

LEARNING

HOW

TO

SEE

with

Brian

McLaren

Brian McLaren: Like many of you, on January 6th, I turned on my television and saw scenes of what was unfolding in Washington, D.C.: Mobs of people storming the Capitol, beating police; carrying signs that said, “Jesus saves,” and holding up Bibles and praying in Jesus’s name; and shouting, “Hang Mike Pence,” and erecting a cross, erecting a gallows. Watching the whole thing unfold, it just seemed surreal. And when I looked on the faces of the people, and all the people who were sending out their videos of themselves there, they were certain they were right. They were sure of themselves. They showed no hesitancy. They had no doubts. And in fact, many of them looked euphoric. They’d never done anything like this before, because nothing like this had ever been done before. And in their lives, I bet if they could remember that day, they would remember it as one of the happiest days of their life when they felt certain and sure.

Brian McLaren: Now, maybe a couple of days later when they get a call from the FBI, or when they’re worried about getting a call from the FBI, what seemed like the best day may have become one of the worst days. But it just struck me as I observed that happening, that what those people were involved with is something all of us have experienced. We thought we were right. We were certain we were right. We believed people who told us we were right. And then we wondered, how could I have been so wrong? It’s so interesting what we can see in hindsight, compared to what we see when things are actually unfolding. That metaphor of sight is so central to Jesus’s teaching. He constantly taught about sight and used seeing and blindness as metaphors for deep spiritual realities. And he also did many healings of people relating to their sight.

Brian McLaren: There’s one story and Matthew 15, and it goes like this. The Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands before they eat.” Jesus answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God, you hypocrites.” Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, “Listen and understand: It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” Then the disciples approached and said, “Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?” He answered, “Every plant that by heavenly father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind guides of the blind. And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit.”

Brian McLaren: Now, I think probably a lot of us, when we hear those words today, we don’t ever want to hear the word blind be used as a stigmatization of a person who’s visually handicapped, but we’re also aware how this image is so powerful, of someone who can’t see guiding other people who can’t see, so they all fall into a pit. And that is a danger that all of us face. Like those folks on January 6th of this year, we don’t see how much we don’t see. And we don’t see how much the people we’re following don’t see. And it’s really easy for us to end up in a deep, deep pit. Those are the questions behind this podcast: Learning How to See.

Brian McLaren: We do not see everything. So we do not know everything. We do not even know how much we do not know, nor do we know how much of what we know is actually impartial, distorted, or false. That is why we seek to open our eyes, to encounter the world afresh in humility and in silent wonder, to learn to see.

Brian McLaren: In the first season of Learning How to See, Jacqui Lewis and Richard Rohr joined me in introducing a baker's dozen of biases that make it hard for us to see what is there. In this season, we want to turn our desire to see into prayer, into something we feel in our bones and bodies, something we desire so deeply that our hearts are stretched and deepened. Before we do a quick review of the whole list of biases, I'd like to introduce the team who's going to be part of this season. I'm so honored to have Gigi and Paul and Mike as my conversation partners this season. So I wondered, just to start off, maybe each of you could introduce yourself? Maybe Gigi, you could go first?

Gigi Ross: Sure. My name is Gigi Ross. I'm the manager of the Living School here at the Center for Action and Contemplation. Been with the center for a little over five years. And my job is mainly to look at the student experience and do what I can to enhance the student experience of the Living School. My coming to CAC also culminates with my coming to Albuquerque, and I've found some interesting things to do in Albuquerque: I am a student of Aikido; I sing with a group called the Threshold Choir, and we sing at the bedside of people who are dying; and I'm also a Spiritual Director. And plus, I love when I can, to just take in the beauty and walk around in the beauty of the various surrounding landscapes here in New Mexico. Happy to be here.

Brian McLaren: Thanks so much, Gigi. It really is a beautiful place where you live. And you're such a great part of this team. How about you, Mike?

Mike Petrow: Hi, Brian. My name is Mike Petro. I'm a Content Specialist with the Center for Action and Contemplation in the Living School here. I'm the newest person on the team. My background is comparative religious studies, mythological studies, depth psychology. And I bring a little bit of that to the equation, but it is just such a gift to work with such amazing people. And I'm new to Albuquerque as a result. So when I'm not at work, you'll find me up on the mountain as often as humanly possible. There's not much more that I could ask for than to get up above it all and just appreciate the beauty of the desert.

