

LEARNING

HOW

TO

SEE

with

Brian

McLaren

Season 4, Episode 13

Listener Questions:

Navigating Faith Shifts in Marriage and Relationships

Brian: Welcome everyone. We're really glad you're back with us for this special episode of Learning How to See Season Four. We are looking at the amazing collection of questions that came in over this season, and we have some questions we'd like to begin with today that focus on personal relationships. What happens when we sense ourselves growing in some ways in a certain direction that seems to make us more distant or increase levels of tension with people close to us? Sometimes it's people as close as our spouse. I'm very happy I'm joined once again by my friend and colleague, Gigi Ross from The Living School, and Dawson Allen, also from the CAC, and Michael Petro from the CAC, and just amazing conversation partners. Glad you're here. I wonder, Gigi, if you could start by reading us a letter from someone asking about their marriage.

Gigi: Sure. It reads, "Hello. Thank you for these helpful podcasts. My questions after listening to Renounce and Announce are about our longtime marriage relationships. When one spouse goes through a major shift in thinking while their partner is doubling down on the old beliefs. Encouragement for the partner who is in the process of renouncing and announcing with friends, but who is not sure what to do about the marriage where one partner thinks the other is now spiritually lost when one partner's belief system cannot include differing beliefs. Here I'm speaking not just of young marriages, but longtime marriages, like 30 plus years, where so very much of life has been shared together.

To call it complicated is an understatement. Separation or divorce may not seem like a solution. In addition to the primary relationship, there are perhaps many extended family members, young adult children, grandchildren, all impacted. Dissolving a marriage in the retirement years seems impossible. How we believe is so core to how we live an everyday life. Thank you for any thoughts you may have about this complicated subject in relation to the deconstruction reconstruction journey.

Brian: Wow, what a question. So powerful. I think we'll go to a second question. Mike, maybe you could read that for us.

Mike: Sure.

Brian: Then we'll be able to reflect on both of these together.

Mike: Dear Brian McLaren, thank you so much for the work you've done over the years. Your books and podcasts, along with the work of many others, including Richard Rohr, have had a large influence on me and have helped me along my faith journey over the past five years. I specifically enjoyed your most recent podcast featuring Barbara Brown Taylor. It helped me put words to something I've been experiencing within my marriage. My wife and I are experiencing reality differently, and this is causing a great tension. She grew up Southern Baptist and still holds many of these core conservative beliefs, although I've stretched her quite a bit.

21 years ago when I asked her to be my girlfriend, before she said yes, she asked me to explain how I could believe in evolution if I believe in the Bible. I spent a decade of my life trying to adopt the beliefs that she grew up with. This eventually led to a crisis of faith for me, and the only way I could remain Christian was to expand my understanding of what a Christian could believe. The rest of my journey has been somewhat predictable and well

covered in the material you put out.

However, that part of my journey that I'm currently struggling with as I know many others are, where there seems to be so little material, is how to manage a successful relationship within your marriage when your faith journey begins to create a wedge between your beliefs. There are times my wife and I manage this well and there are other times when things reach a boiling point. It becomes so difficult because our beliefs inform us on how we should act in this world, so our desired actions are often at odds. For example, what values should we teach our children, where should they attend school, what activities should we encourage them to participate in, what church should we attend, and so on and so forth. I'd love to hear stories from others who've experienced these struggles and how they've managed to wade through the difficult waters together while not being together and what they believe.

As a side note, I'm a licensed marriage and family therapist, so you would think I would have the answers, but I don't, and I'm not sure anyone does, but some stories about shared experience would be nice to hear. Thank you for all you've done to help move forward the Christian Church in America to confronting reality.

Brian: Wow, isn't that an articulate question? Thanks for reading that, Mike. Before we respond to the questions, I wonder if any of us have any reflections or just observations about the questions themselves? How do each of you react emotionally and in your bodies, just to hearing from these good people?

