

**LEARNING
HOW
TO**



SEE

with
**Brian
McLaren**

**Season 4, Episode 5
Find the Flow**

feat. Jacqui Lewis

Brian: What would it mean for us if we happened to live during the decline of the old humanity when a new humanity is in the painful, fragile process of being born? What if some of us are in the process of trying to resuscitate the old, while others of us are conceiving, gestating and giving birth to the new? What if the growth of the new movement, the new humanity, the new social creation or construction depends on the old one losing its hegemony? As I write those words, I can't help but feel a flood of resonances with the Hebrew scriptures. I feel echoes of Isaiah speaking of God doing a new thing. Something fresh springing forth so that there will be good news for the poor, recovery of sight for the blind, freedom for the incarcerated and oppressed. Oppression of the poor is one of the hallmarks of the old humanity.

I hear the prophet imagining a promised time when weapons are recycled into farm equipment because nobody studies war anymore. War is one of the hallmarks of the old humanity. I hear Ezekiel's Oracle about a new heart, a heart of flesh that replaces the heart of stone. The hardening of hearts in the name of self-interest and in group interest is a hallmark of the old humanity. I hear Amos envisioning a time when a river of justice rolls down from the heights filling the lowest places first. A concentration of power and wealth at the top is a hallmark of the old humanity. I hear Micah relativized everything in his religion except doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly before God. Hoarding power, loving money and walking in racial, religious, or national pride are hallmarks of the old humanity.

In the Christian scriptures, I hear Mary envisioning a time when the rich are sent away to feel the hunger of the poor they have exploited and avoided. A time when the poor are filled with the good things previously enjoyed only by the rich. I hear Jesus speaking parables of a new kingdom of death and resurrection, of God loving the world and wanting to save it, not condemn it. I hear him speaking of coming wars and rumors of wars that mark the death of the status quo, but he sees them as birth pangs, not a last gasp.

I hear Paul speaking of a new creation and a new humanity in Christ, and John describing a new Jerusalem descending to the earth like a giant cube in a science fiction movie. And so I imagine, in the middle of the old meta movement of empires, domination, extraction and exploitation, what if a long succession of prophets, including Mary, John, the Baptizer, Jesus, Paul and others, were giving us a vision for a new movement being born? And what if the Christian religion instead of living into that progressive vision of a better future pretty thoroughly accommodated itself to the old meta movement? And what if the Christian religion married the powers that be and slept more or less comfortably in their arms for nearly 2000 years?

Welcome everyone to Learning How to See. In this season, we're talking about learning how to see the Christian faith in a fresh way. And in this episode, we're talking about shifting the question from do I stay Christian to do I stay human. And if I'm focusing on what kind of human I want to be, and if that leads me to make love really my highest priority, then how do I put that love into motion, into action in the world? And I'm so happy to have my friend and guest and co-conspirator Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis with me here.

Jacqui, you and I growing up in different parts of the country, so many things different, we've both ended up really being big believers in movements. And we'd like to talk about movements. I call it finding the flow, meaning I can be involved in my own loving actions in

the world, but when I can synergize my actions with you and we can synergize our actions with someone across the country or across town or across the world, we start to build this thing of movement. And I'd love to hear you just share a little bit about your own experience with movements and how you think about movement participation.

Jacqui: I went to a seminary when I was 30. And for a while, I thought I was late. But it was exactly right time to go, to stick yourself into this incredible stream of thought. All the theologians that have gone before us, the ones that we love, the ones we want to critique, the ones that push us, the ones that shove us... I was especially taken by womanism, this feeling that theology was happening all around all the time. Not just in the room, but in the movies, in the theater, and the jazz, in the guitar. So in a way, I want to pick up this feeling of motion there. There was this feeling I had that I was in an arc, in a story, but also like in a river.

Brian: Yeah, a flow.

Jacqui: A flow. And then I found this Rumi quote when I was writing my book. "To do something from our soul is a river, it's a joy." Like what? But yes, to do something from our soul is a river, is a joy. So I'm weird. So I geeked out about what did that possibly mean. And I do think that Rumi meant the river is the flow, and then it took me to... Do you know Richard Bach's book *Illusions*?