Brian McLaren: That's beautiful. That's great. Hey, Paul. Great to have you here.

Paul Swanson: Hey, Brian. Thank you so much. Great to be a part of this crew. My name is Paul Swanson. I'm on the program design team alongside Mike and Gigi. And I've worn a lot of different hats at the CAC. I've been here about 14 years, and I love the way that we're able to bring a contemplative sight hopefully to the world and participate in that. A bit about me, I've got a couple kiddos and I'm married, and seek to live this contemplative life within family dynamics and neighborhood living as much as possible. But thrilled to be here and for these conversations.

Brian McLaren: Thanks. Thanks so much. Well, let's just jump right in and let me begin by asking you three, how would you define bias? How do you understand it? Where do you see it out there causing trouble and in our world today?

Gigi Ross: I'll start, since I started the introduction. Not that that's going to be how we're going to be going around all the time. The image that comes to me is the image of a pinhole camera. As human beings, we only have a limited amount of sight. And the pinhole camera, I'm near-sighted and myopic, so I look through a pinhole camera without my glasses. I can actually

see much clearer than I can if I don't have a pinhole camera and I'm not wearing my glasses, but that clarity of sight comes at a huge cost. By having everything down to that pinhole, there's a whole lot that I can't see. And if I'm not aware of the fact that I'm only seeing through a pinhole, I can act as if my whole world is what I can see in that pinhole.

Gigi Ross: And I think that's something that is in some ways, necessary for survival. We have to limit the amount of input that we get and just look at what's most important for survival, but that bias also comes at a cost, especially when it comes to relationships, when it comes to seeing how we fit into the larger scheme of things. If we believe that all that we see through that little pinhole is all there is, then we miss out on so much of God's creation. We miss out on so much of the kinds of relationships that we can have. And also just seeing the fullness, not only of other people, but even the fullness of ourselves, because we also see ourselves through that pinhole, there's also a bias that we have to ourselves. So that's my beginning working definition, I guess, of bias.

Brian McLaren: Gosh, I love so much about that, but one of the things that strikes me is you bring out, you really do gain something by looking through a pinhole camera. And we gain something by bias. It simplifies life. It makes things more manageable. Yeah, I think that's a really great insight.

Paul Swanson: I might just piggyback off you there, Gigi, just because I think I used a similar metaphor in my own definition. And you all might have to correct me if I'm wrong here, but I was thinking of bias as like the apps or settings that enable me to see and interact with reality in ways that are most conducive for protecting my understanding. And I think when I'm able to challenge those biases at times, expanding how I'm viewing reality and that understanding... But am I using aperture right? Is that the same? How much you see, is that the right film terminology or am I off-base?

Brian McLaren: I think it's at least partially right, yeah. Well, I think the aperture, it really has to do a little bit like that pinhole idea, how wide or broad are we seeing, but then there are other settings that determine how much light is coming in and whether we want it to be shaded. All of those, what do they call them, effects when you're doing something on a computer, right? Yeah.

Paul Swanson: So my bias, my understanding of bias is already being blown open, which is wonderful.

Brian McLaren: But actually that's a really great point, because you could say, when we put on a pair of sunglasses, we put a certain color or we filter out certain colors. And biases have a filtering dimension to them.

Paul Swanson: Exactly.

Brian McLaren: They keep out certain things and let other things in, yeah.

Paul Swanson: Well said.

Brian McLaren: Anything and anything you'd add, Mike?

Mike Petrow: I was thinking about this. I think when I think of bias, I think about, for me, a navigation system, like a GPS. Essentially, what you need to get around. And so years ago, I was an early adopter with the whole GPS thing, driving around, and I was living in New York City at the time, and one of the things that really stood out for me is sometimes, especially with those early GPSes, they would not be updated as quick as the city would change traffic patterns. And so every now and then it would whip me around a corner and take me down a one way street in the wrong direction. Something hadn't been one way and now it was, or vice versa.

Mike Petrow: And that's what I think of, I think, with bias. I know we're always building ideas about how the world works, ideas about ourselves, ideas about other people, even ideas about the divine to help us function, right? But when this kind of system of exploration gets calcified, it very quickly becomes a prison of self isolation, I think. And then I think it would be like literally trying to drive only looking at your GPS and not even looking out your windshield, and it gets dangerous quick. Yeah. I think that's the word picture that kind of pops up in my mind.

