

LEARNING

HOW
TO

A stylized graphic of an eye is centered on the page. The eye is composed of a dark brown outer shape, a white inner shape, and a black circular pupil. The word "SEE" is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters inside the black pupil. The eye graphic overlaps with the text "HOW TO" above it and "with" below it.

SEE

with

Brian

McLaren

- Brian: When I was a preacher, I was preaching one Sunday about freedom and I used the image of breaking out of a box. And then, as preachers frequently do, I got into a little bit of a rant. And I started talking about how we're just surrounded by little boxes in which we live our lives. We wake up in a box called the bed, in a box called a bedroom and we look at the box called our clock to see what time it is. And then we go into the box of our bathroom and look in a box of a mirror and then get in a rectangular box called the shower. Then we go to the box of the closet or the drawer to get our clothes.
- Brian: And then we go to the kitchen, where we open a box of a cupboard and take out a box of cereal and eat our breakfast and then get in the box of our car to go to the box of our office, where we find the box of our cubicle. And we look in the box of our screen all day until we go home to the box of our home on the square block that is a box where we watch the box of a TV until we go to bed and we do it all again the next day.
- Brian: We live in the boxes of our external world. And in some ways, they really do reflect boxes in our internal world, man made structures. And we very often can't see anything outside of them. There's a story in the Gospel of John chapter nine where Jesus is walking along and he comes upon a man who has been blind from birth. And immediately we start to see people's boxes. The disciples say, "Who sinned? This man or his parents that he was born blind?"
- Brian: So you can understand in their box, if something bad happens, there's somebody to blame. And they're intrigued by the question, "If someone is born blind, how can they be blamed for the wrong that made them blind?" And so Jesus basically answers by saying, "I'm not working inside of your box at all. You're working in too small a box." And then he spits in the dust, makes mud and applies it to the man's eyes and tells him to wash in the pool of Siloam nearby. And this blind beggar is healed.
- Brian: But remember, he has never seen Jesus because when he left Jesus to go to the pool, he still couldn't see. He had a cake of mud on each eye. So that story is interesting enough. But one detail that is amazingly common in the Gospels, Jesus does this miracle on the Sabbath again, so he's in trouble with the religious leaders again. And in fact it creates a scandal in the town. And the religious leaders are not happy that a man was healed on the Sabbath. So they call in the man, they call in his parents, they call in the man again, they put them through interrogation and finally the man says, "Look, I don't know what's going on here, I just know I used to be blind, now I can see. And whoever healed me must be from God because it would take the power of God to heal somebody like me." And religious leaders reply, "You were born in sin. And you're trying to teach us."
- Brian: As if to say there is something going on in your history that caused you to be blind. You see, they're in the same box the disciples were. And you might say they have the same blindness within that box that disciples did. That the religious leaders know the cause of this man's blindness. It's that he was born illegitimately. And so Jesus goes on to find the man, introduces himself and says something really weird. "I came into the world for judgment so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind."
- Brian: And then some of the religious leaders are nearby and they hear him say this and they say to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" And Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sinned. But now that you say, we see your sin remains." This story is just so

dynamic and rich on so many levels. But what strikes me is the disciples begin by assuming if you're blind, it's because of sin. And at the end, Jesus says, "Look, if you're blind, you're not to be blamed for being blind. You wouldn't have sinned if you admitted you were blind." He says to the religious leaders, "It's your claim to see that gets you in trouble."

Brian: So, in today's episode we want to join Jesus in flipping the script. The script that sinners are blind or that people with problems deserve the problems they receive. And we'll join Jesus in saying, "Look, if we can begin by admitting that we don't see everything. If we can begin by questioning that we might be seeing from within a box that's keeping us from seeing a lot, then we can be helped. But if we're claiming we see everything already, we are really inside of a box." So in today's episode, we're going to look at two more biases. One is political and one is very personal and these are boxes that trap many of us. 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.

Paul: Thanks Brian. What a rich beginning. And before we step into our first bias of today, let's pause, look back at our first three episodes, where we've looked at seven biases. Seven ways that our brains work to keep us from seeing clearly. So first, we looked at two of the most basic biases. The confirmation bias and complexity bias. From there, we looked at the three social biases. Community, complementarity and contact bias. Then in our last episode, we just looked at the biases relating to our personal level of maturity. Competency bias and consciousness bias.

Paul: Today, we began with a political bias. It's called conservative liberal bias. So here's how we're going to be approaching this. How we're defining this. Our brains like to see as our party sees. We flock with those who see as we do. Liberals see through a nurturing parent window and conservatives see through a strict father window. Liberals value moral arguments based on justice and compassion, conservatives also place a high value in arguments based on purity, loyalty, authority and tradition. So this one is obviously very relevant to our world today. Brian what if you could tease that out further, but I know you've done a lot of work on this bias. What have you discovered through that study?