Brian: Yeah, I remember that from many years ago. Yeah.

Jacqui: Long, long, long, long, long time ago when you and I were just children. He tells the story at the beginning of the book of, like a parable that gets us to David's motto of the Unlikely Messiah. And he talks about these organisms hanging onto the side of the riverbank, if you will. And they're just being tossed gently. And there they are just there. And one of the little organisms gets bored and is like, "If I don't let go, something's going to happen." And they say, "No, do not let go. You will die." But he lets go, and he gets tossed about, tossed about. But then pretty soon, he gets comfortable in the river, in the flow, and the other organisms downstream look up and point and say, "Ready y'all? Low, a Messiah. See how he flies."

Brian: Yes.

Jacqui: So ever since I read that book when I was a wee... Not that young, but a teenager, I have been really fascinated about what does it mean to let go and get in the river. And I wrote in my book, "We get in the river. And when we get in this river that is a joy, that is the movement, we are sometimes in the shallow parts, in the sha-ha-ha-lows. And sometimes we're in the deep end, and sometimes we tag out." This movement for love and justice is as old as time. The first time one of us stood up on two legs and came out of the cave and said, "Hey, that's not fair." We're in that river, we're in that movement toward righting the world. Right?

Brian: Oh my... And it's so different from what a lot of us inherited with religion. That it was all about, "Here I stand, and I will never change my opinions and never change my thoughts, and I'll keep exactly the same traditions." Oh my goodness. It's so different than to say, "No, this thing is an arc, this thing is a flow, and I love that." With the first person who stands up on two legs and says, "This isn't fair." The first little organism that let's go and is willing to be in movement rather than...

Jacqui: Right.

Brian: Yeah. It makes me think also just that image of Jesus saying, “Follow me,” and baptizing people into a river.

Jacqui: Oh yeah. Brian, I was in Israel about six weeks ago. And some of us went to the Jordan River and some of us got in the river and rebaptized ourselves. And it really was a thing. That river is a thing, that flow... That’s why it captures your imagination. Do you think it’s because we come out of the womb in a flow? What do you think?

Brian: Yeah, I mean, our bodies are water. This image of flow is... Yeah. And we, human beings need freshwater to live. So we’ve got to be near a stream or a spring or a river. You and I have lent our efforts and been caught up in the current of several different movements and in our lives. You mentioned how you came late to seminary, I, in some ways came late to movement involvement. I grew up in a little stream of Christianity that said, “Being involved in social and political movements is worldly. We’re concerned about spiritual and heavenly things.” Time came in my life where I said, “No, Jesus taught us to pray, ‘Your kingdom come, your will be done here on earth as in heaven.’” So this is about this world and being involved in that arc, in that flow.

One of the things I do in the chapter Find the Flow, in this book. I talk about big movements. I call them meta movements. These might be movements that we might call, movements like western civilization, or modernity. These really, really big movements that last hundreds, if not thousands of years. And then there are small movements that arise for a year or three years or five years, and they have their important work that they do. And one of our opportunities is figuring out how we’re going to navigate that to be part of these larger movements, and then to find out how to participate in some smaller movements. And I’d just love to hear anything about your experience in some specific movements. It’s one of the things you do as a pastor, really. You invite your whole congregation-

Jacqui: Into a movement.

Brian: Into various movements, yeah.

Jacqui: At Middle Church, we don’t say, “Would you like to join our church?” We say, “Would you like to join the movement?” And when we say that... We started that maybe, I don’t know, 12 or so years ago, both thinking about how people feel about joining and belonging. But also... Honestly, Brian, around the time that I connected with you and the Auburn fellows, I had the sense that I was inviting people into a flow that included all of us. So when you join Middle, you’re joining Brian, you’re joining Valerie, you’re joining William, and all that. Just to say that really quickly, but to say... When I was in seminary, I did 10-day training right after graduation. 10 day community organizing training through the IAF, the Industrial Areas Foundation. Listeners might have different feelings about Solinsky or whatever, but this 10-day training on how to be a part of a movement was maybe the best class I took in seminary besides homiletics, and for my soul.