Brian McLaren: Oh my goodness. Such a good picture, too. And as you say, you could imagine someone trying to drive looking at their screen and not looking out the windshield, but in a sense, I think very often we see what we want to see, or we see what we expect to see. And this is one of the great struggles of bias. Of course, a lot of people aren't aware of this, and that's something else about your analogy that makes sense. You could have a program that you've downloaded that works for three years, and then reality changes, and your program isn't updated. So biases might not get in a person's way for a long time, and then suddenly they do. Yeah. And then we're really disillusioned, because, "What happened to reality? It wasn't supposed to change."

Mike Petrow: And then we're lost.

Brian McLaren: That's right. Going up the wrong way on the one way street.

Gigi Ross: Brian, I'm wondering at this point, maybe you could review that list of biases that you covered before.

Brian McLaren: Sure. Be happy to. So there are 13 of them, which is way too many to remember, but the benefit of naming all 13 is it just gives us a lay of the land and maybe a general impression.

Brian McLaren: But the first is confirmation bias. It's easy for us to see things that fit in with what we already think.

Brian McLaren: Complexity bias. We prefer a simple lie to a complex truth.

Brian McLaren: Community bias. It's easy for us to see what our community sees, and very hard for us to see something our community doesn't see, or doesn't want to see.

Brian McLaren: Complementarity bias. If I like someone, if I feel comfortable them, and they tell

me something, it's much easier for me to believe it than if they're mean to me or they're unfamiliar to me. I tend to reward people who I like with belief, with believing what they say, and I'll be prone to disbelieve the truth that comes from an unfamiliar person or a person I don't feel comfortable around.

Brian McLaren: Contact bias. What other people see who I don't have contact with, I do not see.

Brian McLaren: Conservative-liberal bias. There's a whole lot of research that's been done that conservative brains and liberal brains actually function differently, and we'll look at some of those on an upcoming episode, some of those differences.

Brian McLaren: Consciousness bias. That depending on our level of consciousness or our level of maturity, different things will be easy for us to see, some things will be hard for us to see, some things might be impossible for us to see.

Brian McLaren: Competency bias. That we are incompetent to know how incompetent we are. That one of the greatest effects of our incompetence is making us unaware of our incompetence. And by the way, the same is true sometimes of our competence.

Brian McLaren: Then confidence bias is the tendency to believe people who speak confidently, no matter how much they're lying to us, and to doubt people who speak hesitantly, no matter how honest and true they are.

Brian McLaren: Next is conspiracy bias, which is our desire to believe stories that cast us as either the hero or the victim. We never want to accept a story that casts us as the villain, or even as a accomplice to the villain.

Brian McLaren: And then there's comfort bias, which says that we accept information that doesn't disturb our emotional feeling of comfort.

Brian McLaren: And there's catastrophe bias, which is related to normalcy bias, which says that we can accept information about a clear and present danger, but if it's about a slow approaching danger, a slow train coming, we find it harder to see that kind of danger.

Brian McLaren: And then finally, cash bias. It's very hard to see something that is going to cost you money if you see it. And we're attracted to see and believe things if somehow it looks like there's some sort of financial gain for us.

Brian McLaren: And so that's the overview, and we're going to dig deeper through this season in each of these.

Mike Petrow: So it seems like confirmation bias is the most foundational to all the others. So it would be okay if we start there and talk about that first?

Brian McLaren: That sounds great.

Mike Petrow: So if I'm understanding this correctly, we easily accept information that confirms what we already think, and we easily reject information that unsettles our existing beliefs. So we can put to the team the question, where do you see confirmation bias evident in our world these

days? Is it anywhere, creeping around?

Paul Swanson: I'm happy to throw out the first lot here of, I think something that certainly came to public conversation after the 2016 election was social media, the way that through these algorithms, that we were recognizing that we were in these little echo chambers, and then the news medias that we go to for our news, often we only go to those that aren't going to necessarily challenge us, but are going to have the same political bent that we have. And so I just think about, where are we giving our attention? If it's just confirming what we already hold true to ourselves, we get into this hyperloop of just sinking in deeper and deeper and deeper into what we already believe.