Brian: Well, first, it really is interesting. A lot of social psychologists have studied that conservative and liberal brains actually work differently. People can do tests on the way you respond to certain situations and they can tell you with a high degree of accuracy what your political leanings are. One group who studies this, they're called moral foundations theorists. And what they have found is that there are six basic lines of moral argument. In other words, any moral argument usually relies on one or more of these rationales. First is justice, second is compassion. It turns out that liberals almost always argue almost every issue based on justice and compassion. Then the other four are purity, loyalty, authority and liberty. And interestingly, conservatives argue on justice and compassion but they also argue on purity, loyalty, authority and liberty, and liberals seldom do.

Brian: And this has been tested and all kinds of experiments have been run to show these six lines of moral reasoning. And this tendency, obviously, we could find exceptions but this is a generalization. I've thought about this a good bit and I think one of the reasons that liberals or progressives tend to not talk about purity, loyalty, authority and liberty is because

they feel they often see conservatives using these four values against justice and compassion. And so that's something we can talk about in a couple of minutes. But one other finding, this comes from the work of George Lakoff, and he basically says, "Look, when we're raised as children, many of us live in the world of a strict father." Our experience of our upbringing is there's a strict man, a father or grandfather, maybe could be an uncle, but there's a strict man who is the dominant figure in our upbringing.

Brian: Others of us grow up with nurturing parents. And Lakoff suggests that that sends us on a trajectory of our lives. That many of us then, for the rest of our lives, live in the universe of a strict father and that tends toward being conservative politically. And others of us live in a world where the nurturing parent is natural and that leads us to be more progressive. And when you take just that amount of research and you set that loose on our political landscape and you look at all of our divisions and you watch what's happening, I think it helps us understand first, why the world looks obviously one way to one group of people, obviously, another way to a different group of people and maybe why we find it so hard to understand each other. So I'd love to hear what thoughts that stirs up in each of you.

Gigi: The thing that comes to me is just how important information can be to help us get over bias. But I also think we have to be inclined to want to get over the bias first. And because one of the things that's the most helpful for me in overcoming bias is to be able to put myself in the other person's shoes. And so to have a sense that there is something going on in the background, whether because of how someone's brought up or how their brains are wired that is in addition to what people are saying, there's something else going on, something larger. It doesn't negate any kind of harmful impact or anything. But it does show that there... I think of some things that we talked about earlier, and people in general are just doing the best that they can do. And that for at least for me, it softens any kind of hard edge I might have against somebody to be able to say that it allows me to put myself into their shoes even if a little bit, it can soften my bias against them.

Brian: That's beautifully said.

Mike: I really appreciate you saying that Gigi, especially that people are just doing the best they can do. It's interesting to think about this for me because I started out with one particular bias in this conservative to liberal contrast. And then as I got older I deconstructed it and now I would say I'm probably completely on the other side of it. I don't know if it's dangerous to say but I don't ever want to lose touch with why I held the previous bias that I had.

Mike: I don't want to lose touch with what was going on in my own mind and my own thinking, and I don't want to lose the ability in some way to relate to friends and family members who are completely on the other side of that spectrum. And it's a real effort. And I'd so appreciate the thoughts of the rest of you on this. It's a real effort to hold those bridges of communication and compassion and understanding even when I feel like I'm hearing things and seeing things that are utterly devoid of compassion and understanding. But I don't want to lose touch with remembering the way that

I thought about things back then, even though I'm disgusted by some of it, to be honest.

Paul: I love that. It brings to mind for me about how, the way that mystics, when they speak of their particular path or the way that they participate in reality, that humility is always the first step. And I think with this particular bias, if one person embodies humility regardless of where they land on the political spectrum, they're willing to engage on the supposed other side of the spectrum because they can offer that from a place of humility, of seeking to understand and even conceding points that they maybe didn't see from their own particular bent or bias. And I think of that, that cultivation of humility, if that was ingrained into our politics as a beginning place for conversation, what could happen? How could folks reach across the aisle and see beyond, as you said, just this natural first or foremost pieces that we see through the justice, compassion or the purity, loyalty, authority and liberty? Yeah, I find humility to be the potential bridge to hopefully speak through and speak to one another.

Brian: You know, Paul, as you said that I think, yeah. And one of the things that humility involves is a refusal to take the position of moral superiority. Because I think this is what we always want. We want to... That not all of us and not all the time, but there's some part of us that is always fighting being ashamed and being put down and so we want to get one up on somebody else. And in so much political discourse... And as you three know, I've been very involved in political campaigns for a number of years so I have skin in the game in this and I feel these temptations. But what I feel as someone who identify... I was brought up very conservative. And, Mike, I'm really glad you mentioned, it's possible for us to change. And my family had a mix. One of my parents was a Republican, one of my parents was a Democrat. I could never remember which was which. Sometimes I wondered if they could remember. But their leanings were politically conservative, especially as as they got older.