And the idea that it starts one to one. So it starts one to one, and then you find out each other's self interests, and then you make a house meeting and you talk about your self-interests and how can you collaborate. And then you have a town hall meeting. And this is some strategy, but the fundamental philosophy is it really starts small. So some of the first movements I joined as an adult were... going to meet with that Catholic priest. And the four of us are going to go work on the playground, and we're just going to work on the playground. And that movement, we're just going to work on the cops who killed that girl, Jennie Hightower, I won't forget her name. Small, focused, beginning, middle, end, by an outcome, here's it.

That's how I became an organizer, I think. And because that's how I became an organizer, I feel like my sense of movements now, whether I'm doing gun control... Which I think is get the guns off the street, that's how you control them. Or Black Lives Matter, anti-racist work, or reproductive rights work, or voting rights work. When I go to something, Brian, I feel like it's an episode in the bigger story. And to kind of come to your flow water metaphor, it's a wave in the ocean. It is a ripple in the stream. Pick one of those. All of it is pushing toward healing. And this one you ride, you finish it at crest, you evaluate, and you think about the next one that's coming and you get ready to jump in there.

Brian: As you say, what you learned in that organizing class was that it starts with two or three, and doesn't that bring to mind, Jesus? Wherever two or three are gathered in my name. I wrote a book a few years ago called Great Spiritual Migration. And in that book, I had been exposed to movement theory. After I learned about social movement theory, I went back and reread the gospels, and it just hit me, like it was a revelatory experience to say, "Jesus was a movement builder." Jesus moved through the world gathering people, inspiring them with a vision, giving them opportunities to practice it. People maybe never thought of this, but the Sermon on the Mount was a teach in giving people free education.

Jacqui: Yeah.

Brian: Military movements spread around killing people. Jesus goes around healing people. One of the ways that military movements gain control is through what we call sanctions, but it was starving people, keeping any supplies from going in till they would surrender. Jesus goes around feeding people. You just start to see all these are demonstrations and this is a movement. And instead of saying, "I want you to praise me forever and keep talking about what I did," he says, "You will do greater things than I have done." And so he's trying to empower people to keep the movement going. To me, it's a really great way to think about... Maybe part of why many people are leaving Christianity is that it's a movement that in many cases has either stopped moving or moves in the wrong direction.

Jacqui: Well, yeah, that's right. And when you said that, I thought, "Is there a place in the..." I'm not this girl, but is there a place where the waves are coming against each other because of the currents or the... Right? Something like that?

Brian: Yeah.

Jacqui: If there's two forces, then there's not motion. There's just collision.

Brian: Commotion.

Jacqui: Commotion. I like that better. Chaos. And sadly, the church has not moved expeditiously with and toward love because the other force is domination or patriarchy or white supremacy or all those things that came along with it. Empire, as we became a movement. We became a movement in Palestine, Jerusalem, Israel, spread the news around... And then Rome says like, "Ah, I like this." And that pushes us in another direction. Does that resonate?

Brian: No, it really does. And it maybe helps us see that, this is why if we just stay obsessed with the question, do I stay Christian, and never ask the question, what kind of movement do I want to contribute to? Where do I want to invest the energy of my life? Where do I want to throw that energy to build momentum? What kind of world do I envision?

One of the things I try to do in the book is I try to offer some just specific encouragements to people. At the Center for Action and Contemplation, a lot of people come to events and living school because they're really interested in contemplation. And I think sometimes they're a little disappointed when they find out, "Hey, we don't think the goal of this is to just get you contemplating. We believe that when you become a more contemplative person, it actually will lead you inevitably to loving action, and it will lead you into being involved in movement work in various ways."