Gigi: If I could say something, I have been in a long time relationship before, but I have never been married and not for decades or anything, but I do know that in this society we place a lot on intimate marital relationships, that pretty much our society has taught us to expect everything from our partner. I'm not saying this was happening in this, but I'm just saying that that's part of the waters that we swim in. I also, the only other observation I would say is that how important it's for each person to be seen. Sometimes when things change as core as beliefs, it can be threatening to the person who didn't change. There's a wondering, have I lost this person who has become somebody different? There could also be some fear around. Those are my two observations.

Mike: I'll just add something at the top, which is speaking as a divorced person, and I know there's going to be a lot of our listeners who hear that from this place, sometimes the relationship ends and you add in the complicating factor that being deeply committed to this spiritual path is being deeply committed to transformation. Sometimes we transform in different directions. Solidarity to all the divorced folks who are listening, and to recognize that I would say sometimes the contemplative and loving thing to do is to let something end when the time has come for it to end. We put a huge value on relationships lasting forever, and that's not everyone's narrative or reality.

Brian: So well said. Thanks, Mike.

Dawson: The felt sense for me was sort of an immediate sympathy just to the sheer complexity and intensity of the two questions that we're talking about intimate relationships in the context of a social network and just the acknowledgement that we're human beings who want connection and want belonging. Sometimes those dynamics are really complicated.

First before any real response, just to acknowledge how complex that is and how intense because of some of the dynamics that Gigi named. I would just start with an acknowledgement in the intensity and the complexity that animate both those questions.

Brian: Dawson, I think that's a good place to start also because it will help us adjust expectations. We aren't going to be able to give people first class marriage counseling through the podcast, but what we can do is validate that this is tough and you could feel it in both of these letters, couldn't you? I think sometimes we reach out for help because we just need some validation. We need somebody to know this is not easy.

I'd like to share. The second writer asked about stories and I thought I could just share something very brief about my own story and then a couple of quick anecdotes about some other stories in similar situations. But I was very fortunate. It didn't have to go this way, but it just did, that when I was going through my deep questioning, my wife was too. In fact I was in the ideal situation. She wasn't holding me back. She was saying, because I was not only her husband, but I was the pastor of the church that she unfortunately had to attend. She couldn't get away from me and she was very involved in the church herself. But her message to me was always, "Will, you get moving? We need you to move faster." She was very much for me being honest about my questions and she would share hers. The two of us looked at our kids and said, we don't think our kids will ever be able to survive in kind of Christianity that we were brought up in.

We had this sense that we were trying to make enough progress fast enough to create a hospitable place for our kids. We were fortunate that we were in sync in our journey. That continues to today. There are two or three different issues that my wife and I see so differently, but I understand why this... certain areas of real interest to her. I also understand why it's not of interest to me. I'm glad she's has the freedom to be interested in it and I'm really glad I don't have to be interested in it. We could flip that back and forth. I think this is one of the things, those of us who've been married for a long time or those of us who were married in the past and have seen when these things don't work out sometimes is there are ways that we say, I'm committed to the marriage and I'm committed to you, and this is why I make room for you to be different from me and I make room for me to be at a different place than you. That's one framework.

Two other very brief stories. I think about a fellow, a friend of mine who also happened to be a pastor and he was going through a deep rethinking of his faith. His wife was traumatized because first on one level she didn't have questions. She was very happy with a conservative evangelical faith that she'd grown up with. But every time he asked a question or let something slip in a sermon or tried to stretch the congregation, she thought he's going to get fired, we're going to be unemployed. They had young children, and our children are going to be hungry and we're going to be on the street living in a cardboard box. There was big, catastrophic insecurities that came up from her husband being a pastor asking these questions but at one point, late one night, they were having a difficult conversation and she said to him, "My father will want me to divorce you if he finds out what you think."

My friend, I still remember having this lunch with him after this, and he was very distraught. He said at that moment, I realized that if push came to shove, she was more concerned about what her father thought than what I thought or even what she thought. He just felt in that moment the dominating patriarchal attitude that goes along with a lot of traditional religion that she had internalized. He realized that in a certain sense, he said to me, “My wife isn’t even my conversation partner. She is channeling her father and his thoughts. I don’t think she’s ever even developed the freedom to think for herself.” I just thought that was super insightful, super painful, and not easy to deal with, but it’s just a reminder of how complex these things are.