Gigi Ross: One thing that comes to my mind is a conversation I had with a neighbor here where I live in the early days of the pandemic. It was even before we were sure whether or not to wear masks. But social distancing, as it was then called, which I prefer physical distancing, was something we were supposed to do. And I was talking to this neighbor, and his reason for not believing that COVID-19 was real was because he didn't know anybody. I know we're going to be cross-fertilizing our biases here, but the fact that he himself didn't know anybody, even though there were over half a million people in this metro area, because he didn't know anybody who had COVID, therefore it wasn't real. It was really hard for me to have a comeback because it just seemed so illogical, but that's why we're talking about bias. Bias isn't logical.

Gigi Ross: And it also got me, and I know we'll probably get to this later, thinking about the ways in my own life where I just look at something in front of me and say, "My interpretation of what's in front of me is in the way that confirms what I think," even though there are other things that I don't see that could just show ... There were other people. He asked me if I knew anybody. I said, well, yeah, actually I did know somebody. But that wasn't enough to make him change his mind, because he still didn't know anybody.

Brian McLaren: Gosh. That story brings to mind one of the more embarrassing moments I've had in my public teaching career. I was speaking at this university and I was talking about a philosopher named Rene Descartes, and way, way back in my undergraduate years in college, when I first learned about Rene Descartes, my professor told me that Rene Descartes was in seminary. And so I said, "Oh, he was studying to be a priest." And I assumed that Rene Descartes had become a priest. And years later, I read that he had a spiritual director.

Brian McLaren: Well, you can see, I already thought that he was a priest. It was something where I filled in the gap, right? But now I've got confirmation, "Oh, he has a spiritual director." And so for the rest of my adult life, I worked under the assumption that that Rene Descartes was a Catholic priest, and everything that I read confirmed it. Nothing I ever read didn't confirm it until I was giving a lecture, and I mentioned him being a priest, and a professor who was there who was a specialist in Rene Descartes just stood up and said, "You're wrong. He's not a priest." I could admit, he could have been a little more gracious in his way of doing it, but even so, I couldn't ... My whole understanding was shaken. "How could I be wrong?" And then I had to sort of piece by piece realize how I had become so confirmed in an idea that was wrong, and it was disruptive.

Mike Petrow: It's really amazing how easy it is to sink into an idea and just get comfortable with it. And

now what is intriguing to me is how our technology has actually enhanced that reality. So one of the things we throw around a lot here is how increasingly difficult it's getting to become true selves in a virtual world. And I don't pretend to be an expert here, but social media algorithms enhance our confirmation bias because they shape the information that we see. They are shaping the reality that we are interacting with to be something that we are predisposed to agree with or violently react against, which is wild. I don't know that that's ever happened before. And it really, really captivates me about how vigilant we need to be.

Brian McLaren: Yeah. Actually that comes around to the question, what can we do about confirmation bias? And it strikes me first that a whole lot of people don't even know this thing exists, right? And so just knowing it exists and reminding ourselves it exists as a start. To say, "I need to be on guard that I won't just keep accumulating data to reinforce what I think, and the data that could challenge what I think keeps bouncing off." And in fact, psychologists tell us this happens at such a fast speed before it ever becomes a conscious thought that I have no idea how much information is bounced off me because it didn't confirm what I already think. And when I'm aware of that, then, it might help me then to habitually ... Because we forget, right? We can know confirmation bias exists, and then forget it because we don't want to think that it exists. But then we remind ourselves and we try to make it habitual to say, what am I missing? I need to slow down. I need to listen. But as you say, Mike, the reality of cable news channels and social media channels and algorithms, they put us in situations where we can go for months or years without hearing anything that goes against our confirmation bias. And that's where I think we reached this deeper level that when we see that danger, we really have to try to promote desire. A desire for truth.

Brian McLaren: We can't make confirmation bias go away. It's the way our brains evolve. As Gigi said before, there's certain efficiencies to this, and it brings certain benefits to us. It's not going to go away, but there are things we can do to really strengthen our desire for the truth that will maybe make us more vigilant about confirmation bias. And that's why in this series, we're going to put a lot of emphasis on prayer, because one way to define prayer is prayer is the intentional strengthening of desire.