So what I thought I'd do is I'm just going to read some of these suggestions that I'm offering about how to be involved in this, how to understand ourselves as movement oriented people. And then if you have any comments or examples or pushbacks, you just feel free to jump in. Okay?

Jacqui: Thank you. Yeah.

Brian: But the first one is I just say, "Look, believe in it." We have to believe that... One way to say it is to say, we have to believe the spirit is moving. The spirit is moving in the world, in history, and we want to join the movement. And that's, in a real way, what I think faith is saying, "I want to join this love movement. I think it's there. I want to be part of it."

Jacqui: Love that.

Brian: Second one is, "Go beyond opposition to create positive alternatives." Because very often when we get involved with movement work, our first awareness is anger and protest, which is important. There's a lot to be angry about and to protest. But then sooner or later, we have to say, "Well, what am I for? What do I want to create?"

Jacqui: That's good.

Brian: The third one is, "Don't expect any micro movement or institution, including ones you love, support, and even lead to be the whole answer." But what often happens to us is we join a movement and it's the best thing we've ever been part of and we think, "This is it, this is it." And then the movement can go sour. I think we've had experiences like this where it loses its momentum or its leaders make some sort of very serious mistakes, and we're

really disillusioned. And I think we have to participate in micro movements, but we have to understand they're going to be like those waves or those ripples. They aren't the whole current.

Jacqui: Right. That's good. That's good.

Brian: And then the next is "Support every positive change in every micro movement and institution." So this or that movement might not change the world in the deepest ways, but if it's a small step in the right direction, instead of condemning it for not being more than it is, we can at least celebrate the small step.

And then I say "Prepare yourself for turbulence," and this is really what you were saying before. If we are moving and someone wants to move in the opposite direction, there's going to be a collision. And that doesn't mean we're doing anything wrong. I think about... What was the term they always use for Dr. King? He was a disturber of the peace and... There's another word, a negative word. He's disturbing things. Troublemaker, rabble-rouser, that sort of thing.

Jacqui: Troublemaker, disruptor.

Brian: And then, "Nurture the practices of spiritual resilience because every movement has major setbacks. And if we think it's going to go from victory to victory, we're going to be disillusioned." And then I return to believing in it. That this is where faith comes in to say, "We've had some setbacks, some things have gone wrong, had some disappointments, but I'm not going to give up on that deeper, bigger movement." So I'd love to just hear anything that you want to riff on there.

Jacqui: The couple things that are coming to my mind are... There's a lot of this, so I'm going to just use a specific example. The Roe v Wade decision, that really crushed women and fems across the landscape. Before that happened, there was a lot of organizing around reproductive justice, of course, anticipation. And I, who was not the organizer of many of the things that I went to, noticed that there were sometimes... We're not going to go to that one because these politics are not aligned. These are not our people. This happens all the time. So there's something about the kind of micro movements. I would say the different ways party X and group Y organize around that issue are mini movements. And so can we celebrate that? Can we find a way... Particularly progressive people, but can we find a way to say our tent is wide enough for you to have a win that wins for all of us in your own way? That's one thing that's resonating.

And the other thing, Brian, is, kind of back to our collusion and collision and conflict. Wherever two or more gathered, God is there, but also so is conflict. It's true, right?

Brian: Yeah.

Jacqui: And so could we lean into... And I write in fierce love that part of what we have to curate is a tolerance for conflict. I am in the best relationship with my father in my life because we had some good conflict, some holy conflict when I was about 45 years old. We won't say how long ago that was, but we did. So there's a way in which movement building has to include and embrace, and then maybe celebrate and maybe analyze the collision that

happens because different passions run toward each other. How beautiful is that that there's a... I'm passionate about this and I'm going to bump into you, and let's see what it is. We are so squeamish about conflict. What the hell? Conflict is okay. Jesus had a temple tantrum. Who is this person we create that's like, "Oh, Naomi, Pami, Hippie," and whatever. So I want us to sort of think about movement building as having room for, and in fact, embrace of skirmishes and conflict.