Then one last quick story that has nothing to do with the faith transition. I have two friends who at a relatively young age, one in their 40s and one in their upper 50s, their spouse developed early onset Alzheimer’s. In both cases, the disease progressed very rapidly, and in both cases, for the spouse to be out in public with, in one case a husband or one case a wife who was descending in to dementia very quickly, brought up for them something that all of us who are married or in families understand. That is when our identities are bound together, we’re embarrassed for the other person.

Both of these friends, as I watched them graciously, beautifully, lovingly handle this trauma to their marriage, what I watched them both be able to do is to stop being embarrassed for their spouse. One of the effects of Alzheimer’s is that their spouse wasn’t embarrassed about these problems. What they had to do is in a certain sense, it was a new challenge of allowing their spouse to be who and where and what and how he or she was. That extreme example might help all of us to realize that things happen in life that we have no control over, and part of loving a person is allowing that to happen and to process our disappointment and our embarrassment somewhere else and not put that on them, and then to see it as our problem of letting them be who they are and where they are.

Now, that doesn’t solve all problems, but I just know I’ve been inspired by those two friends in very profound ways. I don’t know if any of you have some other stories you’d like to share. Maybe Dawson, I don’t know if you’d want to share anything about your own journey in this because you come from a background similar to mine.

Dawson: Thanks, Brian. Maybe the first thing I would say, circling back to the social complexity of the question is an acknowledgement that many of us come from context where ideological alignment is a prerequisite for relationship or for belonging. Another way to say that is there’s a conditional that’s set up, which is if you believe X, Y, and Z, then we can be in meaningful relationship. Just to acknowledge that there’s not just interpersonal dynamics at play here, there’s social dynamics and there’s also a prioritization of what we believe as the primary way that we identify. I would say that that was the first thing that came up for me.

There’s a couple other things that come to mind, two from art and media, and then one quote. I’ll start with the quote. There’s a Rilke quote that ironically my wife shared with me and long before I was introduced to this contemplative path or poetic wisdom, she shared with me this Rilke quote. “For one human being to love another, that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks. The ultimate, the last test and proof,

the work for which all other work is but preparation. I hold this the highest task for a bond between two people that each protects this solitude of the other. That is the miracle that happens every time to those who really love. The more they give, the more they possess.”

I think we could spend a ton of time on this quote and there’s a paradoxical wisdom there, but the thing that jumped out at me was the highest task as protecting the solitude of the other. What that evokes for me is thinking of Richard differentiating between unity and uniformity. There’s an animating question here that I’m interpreting as how do we lovingly relate to difference? There’s a bunch of different ways to practically answer that question, but I think staying true to that spirit is a really critical component to this is how do we relate to difference in loving and compassionate ways?

I’ll say in my own life, in my own marriage, it’s been a real gift to see the diversity of thought from Taylor and the ways that she thinks differently from me because she sees those differences and has taught me to see those differences as complimentary and as diverse and as beautiful, rather than seeking a ideological alignment that says for us to be in relationship, we have to believe all the same things about X, Y, and Z. But actually seeing those differences as opportunity to appreciate the particularity of each other’s lives and views, and also to grow and be challenged and to be in a learning relationship with each other. That’s some of my own experience.

The other two examples that come to mind, one, I don’t know if y’all have ever seen the movie’s Soul. It’s a Pixar movie and it’s this universe in which a soul is able to inhabit its body once it find its calling and that’s what allows the soul to come down and inhabit this body. It’s a Disney or a Pixar movie, I think. But something that, this is another example that Taylor has shared with me is a allowing each other to respect and honor our soul gift or path and recognize that they’re not going to be the same thing. She’s joked that for me, maybe my soul gift was encountering a Richard Rohr book and that’s what allowed my soul to rush down and to be here, but that’s not the same gift for her. That’s not the same calling. But to see that as something beautiful, that’s something that I’m still learning from Taylor.

Brian: Oh, it’s beautiful, yes.