Brian: And I went in a different direction. But as you said, I have empathy. I want to remember the good motives that they had. And one of the things that this challenges and invites me to do is, when I, for example, as a progressive person, I sometimes watch Fox News and I seldom feel that I'm learning anything about reality outside of the television station. But every time I watch, I learn a lot about what motivates their loyal viewers who make up a very significant percentage of the American population. And having this tool from moral foundations theory, I could see, "They're arguing for purity right now." For example, in conservative resistance to accepting equality of LGBTQ persons, many of those arguments are related to certain forms of sex are pure and certain forms of sex are dirty. So that purity language comes in and then I realize, maybe progressives are making conservatives feel inferior because of their stance on racism or on the way they treat transgendered kids and they're coming back by reasserting, "We're not inferior, we're not shamed, we uphold purity."

Brian: So it becomes this battle of dueling moralisms. And then loyalty. You think, "Loyalty is a great value." But then you think, "How could it be abused?" And respect for authority, there's really a place for that. I agree. In fact, that's one of the things that my parents really taught me, is respect for authority. Yet you think, but if authority figures say to maintain old prejudices, that's perpetuating racism and anti trans

attitudes and so on. And the same with liberty. Even in the recent battles over whether you wear a mask or not. You could just see, this is the concern for liberty, I'm free to not wear a mask versus those people who are so concerned about compassion that they don't want to make somebody else sick. And so then, standing up for liberty seems macho and standing up for compassion seems weak. But when I understand that, I realize it's not that those folks think of themselves as bad, they just think of themselves as moral by a different yardstick. And at the very least, I think that helps us to approach one another without the same superiority and disdain.

Mike: That's so helpful, Brian. And who doesn't see the value of morality? It's such a crucial component of our ability to function in the world, how we treat each other. And I have to admit, growing up in a world where the word, purity was thrown around, it's even hard for me to say. It's hard for me to say or hard for me to hear but it's still important for us to talk about. And so I so appreciated the other day, when you shared that story in the Gospels where Jesus addresses the value of purity. And he said, "It's not what goes into a person that makes a person impure, it's what comes out." And I think that's in Matthew 15.

Mike: The rest of the passage reads, "But Peter said to him, explain this parable to us." And Jesus went on, "Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart and this is what defiles us. For out of our heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile." So it doesn't seem like Jesus is rejecting purity as a value. And again, I have to say, it's hard for me to even say that, but it definitely doesn't seem that Jesus is rejecting purity as a value. He's shifting our thinking from applying it to the body to instead applying it to the soul.

Brian: Well, let me just say, Mike. Yes. And this issue of purity is one I feel because I'm quite involved with issues of climate change, I constantly speak of dirty energy and dirty fossil fuels. And I do that because I'm trying to appeal to people's desire for purity. And when I care about the environment, I'm caring about purity of our water and purity of our air. So I think, I uphold purity. It's just a question of where we see it. And that to me is what I love about that passage. And you even feel Jesus as being a little bit mischievous. It's, "You're worried about what goes into your mouth? Kosher or nonkosher? Hands washed or unhands washed? Remember, whatever goes into your mouth ends up in the toilet." It's his way of saying, "It's not so clean." I know this isn't in any of the creed's but Jesus is just brilliant. The way he challenges people's thinking.

Gigi: I like the idea of, for all those values, justice, compassion, purity, liberty, the others, that it may be more about the level at which we're looking at them as opposed to those values themselves. And I wonder if there's a bridge in that. In that, if liberals could look at the ways in which they actually are upholding purity or the ways they're actually are... And you can see that it's just a different level. And if the same thing for the conservatives. Especially with, I think justice is not the same, but with compassion because compassion does have a... For many people it's the bleeding heart liberal feel to it. But if they could see that what's underneath, actually, I think for many of them, underneath the purity of the liberty, there is some compassion under there. If they could see that level, and maybe they can talk from where they have the same values but different levels, it might be a way of bridging some of

that bias.

Paul: That's so good. It makes you think of no value as an island unto itself. They're all connected. They're all supporting one another to build a beautiful landscape to traverse across. I really appreciate that Gigi. I'm curious for you all about the strict father nurturing parent tax. Is there anything that comes up for you all with that in relationship to this?

Gigi: Well, my mom was the one who was disciplinary.

Paul: Got the script already.

