, I'm spiritually dry. I have no idea how to get my life back on the rails." I can talk about that. I've been there, done that.

Gordon Macdonald:

So unlikely then to say, "I'll tell you what. Why don't you go home and pick three dates, where you could be free, and I'll match them with my calendar and pick one of the three that fits my world and we'll get together."

Carey Nieuwhof:

I like how specific that is. Rather than the 17 emails about, "Hey, would next Tuesday work? Hey, what about October? Hey, what about?"

Gordon Macdonald:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. That's smart.

Josh Gagnon:

I did talk him into writing the afterword of the book, though, so he did [crosstalk 00:20:52] He did write the afterword. That was just because he loves me. I know that. Trust me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Josh Gagnon:

I think for us, one of the things I think for those looking for mentors, because that would be me, I think that's just honesty and authenticity. I don't want to get anything from him to benefit me as far as ministry goes. And I don't know if you deal with this, Carey, I know you do actually, just because of your positioning. A lot of times it's, "Will you be my mentor? But what I'm really hoping is that you'll open up doors for me that I couldn't open on my own."

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Josh Gagnon:

Right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Josh Gagnon:

It's this relationship where, "Well, if I could get you as my mentor, I could get a hand up at being famous. I could get a hand up at speaking of conferences." And with pastor Gordon, I can't really give him much but it was never in my intention, hoping that his name would help my name. And I think that that's what made it more authentic.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So not using each other to get something bigger?

Gordon Macdonald:

That's very important.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, it is.

Gordon Macdonald:

I wouldn't have thought to say that but you just said something very important.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

I guess we've all seen that, from time to time. A person who tries to use you. As Kim Polo, my good friend used to say to me, "If he uses me, that's okay. It won't be the first time I've been used." So you try to avoid those moments but they're going to come.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I have those few friendships in my life where a couple of very influential people but you would almost think, "Well, I could never ask you for that because it would ruin the sacredness of the friendship." And then other times where, "Oh, yeah. I can do that for you. And you did this for me." And so yeah, you're right. But if it's a stepping stone to something else, or like, "I'm getting mentored by Gordon MacDonald."

Josh Gagnon:

Yeah. I think that's the only reason. I mean, I think friends can help one another out and I've got friends that have given me a hand up that I genuinely... You're one of them... That I genuinely care about. And so if the hand up never came or never came again, the relationship remains. I think a lot of times why we see relationships and mentoring relationships fail, is because we're in it for as long as it helps us. The question is always what can I get out of it?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Josh Gagnon:

And there's nothing wrong with friends helping friends out and a mentor even giving someone they're mentoring a hand up, right? It's just what's the motive behind it? Is the relationship built on that? Or is that just part of the blessing of the relationship? And I think that that's the authenticity that needs to be there.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What is your rhythm? How often do you get together? Where do you get together? Is it breakfast? Is it at home? Is it here at the church? We're at Next Level Church right now in New England. But what are the rhythms for you when you get together?

Josh Gagnon:

We typically... I don't know if he'll want me to tell you but he loves ice cream. So anytime you can sneak in [crosstalk 00:23:53]

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's a good man.

Josh Gagnon:

But we'll get breakfast and it's funny because the relationship has grown to a place of just where I value so much... If I'm in a busy season, it's not like I just have to continue to run after my mentor. There's been times where he'd sent me an email. He'll be straight up, blunt, honest. And he'll say, "Listen, I haven't heard from you. And that's fine but I haven't heard from you. If that's what you want, that's fine. But I want you to know I love you. And I'm here."

Josh Gagnon:

And I know what he's saying. And when that happens, I think to myself like, "Josh, you need to get your ducks aligned. This is a very valuable..." He's not telling me like, "You need to meet with me." But when I get that email... Because here's the thing, I've never left a breakfast, I have plenty of ministry moments where you can learn about growing the church discouraged or fired up for a moment but really never changed my life.

Josh Gagnon:

If I'm just being honest, very few conferences has ever changed my life. You look around at what you can't afford. You look it around and all the churches have more than you. When I'm with pastor Gordon, and he's talking about his marriage, he said, you've heard him say it before. "When I hug Gail at night, I hug her tighter." He tells me he sits on the couch and eats popcorn with Gail.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I know. Every time you tell me that story, it makes me so grateful for my wife, Tony.