Mike: I often joke with folks that I’ll say contemplative practice did not save my marriage, but it did save my divorce because my former wife and I deconstructed and reconstructed together. What happened was, not that we went our separate ways because we couldn’t align religiously, but the deconstruction process revealed fundamental patterns of disconnect underneath it. Then because of good counseling and good contemplative practice and an ethos of love, we were able to separate and go our separate ways as friends, which we still are. But I can’t help but think that a lot of times when we experience a spiritual disconnect, what’s also happening is it is revealing other patterns underneath about identity and value and the narratives we tell ourselves about relationship and alignment. I would encourage folks to have the courage to look deeper and not just hide in the religious disconnect, but to be willing to look at what’s under the pattern behind that, wherever it takes you.

I will say our beloved, Jim Finley told me once, he said, “The relationship didn’t work out, but you followed your path and you followed your heart and you stayed true to your integrity, and so it did work out.” That has been a good thing to come back to from time to

time when I think about this.

Brian: Beautiful. Thanks so much, Mike. Any final comments from these first two before we read one more?

Gigi: In all of this I hear a question, one that I think encompasses everything that everyone has said. When I think about what love is, the question that I hear in both of these is, how do I stay true to my path by allowing my spouse to remain true to their path, even though they're different? What makes it I think complex is all the competing strands that we've all been talking about that gets in the way of us allowing a person to be fully who they are and allowing ourselves to be fully who we are without having that be tied. I guess that's for me, that's the question for me that I'm hearing in both is how do I allow myself to stay true to my path while allowing my spouse to stay true to their path?

Dawson: That's beautiful, Gigi. I'm actually thinking of something that you said in a previous conversation about how the ways that we see move into contemplative practice in our actual way of showing up in the world. I think maybe one of the questions, two questions maybe that are practical spiritual practice questions in this conversation, not in way of giving advice, but to say, here's maybe some ways to hold these questions, is how can I get curious about this difference? Like asking myself when I'm experiencing difference whether it's relationally in the marital context or otherwise to say, how can I get curious about this, or to say, what do I have to learn about this person's experience or perspective and just seeing how that shifts your mode of being with these super complex and really loaded questions in a way that hopefully honors both your path and the path of the person that we're in relationship with.

Brian: So well said. Gigi, your comment just gave me an idea, and we can give this a try and it doesn't have to work and all four of us don't have to participate. But I wonder if each of us could try to put ourselves in the position of one of the four partners in these two marriages we've just heard about. I wonder if we could try. Someone brought up the phrase renounce and announce. It's almost like we have to... it's a coming out. It's an acknowledgement, things are different between us than they used to be. I wonder if we could try to put into words a loving statement that could be made to the other partner. Does that make sense? I wonder if any or each of us would be willing to give that a try, to imagine what would our script be, something that we think could break a sound barrier and help a conversation to go to a new place?

Dawson: Thinking about this intensity of these questions is just asking what am I holding onto that's preventing me from being present to what's here in this relationship? Another question is, what am I not understanding about the other's experience that's preventing me from being present in this conversation? I think coming back to that embodied presence, how can I show up in a loving way regardless of outcome? These are how questions, not what or prescriptive answers, but how can I be present to what's emerging in this relationship? That's what's coming up for me.

Brian: Actually, that really helps me, Dawson, because I think what wants to be said from inside of me is a question, and it would be a question that I would ask to my partner, which would be, what has it felt like for you to watch me going through these changes? If I could

show genuine curiosity, because so much of me in these situations, I don't want there to be a problem. I don't want to imagine what it's like for the other person. I want to fix the problem, not face it. To say, what has it felt like to be you watching me go through these changes, that could take things to it different place.

Gigi: I'm going to keep up with the question one, and just thinking of my own life when I've been in relationships where there have been differences, and my tendency is to see my fear and not to see what's really going on. My question would be, what am I afraid of losing? What am I afraid it's going to happen? Then the question I would ask myself, how am I seeing my partner, am I seeing my fears or am I really seeing my partner?

Brian: Beautiful.