Gigi: But I have to say, in the African American culture there is a different way of looking at liberal and conservative. Justice is just huge no matter where you are in the political spectrum. But at least in the culture I grew up in, there was also ultim conservatism when it came to homosexuality, when it came to abortion. But my parents were Democrats. And for many of the people I know in my culture, it was historical. Who supported civil rights? So it came from that difference. And there was a shift, as you probably know, because most African Americans started out Republican because of Abraham Lincoln.

Gigi: But then in the 60s and even before, there were two Southern Democrats that just changed their stripes so many... So they changed their stripes to Republican, so those who were too still diehard Republicans went over to Democrats. For me personally, I'm neither. I'm an independent. Although I tend to lean toward the democratic liberal side because I tend to lean toward compassion. But I think given my family history, there was nurturing but there was also a lot of strictness and strictness tended to win out. But I think there are other factors, mostly, I think in being part of a basically historically oppressed minority also weighs into where my bias goes when it comes to liberal and conservative.

Mike: I really appreciate you sharing that Gigi because it's so profoundly insightful and also gives us this look at the limitations of the models and the theories that we use. And how those models and theories can have their own bias. It's built into them. And I think Paul an answer to your question. Same is interesting for me as I, didn't even realize it till we're talking about it in this conversation, I tend to think of political persuasion in a developmental theory. So I don't know, was it... Someone here will know. Was it Churchill who said I don't trust anyone who doesn't start out as a liberal and end up as a conservative?

Brian: I think so. I think he said something like that. Yeah.

Mike: Yeah. And it's so funny because for me, to own my own bias, I move and groove in a friend circle where almost all of us to a person started out conservative and ended up liberal. So it's a very interesting thing to ponder how our family of origin affects it, how our friends affects it and how our own development affects it and then to turn around and look at those developmental models and realize they also have their own persuasion and limitations.

Brian: I'll just throw one other little bomb into the mix here. I think part of what's happened in our politics in the last several years, is that a new group has come up in addition to liberals and conservatives. And I would call that authoritarians. If anybody's interested, I have a little ebook about this on my website. And I think what happened is authoritarians came along and they talked purity, loyalty, authority and liberty. But what they really valued was

winning. And you might remember that when the former president said he could stand in Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and wouldn't lose support, I think what he was saying is, "People believe that I will help them win. And in the interest of winning, they'll throw out justice, compassion, purity, loyalty, authority and liberty." That winning is the only value. Winning for our side. And anybody who supports us is on our side and anybody who doesn't is the enemy.

Brian: So it creates this... It just changes the game entirely. And Gigi your bringing up the history of this, I think is really important too, because it reminds us that liberal and conservative aren't two eternal categories that exist in the cosmos. They're constantly changing and they're reacting to local situations. And in our country, we also have to remember... In Jesus' day, there was no democracy. So although there were political parties, they weren't parties in a democracy. They were different interest groups. And so what's happened, especially in a country like ours that has two main parties, is that everything gets put into dualistic categories. We own this value, you own that value. And I even find this in some progressive circles that I operate in. People are embarrassed to bring up loyalty as a value or they're embarrassed to bring up liberty. They have that value but they're afraid if they use it, they'll be seen like traitors. So the binariness of this really creates all kinds of problems.

Paul: Yeah, I love that. I feel like there's times where I've tucked some of my conservative values under my sleeve in fear of what others may think of me in progressive circles. And I just so appreciate you muddying the water there Brian. And to further muddy the water, I'm wondering, in season one, we got a few comments who felt that by criticizing Trump or naming Fox News, that you were displaying bias and taking sides in a dualistic way. And since we've just brought up this dichotomy of how we talk about these things, could you address this concern?

Brian: Yeah, it's a really legitimate question. So first, let me say, bias doesn't mean taking sides in the way we're talking about it. To be unbiased doesn't mean that you aren't allowed to pick a side. Bias has to do with whether that side becomes a box that we can't see out of and that we never are allowed to or allow ourselves to have empathy for people who might be in the other box. And bias means that we can no longer see the morality and the moral arguments of people who are in the other party. And I also think people sometimes think that to be non dual means that you don't take sides. But I remember what Dr. King said, "To try to claim that you're neutral in a situation of evil is always to side with the oppressor." Because if the oppressor has power and you just say, "I'm not going to get involved, I don't take sides," Then you're in a sense complicit with the status quo which empowers the oppressor.