Josh Gagnon:

Yeah. He talks about that. He told me this one time, we were sitting there and this is one of the most influential things he's ever said to me because it just stuck with me. He said, "Every single Sunday, I'm going to speak for you." He says, "Every single Sunday I would preach and Gail would be on the front

row just taking notes." He said, "I get done speaking and she'd come over to me and just what a great message, Gordon. What a great message."

Josh Gagnon:

And he said, "Then I would come home." And this is early on, I'm assuming in ministry. "And I'd throw my clothes on the floor at the house and I would not talk about her keeping up the house." And he said... This impacted me beyond. I'm telling you this changed everything for me. He said, "But what I needed to realize was her responsibility, and her gift, and her sermon every week was how she took care of our home. So every time I threw my clothes on the floor and didn't pick them up, I was throwing my clothes on her sermon."

Josh Gagnon:

And when he said that to me, I was like, "That's me. That's me." Jennifer's so encouraging. She's writing a sermon all week and I just poop on it. And I just look past it. And so these moments that happened, where I need them in my life because they don't just make me a better preacher, they're going to help me get to the end of my life as a better man.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Josh Gagnon:

Right? So if Next Level fails and I can succeed at this marriage because his blessing to me and Gail to Jen. We've wanted something greater than ministry. We've wanted marriage. And so those are the things in my life that keep me just seeking after him. So I would say, it's tough seasons, it's once a month. I think that's what we shoot for, sometimes it goes longer than that. But I think it's more along the lines of doing it a while now so we have a genuine relationship so it's kind of casual.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's like friends.

Josh Gagnon:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

We haven't had dinner in two months. Let's get together.

Josh Gagnon:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Gordon, what are you thinking when you send those emails?

Josh Gagnon:

I probably said the whole story [crosstalk 00:27:36]

Carey Nieuwhof:

When you send that, "I haven't heard from you. Hey, I'm still here. I love you." What are you thinking?

Gordon Macdonald:

Well, I'm thinking probably like a father that are there things that are potentially going wrong in this man's life that's causing him to maybe avoid me a little bit?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

And if he is done... Maybe I keep saying this too many times. If you've done 60 years of ministry, you've made some terrible mistakes yourself. You've drifted. Like the person who asked me today, "Have you ever doubted?" And even Gail was shocked when I came back. Sure, I've doubted. And Gail didn't expect me to say that. But you can walk with the Lord for 60 years and not several times during that period, get far behind him and forget what the journey is supposed to be like.

Gordon Macdonald:

So if I see a person that I'm concerned with, we've had this relationship and nothing has passed between us for a few weeks, I start saying to myself, "What's behind this absence?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

Now, maybe it is that he's just plain over his head busy but then the logic comes back, but you can't afford to cram your schedule with things and cost about your personal relationships. Obviously, your marriage relationship. You can't ignore that. You can't just keep filling up and doing a 90-hour pastoral week, and then come home and realize you haven't said a word of usefulness to your wife all week long. You can't afford not to have key, wonderful, seminal moments with your children. You don't give them the tired time, you give them the best of time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

And then thirdly, your mentors and what I call your capital F friends, which is only five or six people. All those people go into your schedule first. But most of us and I was the first in this, I put those people last.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

And then, as I told you, a few minutes ago, came to a moment where not having those relationships fresh and strong, I paid a heavy price. So you couldn't get these days to turn over my priorities and give my best time to people I hardly know. Every once in a while, Gail will say that I've committed myself to something, and she'll say, rather lightheartedly and tell me, "Will those people be standing at your grave when you die?" And I know exactly what her message is. Your priority ought to be with the people who will be at your gravesite when you die or when your spouse dies.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And Josh has become one of those people to you? Top priority.

Gordon Macdonald:

He better be. [crosstalk 00:30:36] die.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And again, just one last question for you, guys. One of the greatest things you've learned from each other. And I want to give you each a crack because you say mentoring is mutual and I agree.