Brian: Yes. Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness. That's so important. And I know this is something you've experienced. There's a way that whenever conflict comes up, I either feel threatened or my ego is engaged, and I can get all nasty about it. But there's a way I can be involved in conflict where I say, "This is necessary. I'm going to do my part. This other person, they think they're doing the right thing too. I don't hate them. I hope I can win them over. But even if not, I still want to understand their dignity."

Jacqui: Yes.

Brian: We have a mutual friend, Imam Dawud up in Detroit. And he and I were having a conversation once. He is an Imam who's deeply involved in all kinds of movements in Michigan, especially in Detroit area. I said, "How does your faith influence the way you do social justice work?" And he's a thoughtful person. He has this sort of long pause, and then he said, "It forbids me from considering anyone beyond redemption. I never can just write anyone off and say there's no hope for them. They're the enemy. They're bad, they're evil. It keeps me from being able to do that." So we need that kind of heart if we're going to be involved in oppositional work without just adding to trouble in the world.

Jacqui: That is so astute and so well said. I love that. I love the way Dawud said that, and you quote him. I get asked love your neighbor questions because of the book *Fierce Love*, "Do you really love your neighbor?" Yesterday in a talk, "What does it mean to have unconditional regard?" I said, "No. Non possessive delight..." Unconditional, regardless, Kyle Rogers in therapy. But non possessive delight in the person that's mean or evil or raw, can you have a delight in there? Non possessive would mean detached. Can you detach yourself and just be curious about, "What's wrong with John today?"

Brian: Yes.

Jacqui: Or, "Why is McConnell stuck?" Like whatever. But a kind of curiosity about our enemies.

Brian: Yeah, that's great. Well, this is I think one of the invitations that a lot of people are going to feel as they struggle with their religious identity because their religious community had them so worried about whether they were insiders or outsiders, it didn't get them thinking about what's the movement of the spirit in the world. Where's the current of the sphere flowing? Where's the arc bending toward? And this question, it seems to me is one of the deep, deep questions about staying human.

I'd like to leave you with this reflection from, *Do I Stay Christian?* Whether or not you stay Christian, I hope you can see what I see. With or without the Christian logo, we must invest in the new spiritual meta movement that is already emerging within and among us. If it is to liberate us from the dominant meta movement that has proven itself, genocidal, ecocidal, and therefore suicidal. The new meta movement we need must go beyond mere

sustainability. It must be fully regenerative, restoring old balances that have been disrupted and diminished by our current civilizational project. And where that is impossible, finding new balances that make new vitalities possible.

None of us at any moment can see very far into the future. To trust in the process is another way of saying, to trust in an intelligence wiser than current human intelligence, to trust in a love deeper than current expressions of human love, to trust in a desire stronger and wiser than current expressions of human desire. Christians refer to this wisdom, love and desire as God or the divine or the creative spirit, and others can find their own ways of naming it. But whatever name we use, the next step in this process will only become clear when we're pushing through the current step, often at the last possible minute.

To use familiar biblical language, we will need to walk by faith through the valley of the shadow of death, always holding anticipative space for something beautiful to be born, especially during the most painful contractions. Some forms of Christianity will remain desperately loyal to the old machinery thinking it's as good as it gets. Other forms of Christianity will seek to repair the harm the old machinery has done and participate in the building of a new way of life that is truly regenerative. You can be part of a Christian wing of this regenerative meta movement if you so desire, or you can participate as part of some other wing. Wherever you invest your life, I hope it will be in this larger movement laboring for the birth of something new. Embrace the long view and find the deep current, the infinite flow. When you find that flow, you know it is holy.

If this episode has raised questions for you, we'll devote a final episode in this season to responding to listener questions. You'll find information in the show notes and how to leave a recorded or written question. And I look forward to responding. Thanks to the Center for Action and Contemplation for all of your support for this podcast. Thanks especially to our wonderful producer, Corey Wayne, and all of his artistry and support. And a special thanks to each of you for listening, for your attention, for your care, for your interest in Learning How to See. And if you found this series helpful, I hope you'll share it with someone and love.