Mike: Where my mind wants to go actually connects us with the next question. The year that I lost my mom and my brother, I got knocked down to one sibling and one parent, and it was when I was going through a pretty intense religious deconstruction so I didn't align with either one of them politically, religiously, and in a lot of other ways. My therapist at the time said to me, he's like, "Hey man, you're down. You're down to one sibling and one parent and you have a choice to make here, which is do you want to be right or do you want to be in relationship? Do you want to be totally aligned with them or do you want to find a way to stay connected to them?" He's like, "That's a real question you have to ask yourself." If you want to be in relationship, so much of staying in relationship is learning the skill of where you connect and leading harder into those things and letting go of the parts where you don't connect. Maybe just, again, certain things are just temporary, conversational no-fly zones.

I think for me, that leads me to think about if I was trying to maintain an intimate relationship where I knew there were differences, which really is every intimate relationship, isn't it? I would want to acknowledge those things and say, "How can we make space for each other to be different? And how can we acknowledge the areas where we still deeply connect and lean even more deeply into them? How can we celebrate even more the parts that work well and the things that we still do share in common and the core values that we still hold together?"

Brian: That is super insightful. I think that is a good segue to our last question. I wonder, Dawson, would you be able to read that last question for us? It strikes me, just before we move on, that a huge part of what this involves is in our relationship acknowledging I didn't want it to go this way. I liked it better when we both saw the world the same way. I liked it better when we were both conservative Republicans or when we were both progressive Democrats, or I liked it better when we were both sincere, true believer Roman Catholics. I liked it better when... that was the contract that I signed up for. That was the expectation that I have.

There comes this act of acknowledging that that's not real anymore, and then going through a grieving process and just being able to admit it, I'm disappointed, I'm hurt, I'm afraid. Then realizing that our partner is also in that same situation. Then I think sometimes there are liberating things that can be said where maybe both partners aren't here yet, but one partner can say, "I have come to accept that we're different in this area, and I want you to know I'm not going to try to make you be like me. I want to accept and appreciate you for being where you are." There's an act of doing that before the other partner might be ready to

do it, but my guess is if one can be ready to do it, it will make it easier for the other. Let's go to that last question. Thanks, Dawson.

Dawson: Loving the most recent podcast on Living in Reality. I'd love to hear a thoughtful episode on reconciling relationships with those who still live in other realities. My extended family and many friends' families were really damaged throughout the recent election turmoil and ultimately the realization that we just live in different realities, and where some are interested in learning to see, others prefer adherence to strict cultural thinking and understandings. Some of Brian's books talk about the conflict with others inherent in Learning to See, but the reconciling with others I think is potentially the most important fruit of Learning to See. Thank you for your thoughtful episodes.

Brian: I'll just share when I heard that question, I thought of a dear friend who we went through really deep election related relational trauma too, and to the point where this friend yelled at me and I was afraid he was going to hit me in the middle of a conversation. We had to intentionally stay away from each other for a period of time just because... he came to me to apologize for an outburst in a previous conversation, and after he sincerely apologized, then it was like something clicked and he said, "But it's not like I think I was wrong." Then it was right back in the intensity of disagreeing.

What I started doing with him is, he would say something that he knew I disagreed with and I would just say, "Hey, man, I don't see it that way. If you're ever interested on why I see it differently, I'll be glad to tell you but we don't have to go into that now." However many years it's been, six years, he has never once asked me how and why I see things differently. But the act of saying that has created enough safe space for the relationship to continue. I don't know if that would be called reconciliation, but it's way better than the way things were going.

Mike: Yeah, it's interesting. I want to say, I mentioned the conversation I had with that therapist and I talked about having one sibling and one parent. Those relationships did not work out the same way. One of them I talk to every day, and one of them not so much. It's because at a certain point you... sometimes loving people well is learning the load-bearing capacity of the relationship.

Brian: Oh my goodness. That's so well said.

Mike: Yeah, and it changes throughout seasons.

Brian: Yes.