Brian: And so, I'm aware of this and I'm sure I crossed the line, I'm sure I go across the line sometimes but I'm also sure that people who are so afraid of crossing that line might make mistakes in other ways. We all make mistakes in this. And I think this is where that value that you began with, Paul talking about humility, we just have to have the humility to say, "I make mistakes sometimes. And people on the other side of this issue are right sometimes. And let me be humble enough to admit that." Maybe one other thing I'll say, because we live in a political situation where there are parties. My basic policy is that I want to differ boldly and graciously with people who I think are doing wrong. I was in Charlottesville. I have been surrounded by proud boys screaming insults and racist statements and homophobic statements. I've received death threats. I understand the vitriol that's out there. And I don't

want to be afraid to speak up and say that I think white supremacy is evil.

Brian: And I think Christian nationalism is a distortion of both Christianity and a proper kind of patriotism. So I believe in differing boldly with my opponents. But I know that I won't win them over if I'm nasty or don't understand them or hate them. So I always remember that my opponents are human beings. And so I don't want to insult my opponents. But I don't want to coddle them either. And I don't want to, especially if they're in power, I don't want to pretend that they're not.

Brian: But that leaves this huge number of people in the middle. And very often, they're the ones who are watching everybody else argue. And they're the ones who I think have to observe who is demonstrating all of those six qualities. Who is demonstrating justice, compassion, purity, loyalty, authority and liberty. And when they see the whole package of morals reflected in people, including that grace of humility, I think that can help change things in a better direction. I don't know, I'd be interested... You all might see weaknesses or problems in that. I'd be very open to it or might have additional comments.

Paul: I love the way you nuanced how you've approached this. And from that posture of humility and saying, "Hey, there may be times where I have stepped on a line." And can we give grace to one other in those moments so that we can keep the conversation going while still standing firmly in the ground of truth and morality from your own sense of justice and compassion? I just think that's such a beautiful way to engage the conversation. So I appreciate that nuance and also that openness for furthering the dialogue.

Mike: I also appreciated you just referencing the concept of non duality, because in some of the spiritual circles that I move and groove in, sometimes that concept gets thrown around and it's misunderstood, I think. To mean that we can't ever have an opinion or take a stand or disagree with someone. And it's this misunderstanding that non duality means that we all live in this universal puree of total agreement, when in reality, non duality means it's not this or that thinking. It's infinitely more complex than that. I think it's so helpful to realize that it's an invitation into a deeper wrestling with these issues and not an invitation to step away from them.

Brian: Yes. Learning How to See will continue in a moment. I'd be interested, Gigi, in what you would think about this. I've met very spiritually sincere people who are very concerned about non duality, who are white and they want to say that, "We're above all of that sort of thing. We're just focusing on consciousness and we don't get involved in politics. Politics is divisive and dualistic that's beneath us and part of me wants to say, "Yeah, here you are a person of privilege with a lot of power. It is very easy for you to take that kind of stand. But if you felt solidarity with people who are being harmed, you might be prone to speak up."

Brian: But then there's one other side of it, I'd love to hear your thought on this too. That for example, I have Muslim friends who really don't want to speak up about politics, because they feel they're already visible and they're already stigmatized. As soon as they speak up, they become even more targets. And so their way of surviving is to say, "I need to be quiet." And I think there's this other kind of dualism where people can say, "Everybody has to speak up just the way I am without empathy or understanding for our people who are in a different situation." But I don't know, I'd be interested in your thoughts, especially about that Gigi.

- Gigi: It brings to mind a couple of things. One is, we were talking about the simplicity, complexity bias. And I think it's the simple thing to say, "I'm above duality." It's a simple thing to say that, "I'm above politics." But in reality if you're living on the earth, you can't be above politics, if you're living on the earth, to even get out of bed and walk to the bathroom, you got to be in the world of duality. So non duality, I think sometimes gets confused with unity, which gets confused with uniformity. And non duality basically means not two not one. And so you're not siding on all unity, and you're not siding on all duality, you're alone in that hole. And we think of the Trinity as a non dual symbol, you have three distinct beings, but they're one and so you don't become this one amorphous thing.
- Gigi: And one of the beings in the Trinity was very much involved in politics, was very much involved in the world. So I don't know how you can say that I'm really practicing non duality, and that being your body and the world. Especially if you're Christian I don't see how you can do that. And the other thing, I'm remembering, there's a... I hope is okay to talk about other podcasts on this podcast. But there's a podcast that I binge listened to last year called Busy Being Black. It was by a multiracial, African American white Irish mother, who grew up in London came to the states in the south, they went back to England, who's queer. And he grew up in what he would call proximity to whiteness, because he was very very light skinned, he had lots of privilege. And then as things happened in his life, he became in a place where he started to reclaim his blackness.
- Gigi: And he did this podcast to just learn how to do that and just talking mostly blacks, but other people of color and once in a while the white person. And when he would talk to different people of color who were queer, they were always... There were white gay men who were saying, "You got to come out, that's the best thing you can do, you can always come out." And one of the guys he talked to was this, I can't remember which Arab country, maybe it was Persia, maybe was Iran.
- Gigi: But this was a person who, if got out that he was queer, he could have been killed. And somebody outed him and so he had to run for his life. And so it's one thing to say, "I'm going to be out." It's one thing to say, "I'm going to be in politics, because it doesn't hurt me to say to stand up on the side of someone who's oppressed." But to ask someone who's oppressed to do that without taking into account what it will cost them, I think is actually to further their oppression. So that that's where I go into that.
- Brian: What an amazing story and it just seems to me that brings us back to that value of humility and that value of compassion. To have compassion that other people are not in the same situation as I am.
- Gigi: Another thing I think about is just kinds of ways, practices, that we can engage in to overcome our conservative liberal biases, both for even if we're staying in liberal circles just to broaden that conversation, as well as when we're talking to others that were close to or not close to who may be on a different side than we are. And what comes to my mind, especially in the things that we've been talking about is this practice of discernment. I learned that discernment really happens when you're trying to figure out two goods.
- Gigi: And you look at all those values that you're talking about they're all good. But for some reason, we've allowed ourselves to say that because certain people are saying this value,