Josh Gagnon:

Well, I can start.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Josh Gagnon:

I've learned a lot more from him than he's learnt from me. When you watch somebody, there's so many different things, right Carey? When I watch him walk around a room, when he's speaking at a conference, I watched him make eye contact with every person and ask these questions. "What's your wife? What's your husband's name? How many kids do you have? What are their ages?"

Josh Gagnon:

And he's worked at this. This is a priority in his life. He's asking these questions and he really cares. It's not fake, he's caring, he's not putting on a show. It matters. And I looked at myself in those moments. I thought, "I don't do any of that." I'm trying to get on to the next relationship. I'm just trying to move past that person to get to the next one. And watching him, guess what? I had a woman about a month ago because I do this now. I was at a line of people on this meet and greet.

Josh Gagnon:

And this woman came over and I won't say her name but she came over and she looks at me and I looked right at her, and I'm talking to her like you've taught me. And she says, "I love it here so much. And this has changed my life. I lost my son a year ago, and I'd never been to church. And I wanted you to know this has changed my life." So I looked at her and I said, "What was your son's name?"

Josh Gagnon:

Her eyes watered up, tells me the name. I said, "Tell me about him." She starts talking about him. He died in a tragic biking accident. She starts telling me about him. The next day, I get an email from her

saying, "I want you to know that when you asked me about my son, it gave me a chance to honor him and to talk about him and everybody ignores that. No one ever asked me. They're too nervous. No one ever asked me about him."

Josh Gagnon:

And I can attribute that quality in me from learning from him. And so it's almost like what have I learned? I've learned too, marriage, ministry. Those questions, asking better questions. Those are the types of things. You know what I mean? So it would be hard for me to unpack what have I learned. It's simply just you watch a rabbi and you just basically, pick up on, "Okay, that happened there."

Josh Gagnon:

Pastor Gordon observes a lot and he watches people. I think that's one of my gifts, where I just watch, and I just learn. And so there's a huge direction my life heads in most areas. Parenting, he has two wonderful kids. And I ask him questions about his grandkids. Matter of fact, this morning. My question to him was, "What has your grandkids taught you?" My first question one of them, "That your kids didn't teach you?" What have you learned through now being a grandparent?"

Josh Gagnon:

And I'm learning for when that day comes. And so that's kind of the benefit. He's someone pointing me in the direction I hope to go and yet he's living in it today.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Gordon for you?

Gordon Macdonald:

Well, I think that when you're the old guy, the temptation is to give up on relationships and to just kind of retreat back into your cocoon, watch a lot of television and not take care of yourself. If you don't want that to happen, you better create a bevy of relationships with people who are much younger than you are. For Gail and me, it's the young people that we spend our time with, who renew our sense of vision of serving the Lord and serving the Lord's people.

Gordon Macdonald:

I mean, it's terrible to say, if we just spent our time with people our age, we would do nothing but talk about medical appointments and the latest ache and pain and the latest as possible over the counter medicine, and the latest extended care facility we might move to in the next few years. There's no way to age yourself more quickly than to spend time just with people your own age.

Gordon Macdonald:

So if we were to list all of our relationships, you would discover that the preponderant number of our relationships that we highly prize are people, this man's age and maybe even a step younger.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Gordon Macdonald:

We loved doing that. And so I would say, the great gift for the old, for the mentor is... I should add this. That he or she picks up contact with the new generation and what they're thinking and what's important to them. We're going through a time in North American evangelicalism where the whole gospel is being changed.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

And that's not something I can make happen for myself alone. I've got to listen to people like Josh and his team that challenged my mind and made me realize the way I preach to people 40 years ago is different than the way you preach to people today. So how am I going to learn that? And so I tried to listen carefully to the logic, to the concerns that younger women and then have, and then ask myself, "What can I say to that?"

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's good. So, as we wind down, for leaders who are watching right now or listening, and they're saying, "Okay, I need a mentor." And this is fortunate. Gordon, you've had a tremendous impact with your life, with your books, with your ministry, with your speaking. Not everybody has access to it. I don't like this term but "celebrity" or someone with your pedigree, but they're living in the middle of Iowa, they're living in Alberta, they're living in Nevada or some other New England town. How would you suggest they find a mentor? Any steps to connecting to someone who can mentor them?