Brian McLaren: And so at the end of each episode in this series, we're going to have a time to just slow down and strengthen desire through prayer. But we'd like to introduce you to the prayer that we're going to use for confirmation bias. Now, a prayer that will be in the program notes, if you want it to read it and use it on your own. But because this is a real issue, this isn't just theory, we're recommending that we all actually try to strengthen our desire for truth, a desire that will even be stronger than our confirmation bias. We'll just introduce this prayer to you all right now.

Practice: Source of all truth, help me to hunger for truth, even if it upsets modifies or overturns what I already think is true. Guide me into all the truth I can bear. And stretch me to bear more, so that I may always choose the whole truth, even with disruption. Over half truths with self-deception. Grant me passion to follow wisdom wherever it leads. Thank you.

Brian McLaren: Learning how to see, we'll continue in a moment.

Gigi Ross: Let's all move to the second bias. How about going for complexity bias? The fact that our brains tend to prefer a simple lie to a complex truth. One of the things that I was thinking



about that this kind of, in some ways, ties into what we're talking about with confirmation bias. To me, it's about how we listen. I guess I would say I have a high degree of emotional intelligence and sometimes that gets in the way. I would say for the first 25, 26 years of my life, only half listening, because I always knew what people were going to say. And it was all based on the simple patterns that I had that evolved as I grew up.

Gigi Ross: And then I met someone who was my partner for about four years, and I could never know what she was going to say. And so then I had to make a decision of, what was I going to do? Was I to stretch myself? Was I going to just continue to just get mad at her because she wasn't going through the simple way of doing and doing the pattern that I thought she was doing, so therefore something was wrong with her? Or was I going to stretch myself and allow myself to open up to something more complex?

Gigi Ross: I noticed that's something that I do a lot. In many ways, I go for what's the easiest thing to do. What's the easiest thing for me, the most convenient, the most simple, instead of allowing something that will take more work on my part. And will also show both my dependence, as well as my, again, we're crossing biases again, my incompetency. It's much better for me to go for something that makes me look good, even though it's not the whole truth, or may even be a full lie. So I'm wondering if we have any other examples of complexity bias at work.

Paul Swanson: Gosh, that's so good. I'm thinking about a couple of different things. There's the bias of like headlines slogans of like clean coal or cash for clunkers. That there's no complexity, like laying in weight behind those kind of simple sayings that produce action. This just popped to mind. There's this quote that used to hang in my fridge back in the day from Oliver Wendell Holmes about complexity. It's along the lines of like, I wouldn't give a fig for simplicity on this set of complexity, but to give my life for simplicity on the other side of complexity. And I think so much of how I understand the complexity bias is on the first half of that quote, of the simplicity that cloaks the complexity of reality hiding behind it.

Paul Swanson: I experienced that so much in my own personal life of trying to teach the faith tradition of Christianity to my children, where I will sometimes get lost in the truth that I'm trying to teach or pass on. And then they will ask questions that reveal the complexity laying in weight behind it. And then I have a choice right there. That's what came up for me. How about for you, Mike and Brian?

Mike Petrow: I think I'm just going to piggyback right off what you were saying about teaching Christianity and spiritual mysteries to your kids. In another life, I was a pastor for a bit, and I just remember there was a whole season of my life where I really thought my job was to give people answers. And I think we're a culture that prefers good answers over good questions, but I think complexity is the place of questions.

Mike Petrow: My favorite mystic has this thing where he talks about staying in dialogue, as opposed to definition, and exploring as opposed to explaining. And I think for me the last few years, it's just been trying to live in search of better questions that can take me into complexity. It was not easy. It's not easy. Sometimes it feels like you're building a sand castle right in the tide. Yeah, yeah, I really appreciate the invitation to live in the questions that complexity can bring us to.

Brian McLaren: Yeah. My guess is that that has a lot to do with a joy that you've discovered through having a lot of your simplicity's complexified and you found joy in that. But if we can remember that for a whole lot of people, their lives are so busy and so complex that when they see complexity coming, before they even know it, their brain shuts down and says, I'm not ready for that. By the way, we can make an interesting connection with these first two biases. When you think of confirmation bias, I am very happy for any complex information that confirms what I already think.