it's bad. And because certain people were saying this value, it's good. But the sermon is really looking at this way of what is the good that needs to be practiced in this moment, as opposed to what is always good and what is always bad. So that's one of the practices that comes to my mind when I think about how we can become this bridge and overcome our bias, whether it's conservative or liberal. I wonder if any of you have any others that come to mind?

Mike: I think for me, as a good yin yang, I try to engage in as much shadow work as I possibly can, which is when I feel anger and resistance towards someone else to look for those same things that work in myself. Which doesn't mean that you then stop, and you don't still speak truth to power, and work to shift injustice in the world, but nonetheless to recognize my own projections. And so even instead of the word conservative, when I struggle with things that I recognize as fundamentalism, it helps me to step back just to create a moment of empathy and laugh or recognize the fundamentalism in my own life. You can still be a fundamentalist talking about the Enneagram or spiral dynamics or non duality or order disorder. It creeps up everywhere. And it's been really helpful for me to always bring that back. Jung says "Everything that frustrates us and irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of our self," and then still from that place to continue to engage.

Paul: That's so good. And what came to mind for me was the practice of a daily examine, at the end of the day to review the day and for me often to try to look at the things that offended me. And was I truly hurt? Or was it my persona that was hurt, or a fear that I'm trying to protect? Or what is my relationship to that? And I think a lot of that comes through with the next bias, I know we're going to get to hear it's around comfort, is being challenged in my comfort. And I think having the courage to look at myself, through that kind of examination of how I'm reacting or responding to what is mine to do in the world, is some of the most arduous but important work for me to do in my spiritual incarnational life, as somebody who wants to show up in both the political sphere but also just in day to day life with family and community.

Gigi: Speaking of practices, here's a prayer that we'll use, specifically focused on conservative liberal bias.

Gigi: Holy source of both surprise and consistency,

Mike: help me never to be held captive by rigid ideology on the one hand.

Brian: Or addiction to novelty on the other.

Paul: Do not that let me be blinded by conformity or loyalty.

Mike: To any political party or economic theory.

Brian: Help me always to do justice persistently.

Paul: Love kindness cheerfully.

Gigi: And with unflagging sincerity.