Mike: One of my favorite books of scripture is the Book of Genesis, because the Book of Genesis is all about families trying to get along and not always doing a great job of it. You have these two really beautiful moments of reconciliation. You have Jacob and Esau, and then you have Joseph and his brothers. There's these moments where people who'd been in huge conflict come back together. What happens in both instances is they come back together and then there's an immediate separation. Jacob and Esau have this beautiful reunion and Esau says, "Great, let's travel together," and Jacob's like, "No, no, thank you. See you later," and he leaves.

Joseph has this beautiful reconciliation with his brothers, and then he says, “Come live here in Egypt with me.” You could look the story up if you want to know more about it, but what he does is he then sends his brothers to the other side of the country because he knows that even though they’ve been reconciled, it’s not a good idea with everything that’s transpired between them for them to be too close, in such close proximity. I saw that say reconciliation, forgiveness, it’s a transformative act, and it always creates a change in boundaries. Sometimes you reconcile with someone, you forgive someone, and it brings you closer together. Sometimes you reconcile with someone or you forgive someone and you realize, you know what? We’re going to be a lot healthier if we’re a little bit further apart. Even if we get to reconciliation, it is going to look different and sometimes healthy is space, for my two cents. I think that’s what I have to contribute to that.

Gigi: I want to pick up on that. For me, there’s a distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation. I think personally, I think forgiveness comes first, and I think forgiveness is really internal, even though we’ve learned that it’s something you extend to somebody else. But it’s really about letting go of those tentacles that keep you bitter and keep you attached to a story that’s going to keep you apart. I think that’s where it starts. Then I think once you get to that place when you’re not so attached to those differences and not so bitter and not so hurt, and that to me really is saying you’re taking your power back and not giving it to somebody else to decide how you’re going to react.

Then to me, there’s more room for reconciliation to look all kinds of ways. I know I can talk about my adoptive parents, and for me, the reconciliation came after they died. I think once we can come to that own inner place, we can reclaim those ways that people have taken over our identity, taken over our sense of belonging, taking over in such ways that we become better, then we can come from a place of reconciliation without the expectation that it’ll be met with us back. Personally then I think ultimately the outcome of how things get reconciled is up to God.

Brian: Oh, beautifully said. Thank you, Gigi.

Dawson: Yeah, I love this question. This is one of my favorite topics, is how do we relate to difference in healthy ways? I’ve really started to come to the conviction in some ways as part of the experience of The Living School is seeing the way that we relate to difference as one of the great arenas for applied and embodied non-duality, is how do we relate to our fundamental connectedness amidst separations and differentiation, complicating or differing views?

I think this is a super important question, and I want to acknowledge the good instincts. The way that this question ends is that I think reconciliation with others is potentially the most important fruit of Learning How to See. I think that gets to the heart of Brian, why you started this whole series is we’re trying to understand how we see so that we can be in the world in a healthy and loving way. Just to say, I think the instincts behind this question are great.

For me, this conversation starts with what’s the desired outcome of this conversation, and having a real sincere look inward of what do I want? It’s not dissimilar from Mike’s response to the earlier question is, do I want to be right? Do I want to be connected? It’s a sincere self-evaluation. For myself, I appreciate sort of schemas and maps to help understand the world.

I've made three buckets in terms of how I relate to difference. The first is, do I want to be present to this difference? That's the fundamental starting place is, am I willing to just be in the presence non-judgmentally of whatever is coming up in terms of difference? This could be difference in of interpretation of a conversation, or a worldview, or a political event. It could be difference in any capacity.

If the answer is yes to that, there's a further question, which is, do I want to be present to this or do I really want to understand this? If it's yes, I want to be present, and yes, I want to understand, if I'm moving to that level of understanding, then there's going to be a series of active listening. How do I ask questions that help pull out what's animating this difference? How do I help reveal the parts of this perspective that I'm missing? That's this active listening questioning mode of how do I really understand this difference?

Then the last component of it is persuasion. Do I want this person to move in terms of how they believe? I think we have to be honest about that too, because if we're not honest about that, I think it can operate unconsciously and that can be really dangerous and that can be really unhealthy. If yes to presence, if yes to understanding, and then if we're moving yes, towards persuasion, then persuasion has a series of components to it as well, which is, I think of the work of Jonathan Height, who's a moral psychologist who maps moral matrices and explains the reason that conservatives and progressives think differently and maps that onto the brain and explains the evolution and the functions behind these different ways of thinking.