Gordon Macdonald:

I get asked that question a lot. And it's a good one. And my answer always back and everybody thinks I'm being glib, as I say, "Well, how did you get your wife?" What's that got to do with this? I'll say, "Can I suggest you got your wife... You made up a mental list if be of 10, 15 women that you felt relatively compatible with, and you started dating them. Did you do that?" "Yeah. I did that."

Gordon Macdonald:

"And you narrowed them down until you were with one or two. And then you said, this is the one." "Yeah, that's what I did." "So why couldn't you do with potential mentors?" Why don't you go home and make a list of 15 men within 100 mile radius that appeal to you that when you're with them, you feel a smoothness of conversation, a general platform agreement that gets you somewhere and finding out what the other one is thinking, you have spiritual compatibility.

Gordon Macdonald:

Why don't you look for 15 men like that? And then one by one, take them out to breakfast, and watch the conversation. Did the other person respond to you? Did they offer something at the table that you found valuable? And do you think they found what you had to offer is valuable? And don't say to them, I need you to be my mentor, or would you... Just simply say at the end of the morning, "Gee, I really, really enjoyed this. Do you think we could do this again in another month?" And listen to their answer?

Gordon Macdonald:



"Sure. Yeah. I'd be happy to do that." Or, "Well, I've got a busy schedule." Then you know you're being... Pulling off. But plan to take a couple of years to find out who your most special friends might be and among them, who might be the one or two people who would mentor you. And maybe you need more than one mentor, maybe you and your spouse need mentorship on the marriage basis for a while. Maybe you need a mentor who's doing the same track of ministry that you're doing.

Gordon Macdonald:

I will tell you that over the years, very deliberately, I did not pick most pastors to have close friendships with.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Who did you pick?

Gordon Macdonald:

I picked men out in the larger world who represented life in a way that I was not experiencing it. My very best friend for years and years was a college president. And among my three or four peer friends, I'm talking about mentoring friends right now. One is an attorney. One is real estate executive. One is the director of a non-profit organization in Montreal. One or two others like that. But that means that the conversation is going to go over the borders of just church talk.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

I get tired of church talk.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Me too.

Gordon Macdonald:

And I get tired of talking with pastors where you're always subtly comparing yourselves. "The Lord gave me 600 this week." "Well, that's wonderful but we had 1100." I don't want to talk church talk as a usual point. So I have picked friends over the years who had something to teach me from their exposure in the larger world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's great counsel. Josh, anything to add to that?

Josh Gagnon:

No. I mean, I like the thought of having... It's not always one. If you have a desire to have your marriage strengthened, you might want to set your arrow towards finding a mentor who has a strong marriage. If you have a desire to lead an organization to health, you might find a business leader that an organization to help. The best way to find a mentor is to see your weaknesses and to discover or to identify people that have those strengths and in go after it. And so I'm thankful that I talked him into being my friend.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Final word for either of you. Anything else you want to say that you haven't said?

Gordon Macdonald:

Well, we've talked a lot about friendships and marriages. I'll just tell you that as I said to you earlier in our conversation, I come out of a very unhappy home. I never saw my mother and father really love each other in visible ways. It just was not a home to learn much about relationships. And then when I was around 21, and in the university, there was a couple down the road, just a few houses, he was a Presbyterian pastor.

Gordon Macdonald:

And I would say hi to them each time I passed their home and they were out in the lawn or something. And one night or one time, the wife said to me, "Gordon, why don't you come over and have dinner with Frank and I tomorrow night?" And I accepted because as a college student, you don't eat well. And I went thinking that I was going to get a great meal. But the more important thing I got was, I got a view of how two people live together, who dearly loved each other.

Gordon Macdonald:

The way he treated her with such respect and appreciation for what she was doing and the way he would ask her questions and the way he would post and brag about her. I've never seen that before. And I watched the way she treated him, the questions that she asked, the way she drew him out, the way she encouraged him if something was not going well. And at the end of the evening, I was just mind boggled at how these two people treated one another.