- Mike: To walk in humility with you living God.
- Gigi: We move on to our next bias. This one is very pertinent right now it has three possible names, comfort, complacency, or convenience bias. Basically, our brains welcome data that allows us to relax and be happy. And they reject data that requires us to adjust, work or inconvenience ourselves. So we just put this out there. Everyone asked, “Where do you see this bias at work, in your own life or in the world in general?” It’s worth acknowledging how pertinent this question is right now, at this moment in time. I know in another context, we’ve had conversations about tension fatigue, and something that we’re all feeling. And I use that we term as if it can be applied universally, which it cannot. I know I feel tension fatigue every moment of every day. And I think it begs the question, how much more that comfort complacency and convenience bias is at work right now? How’s that real for all of you?
- Paul: I think I have a PhD in the comfort bias. Growing up, being a white straight man, I always said my comfort is of most importance. I was trained to always seek comfort and that comfort should come easily to me. And I think through various seasons of awakening and looking at myself and looking at our world, asking the hard question and often ashamed of my own answer of, “At what cost to others does my comfort come?” And I think I see this happening right now in the pandemic. I see this happening right now in uprisings around racial justice, I see this happen on political spheres. And yet also a need to have a certain level of comfort to engage in higher, I don’t want to say higher, that’s engage in more complex discussions around, what does it look like to help be an agent of transformation in society? So the comfort bias is just what that is, just in my face all the time. I think I retreat to comfort when I get overwhelmed or anxious. And I’ve been taught that that is the food one should eat in such moments.
- Gigi: Of those three words it’s the convenience, one that comes for me, it’s how can I do the least of the things I don’t like, so I can get things that I do like. And I remember just learning things about how much that cost not only other people, but it costs people’s lives for me to have the convenience I have. I think of the way that we just toss things aside, the next new iPhone is out, so I’m going to toss the old iPhone away. And sometimes when we toss that old iPhone away, it winds up in landfills where people are breaking them open to get the mercury and other toxic metals and they’re dying, and they’re poisoning their atmosphere.
- Gigi: I remember one Lent, my practice was to look at the labels that my clothes came from, and to pray for the workers who made those clothes. Because many of them work in places that actually are killing them. We just got through Holy Week and Easter, but there are ways that everyday people are dying for us. And it’s very easy to just not even think about that, because I want my convenience, I want this to be easy. And that’s a bias I have every single day of my life. And it’s actually costing people their lives.
- Brian: For some reason, I’m going back to one of the most stressful periods in my life when I was a pastor. And of course, this is a long time ago before email dominated our lives the way it does now. Back in those days, it was voicemail and I’d come in and there was my phone, and there would be all these voicemail messages. And I’m the kind of person, I like to empty my inbox and I like to get my work done. I’m a Jay I just like to have everything done. But there was this period of time where I was under so much stress, and there was conflict in the

church. And I remember this feeling like I've got five voicemail messages waiting for me, probably three of them are going to be friendly, and two of them are going to be hostile, I don't have the energy to take the risk to check.

Brian: And it's one of the only times in my life where I felt that much stress where I just didn't want to know. And maybe that helps me understand a little bit of how our brains work all the time. It's looking for the things to say, "What can I ignore because I'm dealing with other things, or I want other things?" And when we're just aware that our brain is trying to be efficient it's trying to minimize distractions. It's trying to keep us above the yellow line and certainly above the red line of exhaustion. That maybe helps us understand that then we could be tuning out things that we really should need to know. Anyway that extreme example comes to my mind, I hate to even remember it because I just remember that feeling day after day, I can't handle one more thing. But a whole lot of us we could handle a whole lot more things. And we just got that mode going all the time.

Mike: It's interesting, I can't help but... So I'm thinking back to this gross oversimplification that religion is the opiate of the masses. But I can't help but think about how in my own life I have so often used my spirituality as a cheat, to hide my comfort and complacency bias in platitudes of like, "Oh, it's all good, everything happens for a reason. All these bad things will be made to serve a good purpose down the road." And I don't mean to make light of anyone's guiding spiritual principles, but if I'm being honest there's been too much of that in my own life.

Gigi: I'm wondering, given that we've just talked about the different ways that the comfort bias has shown up in our lives. Do you think that being aware of it can be a way to help us overcome it? Do you have any specific ways that you try to address comfort bias in your life?

Paul: One comes to mind, I think it jumped there from because you mentioned, what are your Lent practices Gigi, I was thinking about when I used to work at a Bible college. And for Lent, I would engage in the practice of eating with the students that made me the most uncomfortable. And it was a way for me to not just hang out with the students that were thoughtful, intelligent or funny but to spend time with those that I wasn't sure how to love, that I wasn't sure how to engage in conversation, I just would feel uncomfortable.

Paul: So after 40 days of breaking bread and clinking glasses, I would often find these sparks of connection. And then how do I fan them into a flame so that it could be ongoing, or there could be a shared sense of warmth between one another? This is why I love seasons like Lent or opportunities to really have some foresight about what kind of practice do I want to engage in? And I wouldn't have used the word comfort bias at the time but it clearly connected me of how I showed up to lean into my own natural inclinations, and try to push up against it into hopefully a more expansive loving the uncomfot of difference or perceived difference that I was experiencing with these students.

Brian: I'm just thinking, Paul, I hope that the students didn't know that was your practice, because they would have seen you.