Brian McLaren: But if I'm confused or if I'm hearing things I don't want to hear, I just want simplicity. I just think it's important for us to remember that the emotional state that we enter the world in and that our neighbors enter the world in. If they're overwhelmed, if they're confused, if they're anxious, if they don't know how they're going to pay their bills, we can see how the brain, a little bit like that pinhole camera that Gigi mentioned before, would just say, oh man, I can't deal with complexity right now. And somebody comes along with a little simple, easy answer, and it's like, I'm going to glom onto that because that's all I can handle right now. It's like a life preserver in a storm.

Mike Petrow: It's really helpful. Was it Maslow's hierarchy of needs where he talked about you can't really move towards big existential questions if you need to pay your bills, feed your family?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brian McLaren: That's right. That's right.

Mike Petrow: That's really helpful.

Gigi Ross: And I was also thinking about how this simple lie to a complex truth, and I'm going to use the word nuanced for complexity, and how it applies to some of the various racism and just racist things that are going on in the country. But I'm going to do it by using a really more personal example. Recently, I was at an event and we were talking about the black church, but it was at an event that was attended by a predominantly white people. And so I was put into a breakout room where I was the only person of color, and there were two other white people.

Gigi Ross: The presenter was a black person. And the question that we were supposed to answer was just about what that presenter said have resonated with us. And because I was the only black person in that breakout space, I became the person to represent all black people. That to me is how wanting that simple answer can actually cause harm. I think it caused harm to all of us, because none of us got to do what we were really supposed to be in that breakout room to do.

Gigi Ross: And I see that often in just the way we do groups, because I think of the groups that we know, we actually can break them down to all kinds. Like if we know cars, we know all the names of cars. To me, I see a car, it just goes out my brain. I don't remember one car from the other. When we know Christianity, we can break it down to all the different kinds of denominations. But if we talk about Judaism, we just talk about Judaism and not the different denominations in Judaism. And so I also see how that bias, it just allows us to just avoid the very nuance existence of other groups that can show how they are like us. And that's a way that allows us to make other groups less than we are, because they don't have all

the complexity that we have.

Brian McLaren: Yes. My goodness. With every one of these biases, we could just talk about how the issue of race in the United States right now is being debated with these biases fully engaged, and then you start putting a couple together. You think about the little white kid who grows up in a family where white is normal. He isn't even around any children who aren't white, and he develops all kinds of prejudices and assumptions, and normal feels familiar and good and different feels dangerous. Everything he experiences confirms that set of biases. And then when he begins to meet people who are different from his home community, you can just see that perfect example of simplicity bias. Oh, this person's Asian. All Asian people are alike and so on, and this is where we need a desire for complexity to challenge these biases toward simplicity.

Paul Swanson: Let's bring in this passage and proverbs of what we know as a book that brings in many different ways and calls to wisdom. I would love to hear your thoughts on how this passage maybe strikes you all in relationship to the complexity bias. This is from the Book of Proverbs of Solomon, Son of David, King of Israel. "For learning about wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, for gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity, to teach rudeness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young. Let the wise also here in gain in learning and the discerning acquire skill to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles." What does that bring up for any of you as these words hit your ears in relationship to what we've just been talking about?

Gigi Ross: The first thing that comes to my mind is that a proverb in general is a pretty simple statement. If you just take in the literal level, you can just leave it at that simple statement. But if you really want to get into the complexity of it, you have to try to live into it. I think that's something that I noticed even among those students, those of us who are in a live in school and the students in live in school, that this is what makes it, we all want the answers. And so we don't want to have to do the work of living into those questions.

Gigi Ross: And so that was the first thing that comes to my mind because to become wise, to become discerning, to even have access to who we are authentically is to learn, is to start to live into those questions and to live into those simple phrases that have a deep resonance and live into that resonance is probably, I think, what many people are hungry for, but not everybody has a sense of how to go about doing.

Paul Swanson: I'm thinking about Jesus and some of his teachings, which come across as so simple. Love your neighbor, that could easily just fit into a simple proverb, but the complexity of what that actually means to love your neighbor is it's a lifetime of confronting the simplicity of what you think you know before you as your neighbor. For some of you asking, who is your neighbor and what does actual love actually look like in your day-to-day life? It doesn't fit into a simple category or a simple proverb.

Brian McLaren: Wow. As soon as you say that, you just think Jesus takes that statement, love your neighbor, and then somebody says, who is my neighbor? And now he complexifies it to say, your neighbor includes the guy who's beat up at the side of the road, or in another place, he says, love your neighbor. You've heard it said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. I'm going

to say, love your neighbor and love your enemy too. In a sense, he jolts people out of their simplicity by contradicting the simple statement that they assume is true.