Gordon Macdonald:

And they said, "Well, why don't you come back and have dinner with us next week?" So I said, "Yes." And that ended up with my sitting at their table two and three times a week for months. And the food was great but it was this drama of these two people who really got into each other's souls and loved each other so dearly. And I remember saying one night, "If I ever get married, I want a wife just like Helen. If I ever get married, I want to be a man just like Frank. If I ever get married, I want a marriage just like they have."

Gordon Macdonald:

And about six months later, I met Gail. And the basic platform of our 58 years of relationship begins with everything I saw in that home. Those people gave me one of the greatest gifts that life could present. They showed me how a man and a woman could love each other. If I hadn't had that experience, I would have passed Gail straight by. I would not have had an appreciation for what we could do together. But having seen it like that, over those many months, made all the difference in the world.

Gordon Macdonald:

And you got to tell that to young leaders because I'm not sure many of them believe it. It could be that in your pastoral ministry, people will learn more from watching the two of you relate to each other than anything you present in the pulpit.

Carey Nieuwhof:

This has been really good and surprising because what I'm hearing you, it's that whole pattern Jesus followed, "Don't just listen to me teach, come live with me. We'll travel together, we'll eat together, we'll do life together." I think Dallas Willard would say intimacy is shared experience, right? That that's what it is. Whether that's going for ice cream on a New England summer afternoon or being at the house and sharing meals together. It's more than just ideas. It's so much deeper than that. And I wonder if we're losing that today.

Gordon Macdonald:

Well, the business of our time now, the thinness of all of our communications.

Carey Nieuwhof:

The thinness.

Gordon Macdonald:

I mean, this email, social networking thing is not the best news in the world.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

Because people will tell, "Well, I have 1000 people on my list and I can't imagine what you have on yours." But what it does is it dilutes our meaning of personal relationship if we're not careful.

Carey Nieuwhof:

But you said to me before we started recording that your wife, Gail, still corresponds by letter with Eugene Peterson's sister.

Gordon Macdonald:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Carey Nieuwhof:

That is something [crosstalk 00:46:13]

Gordon Macdonald:

Handwritten.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Handwritten letters to each other, put in the mail.

Josh Gagnon:

It's something that Gail does quite often is the handwritten letters and Jennifer has now picked up on that.

Gordon Macdonald:

That's good to hear.

Josh Gagnon:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

Gail will write 30 thank you notes a week.

Carey Nieuwhof:

30, a week?

Gordon Macdonald:

Yeah. And this has been going on not just for the last six months, it's been going on for every... She was writing those kind of notes the first week we got married. She writes me thank you notes. I will find a thank you note, sometimes I've parked the car at some shopping mall on the other side of Concord and Gail's driven by, seen my car. The next thing I know, I come out from where I am, and there under the windshield wiper is a note from my wife to me. Thank you for making the bed this morning.

Carey Nieuwhof:

58 years of that-

Gordon Macdonald:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's pretty good.

Gordon Macdonald:

And I've had people come up to me, I am not exaggerating. They will take out their billfold, they'll pull out a yellow piece of paper. And they will say, "I want you to see this. Eight years ago, Gail wrote me this note. And I've been carrying it with me in my billfold ever since. And anytime I get the least bit discouraged, I take this note out and read it. And God speaks to me through it."

Gordon Macdonald:

I mean, that's not just once or twice, that's happened over and over and over again to me. So I've learned from Gail, the power of the written note. And she would tell you if she was here that one of her most favorite verses is Paul's words where he says, "These things I have written with my own hand. This is not dictated. This is written with my own hand." So I try to follow that. I don't write as many as she does. But I do try to write them. And it's an amazing effect upon a lot of people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Yeah, what do you say after that, right?

Josh Gagnon:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

Now, you understand the things I've been saying in this room have taken 58 years to learn. So when I was younger, I used to think that all this was learned in six months. But these are things that takes years and years and years to learn. So if you're careful, and you listen to the Lord, and you get led by the Spirit, and maybe at 79 years of age, you'll look pretty good too.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, it's funny because you and I, in another conversation in my leadership podcast, talked about stepping away from institutional leadership. So I have not been... Well, I'm leading my company now but not a church, for four years. And I have a good friend Jeff Henderson, Equanet Church, who always talked of the power of a handwritten note. And all through my 40s, I was like, "I have to write more notes, I have to write more notes." But one of the things since I've stepped away from the day to day, I write several thank you cards a week.