Paul: I was very private about it until this moment so my apologies to those who remember it

- Gigi: There's a single tear running down the cheek of one listener right now.
- Brian: But I think of father Richard's beautiful statement where he says he prays for one humiliation today. Which is probably a good way to say let me expect at least once a day to have my comfort disrupted somehow.
- Mike: It's interesting, too. I love both Paul and Gigi have mentioned Lent and I have an Orthodox priest friend who always reminds me he's like "You Westerners always forget that a good fast always has to be followed by a good feast." And so I think he's... And he's very often right in his critique of man saying that. I think what's helpful for me too in this is to think of legitimate ways to bring comfort into my life proactively, so that I then can be more ruthless with the ways I hide in that bias. Whether it's spending an extra 75 cents to get the good tissues or the good toilet paper or something like that, I don't know. But just really being proactive to find really good ways to have good self care that's not spiritual bypassing, so then I can be a little bit more honest in my engagement with discomfort.
- Gigi: I like that. And I guess that in some ways, that segues into another question that I have, which is, do you think there's ever a time when we simply can't afford more demands on us like what Brian was talking about, but even more so for people in the social circumstances they find themselves? Are there other times maybe when a comfort bias could protect us?
- Brian: Yeah, I think that helps us remember that there is a evolutionary value for all of these biases. They are there for a reason. And so I think we have to accept that yeah, there are times where I need to say, "I can't take any more right now." I suppose that's what Sabbath is about. It's about saying, "Look, you can't ask me to do work on this day, I need this time off" And vacations, holidays, all of this they're ways that we say, "I need comfort and I need a rest" And maybe we'll find if we... Maybe one of the reasons why comfort bias rules us so often is that we're not taking those times that we need for rest. I just heard on some documentary recently about how Americans are the worst country for taking vacations. And so I think there is a lot of wisdom in that.
- Gigi: I think about there was a season in my life where I'd had a lot of bad things happen in short succession. So I'd had a car accident and lost my car and then right after that lost the job and as a result of losing that Job had lost the place that I was living. It was like dominoes one thing after another. And I was trapped in all these big existential questions about why everything was happening. And I was trying to figure it out.
- Gigi: And a dear friend of mine who's a mentor and a therapist, he and I were just hanging out one night and he said, "Just remember Maslow's hierarchy of needs it's okay to let go of everything but survival right now, it really is okay just to survive this crisis, and then wrestle with the deeper things on the other side of it." And I don't know if that's helpful or not, but it was so freeing for me to know that it was really genuinely all right to just go into survival mode for a little bit. And also then was a lot more effective when I did worry about more practical things like somewhere to live and how to pay my bills.
- Brian: Yes, well, that resonates with that beautiful Franciscan statement, "What is mine to do? What is mine to do right now?" And maybe what's mine to do right now is survive and say no to all the requests that come my way. I think that's super healthy.

- Gigi: I think of the ways that this comfort bias gets turned on its head. I think about especially in neighborhoods of poor people of color, where they have these really awful looking buildings, or because of the way economics have happened there's no grocery stores and it's like every other building has been abandoned. And then they say they want to build a garden. And all of a sudden, people start paying attention to the neighborhood and say, "We're not going to give you any money to build a garden, or we're not going to give you any money to make this building look good."
- Gigi: And to me, that's interesting, because there is this importance to, I would call it self care, to have something aesthetically pleasing, something that gives you joy and comfort in the midst of a really awful situation. And yet, it's okay for people who can go out and buy their toys to have a comfort bias. But it's not okay for someone who is just trying to live hand to mouth and can't even do that, even though they're working three jobs to want something beautiful in their neighborhood. And so it's just interesting how that comfort bias, it's okay for some people to have it but it's not okay if it's going to cost us money for people we don't want to even think about, who are actually making our convenience and our comfort available. We're not going to turn around and give them something.
- Paul: Gigi that was such a beautiful landing place for this part of the conversation. Let's say we turn our attention to the prayer that we will use for addressing our comfort, complacency, convenience bias.
- Gigi: Spirit of truth who sets us free by truth.
- Paul: Please strengthen my desire for truth.
- Mike: So that I will face rather than reject.
- Brian: Truths that inconvenience me.
- Gigi: Grant me the resolve to welcome the pain that often comes with wisdom.
- Paul: Help me choose empathy over apathy.
- Mike: Helped me choose courage over complacency.
- Brian: And helped me to abhorred the bliss that accompanies ignorance. For these two biases hit home with all of us, I think we feel them boxing us in and so we would like to invite everyone now to focus and strengthen your desire to see your desire to see what's outside your box. After we share a line of each prayer, we hope you'll repeat it aloud if you can or silently if you're not in a place where you can repeat it aloud. And then we'll offer a few moments of silence so you can let that desire resonate and deepen in your heart.
- Mike: Source of wonder, help us see with wonder.
- Gigi: Depth of mystery help us find a light and truth so profound this surpass all knowing.
- Paul: Fountain of compassion help us see with compassion.

Mike: Bringer of justice help us see with justice.

Gigi: Revealer of truth help us see what is real.

Paul: Holy wisdom His presence fills our ever expanding universe. Help the horizons ever to expand.

Brian: Light of glory help us to see with humility and awe. Amen.

Paul: Amen.

Mike: Amen.

Gigi: Amen.

Brian: Amen. Thanks so much for joining us on 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.