Brian McLaren: I suppose maybe that's one more level of complexity we have to grapple with it, and that's to say this, if we know that our brains are biased towards simplicity, but we begin to understand complexity, how do we communicate that complexity to people whose brains we know are wired towards simplicity, which I think is what we see Jesus doing, but I had an experience with this a few years ago.

Brian McLaren: I'm very committed on the issue of climate change, and I was involved with an organization where we did some research where we feel tested. We talked to people who were climate change denialists and we would give them statements that challenged their denial. They have this simple idea. Climate change is a hoax, and we're bringing them information to confront that belief, that very, very simple belief. Here's what we found. We could give them 10 incredible pieces of data that confirmed that they were wrong. It wouldn't have an effect. If we gave them nine, it wouldn't have an effect. If we gave them five, it wouldn't have an effect.

Brian McLaren: The only time we would get an effect is if we gave them four or fewer pieces of information. In fact, we ended up finding the three pieces of information that we could give them in the correct order that would have the highest persuasive appeal. As soon as I put that in the framework of complexity bias, you can see that after people heard three or four pieces of data, their brains just clicked off and said, I'd rather stick with my simple belief, even if it's false than have to grapple with all this information that feels complex and burdening to me.

Gigi Ross: That's wild. I think that speaks to why Proverbs are so effective because they're short. It's this tiny little tricky text. It's just enough. You think you got it, and then it kind of stays with you and over time you realize it doesn't mean what you thought it meant and it's this time bomb of complexity. That makes so much sense that three reasons would be enough because it's enough for someone to carry and maybe it'll get them later. Yeah. And that's something I appreciate you sharing that, Brian, because one of the things I've not thought about till exactly this moment is that sometimes, maybe it takes time for complexity to grow in someone's curiosity.

Brian McLaren: In fact, if they listened to those three facts and they think, wow, he might be right. Now at that point, their confirmation bias will kick in because they can say, is there other information that would add to that being right? Now, they have an idea that they've partially accepted that they're experimentally willing to confirm. I love that phrase in that proverb to have shrewdness or the cleverness to help people, to help guide people to see beyond the little pinhole as you said of their simplicity.

Gigi Ross: So here's the prayer we would like to offer for complexity bias. Spirit of wisdom and understanding.

Brian McLaren: Help me not be seduced by simple lies.

Paul Swanson: Or repelled by complex truths.

Brian McLaren: Instead, teach me to seek out understanding as if it were a hidden treasure.

Paul Swanson: Digging deep beneath surface appearances to discover what is real in the depths.

Brian McLaren: Well, obviously we haven't said everything that needs to be said about these first two obstacles to seeing, but we hope we've given you enough to help you observe them in your daily life and to see how easily people can be led into a big, deep ditch. We don't want you to become biased police, trying to take the confirmation or complexity splinters out of everyone else's eyes. We want you to begin with yourself. That's why we'll conclude each episode this season with a time of prayer, yearning and contemplative desire.

Brian McLaren: If you don't pray, you could call this an intention. Instead of beginning with help me directed toward God, you could say, may I, directed to yourself. Either way, you'll be strengthening your desire for truth, your desire to see. We invite you to repeat each line after us out loud if you can. These prayers will also be in the podcast notes in case you'd like to use them later on your own. And so let's begin and just take a couple of deep breaths and center ourselves and prepare ourselves to strengthen a desire through prayer.

Paul Swanson: Source of wonder, help us see with wonder. Depth of mystery, help us find delight in truth so profound that they surpass all knowing.

Gigi Ross: Fountain of compassion, help us to see with compassion.

Paul Swanson: Bringer of justice, help us see with justice. Revealer of truth, help us see what is real.

Brian McLaren: Holy wisdom whose presence fills our ever expanding universe, help our horizons ever to expand.

Gigi Ross: Light of glory, help us to see with humility and all. Amen.

Brian McLaren: Amen.

Paul Swanson: Amen.

Brian McLaren: Thanks so much for joining us in this important time of prayer. If you'd like to engage with these prayers or intentions even more, they're available on a sister podcast called Practices For Learning How To See. You'll find the link in the show notes.