Gordon Macdonald:

Good for you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And it's like scattering seeds. And sometimes I get a thank you for the thank you card.

Josh Gagnon:

Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right? Which is encouragement. You can never over encourage. And one of the things I'm convicted of, more and more is why am I withholding gratitude? What is behind that? When I decide, "Oh, I'm not going to thank you for something." What is behind that? What am I doing? I'm messing up somehow. I'm playing judge. Human beings make terrible judges. We really do. That's God's work.

Gordon Macdonald:

We need to revive that. And I do think that technology has a negative effect upon the thankful heart. It's too easy to just blow these things out there and pretend you've got a personal relationship with a person when you really don't.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

And so I'm an advocate of... I've identified 11 different kinds of human relationship that we all have.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really?

Gordon Macdonald:

And how you perform in each one of them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, you can't say that and pretend like you know it's coming.

Gordon Macdonald:

I have a relationship with my family of origin.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

They're all dead but I have a relationship with them because I dream about them, I think about them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Sisters, parents, siblings.

Gordon Macdonald:

Yeah. I have to work through feelings about them that are both good or bad. So they're there and they're in my active mindset. My second relationship is in my marriage with Gail. That's the priority relationship until one of us dies. It's the most important relationship and it should not be jeopardized under any conditions. The third relationship is with my family. Don't confuse marriage with family. They are two different things.

Gordon Macdonald:

So my family, which would be my children and my grandchildren. My fourth relationship is with my capital F friends. There are may be five or six of those. And the thing that distinguishes them as they know my heart, and I know theirs. We communicate at a much deeper level than is normal with anybody else. The fifth relationship is with my mentees, or sometimes I use the word protege. But that's a priority relationship until it stops existing and it will stop at some point along the line.

Gordon Macdonald:

The sixth relationship is with at least three associations that I had the church being one of them, a community association of some kind, maybe some parish church, whatever, but I'm part of a group that has a certain purpose to it. My next relationship is with my small F friends, and there's probably 180 of those. According to research, you can know that many people.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

I know something about each one of them, where they live, what their names are, what they do for a living, we get together sometimes and have picnics or whatever it is, breakfast. But it's not necessary that they know my heart or I know theirs.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's not a capital F friendship.

Gordon Macdonald:

No. That's the important difference. Then my next relationship is with my neighbors that live on the block. I'm the president of our condo association. And so I'm engaging all the time, with people of varying ages about snow cover and leaf raking and stuff like that but they're my neighbors and I have a relationship with them. And then my next relationship is with the village I live in, the postmaster, the gas station guy. We know very little about each other, but we see each other coming.

Gordon Macdonald:

And then there's the stranger on the corner that I know nothing about, we may be together for no more than 60 seconds until the light changes but I have a relationship. And the last relationship is with people who I consider if they're there, my enemies. The Bible says a lot about loving your enemies, to be good to people who persecute you. Enemies do not just lie there flaccid or dormant. They're real life people. And how I manage that antagonistic relationship will in some way affect all the other relationships.

Gordon Macdonald:

So what I want to do on a regular basis is look at these 11. Ask who fits each box and what the status of the relationship is, and is there something I should be doing to improve the value of it? Or the worker?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Have you written about this?

Gordon Macdonald:

I'm sorry.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Is this in a book that I missed?

Gordon Macdonald:

You'll find a version of it in Resilient Life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay.

Gordon Macdonald:

I was still trying to spiff it up when I wrote that book. It's funny, my editor wanted to scratch that chapter. And this often happens when you're a writer.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Right.

Gordon Macdonald:

The editor will say, "Skip this chapter." And then it turns out to be the most important chapter in the book. You mentioned the color driven in OPW.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah.

Gordon Macdonald:

My editor, when we wrote the book, wanted to scratch that whole section. And yet, those chapters sold the book.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, thank you for not allowing that to be scrapped. I appreciate it. Gordon, this is so rich. And you know what's so interesting? And I think in the whole mentor thing, I wonder if it's become a transactional thing, I just need you to give me a download of your wisdom so that I can be... I was reading some Tim Keller this morning, the day of filming, and he was quoting another book that America has gone through three great gods and that the founding it truly was people pursued God.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Then it became nation. That what God used to do, the nation does. And in the last 50 years, it's become self. And basically, we're not living for God, we're not living for country, we're living for ourselves. And you become something I can get something out of, or you become something which you've talked about, right? But I think having those 11 relationships... John Townsend talks about seven, all starting with C, really prioritizes... Oh, and these are all God ordained, right?

Carey Nieuwhof:

This is the structure in the fabric of life. And not everybody has the same access, and I think social has made it flat. But what you guys have cultivated now, over the last four or five years, is something rare and special and lacking. And you've given us some great insight into maybe how to capture some more of that in our own lives.

Gordon Macdonald:

Well, thank you for the kindness of your words. You picked subjects which are the most important. I'm sure for Josh as well as for me. So it's meant a lot to be able to talk about them.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thank you, Gordon.

Josh Gagnon:

Thanks.



Carey Nieuwhof:

Thank you, Josh.

Josh Gagnon:

Thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, that one really warmed my heart. And I'll tell you, Gordon's become a friend to me as well. And we have an email friendship, which is really fun. And, of course, we do calls from time to time. And as soon as all the restrictions lift, I can't wait to see him face to face again. So how do you find a relationship like that? How did Josh find a relationship like that in Gordon? Well, there are some clues but I want to share some principles with you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

First of all, find someone you admire, all right? If you're looking for a friendship like that, find someone you admire, and who models what you want to see in your life. I would suggest that that not just be with career, I would suggest that would be with character, with the way they are in relationship with their friends and their family. And certainly, when I started in leadership, I had a very small church and I just found somebody who would be able to mentor me, who had a church of 200.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Because 200 is way more people than I had. And you know what? We live in this world where we think about celebrity mentorships. It's like, "If Craig Rochelle could mentor me or if Rich Wilkerson could mentor me or Joe Saxton could mentor me, then everything would be great." The reality is this probably not going to happen, okay? It's probably not going to happen. But the person who leads a church of 200 has probably got time for lunch with somebody who leads a church of 50 or the person down the road that you know, who you really admire in business or marketplace or whatever, who you just think has led to exemplary life, they probably have time to meet with you. So I would start there.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what do you do? Just start with a really simple conversation, take them out for lunch, don't ask them, "Will you be my mentor?" Just take them out for lunch, take them out for dinner, and go for coffee and just have a really simple conversation. Third, bring with you a list of open-ended questions. Just ask them things about their life and try to listen as much as you speak.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Fourth thing, be a little bit vulnerable, share something, not a lot. Don't tell them, "My life is falling apart." Okay, that's probably the end of a first date but just share something vulnerable. "Hey, here's one thing I'm struggling with right now." And just see how they respond. Some people will give you a lot of advice. They'll be like, "Well, here's what you should do blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And you know what? Long-term that doesn't go very well. Some people will change the subject, they'll be, "Oh, did you notice it's sunny out today?" Because they're very uncomfortable talking about anything vulnerable but some people will listen and empathize. And that's probably a clue that you

should do a second meal. And then get together with them a second time say, "Hey, I really enjoyed this today. Can we do this again sometimes."

Carey Nieuwhof:

And if they're willing, then you go back and have a second conversation. Maybe you're a little more open and they're open. And then you're on your way to building a friendship. So I would also encourage you to listen really, really listen in those conversations. Because I've been to meals before with people who wanted to meet with me. And I could barely get a word in edgewise. They were looking for my advice, they were looking for my help but they just talked the whole time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So really, really focus on listening. And then if the results are mutually life-giving, repeat it, just go again. And before you know it, you may end up with a relationship, very similar to the one that Josh and Gordon have developed. So I hope that helps. I can let you get to the work of figuring out how to apply this in your life and maybe identifying somebody that you could actually have that kind of a life-giving mentoring, friendship with.