Or I think about, Brian, your work on the ebook, Why Don't They Get It? It is helping sort of apply these biases to understand why might someone actually experience this election differently than me? Then if we're moving from that understanding into the persuasion, I think there's a recognition that oftentimes we make the mistake of thinking that facts change people's mind. Over and over and over again in different ways, we could talk about a million studies. I'm sure each of you could give anecdotes and academic studies that point to the reality that that is not true. The prefrontal cortex is not where change happens in the brain. Then the question becomes, how do I create non-judgmental space and complicate and displace these views and open up capacity for change?

To think about it in terms of spiral dynamics, it's been said that you can only question, I think it's either five or 10% of your worldviews on your best day when all your needs are met. Being realistic about that reality, and then also how? How do we actually set the container for real transformation? Those are some of the things that I get really excited about when we start talking about how do we relate across difference. I think frankly, it's an area that is really important for our political conversation right now. I think it's a sort of unique voice that the faith traditions can speak to in this current moment is, how do we learn to be loving and present with each other across different traditions, beliefs, perspectives? I love this question and would be curious if anything else comes up for you all.

Brian: Dawson, I love it. Presence, understanding, persuasion. As soon as you brought me there, then I thought, and once you're engaged in persuasion, then where are you going to go from there? Because if the person doesn't say, "Oh, you're right, I want to see it your way," then you can move to domination where I'm going to intimidate and threaten you to agree, or I can go to rejection. If you don't agree, I don't want to be around you. Or you

can say, "I'm willing to be present." I just think I really haven't heard anybody describe that reality that well before. In a certain sense, it is a matter of learning how to see, because the understanding says, do I want to understand why the world looks this way to this person? Beautiful. Thanks.

Mike: I appreciate that you mentioned the cerebral cortex and the change doesn't happen in the cortex. It's worth it, especially when someone's afraid. When someone's afraid and they're in their brainstem, there is no higher brain function. You can't reason with someone. I think what that reminds me is that I want to have compassion because change is scary. Change is scary. We're in a rapidly changing world. Some of us, some the reasons we have these disconnects is because we ourselves have changed.

I remember when I was a pastor and I'd gone through a pretty intense season of deconstruction, and a lot had happened. I sat across a table from a friend of mine and he said to me, "I don't see a lot of you left." I realized he was scared. He was afraid, because that meant something to him that I had changed. It intrigues me to reflect on how to hold space for that fear lovingly.

Gigi: I just wanted to add one more thing because I love that schema, Dawson, and I think it's really important for us to really be real about what we're about and what our agendas are. I think, and I'm putting on my spiritual director hat here, that there's also what is being invited in the conversation. That's why I'm glad you started with presence. I wonder that if we could allow the presence to let us know what's next, then it could help us know whether it's even something that we're meant to... maybe we're not meant to understand, but just to be there. Because sometimes I find that understanding takes me in my head and I miss so many other cues. That's just me. Not everybody does that.

But for me, in situations like that, it is really honest for me to be what I'm about. Sometimes I find I have to set my agenda aside because that's not what's called for. Often, I find that when I've done that, I actually learn more about where the person's coming from than if I start trying to make what I want to happen, happen.

Dawson: I think you're so right to say... maybe I could say it more directly. I think presence is the prerequisite and has to carry through the entirety of that schema. You have to honor that as priority. Maybe that's a better, more explicit way to say it, is that. I think that's part of the applied non-duality, is how do I honor the inherent interconnectedness? That's the deepest reality amidst voting for different presidential candidates or different interpretations of a conversation, or different religious views, whatever the case might be. That's really, I think that's a huge clarifier.

Brian: This time has just flown by. I'm so grateful for each of you. What a good conversation. I feel so enriched by this conversation. I would imagine other people feel the same way, that there's somebody who's driving along listening to this conversation in a car or washing the dishes. My recommendation is sometime soon pull off the road in a parking lot, or once the dishes are done, take a walk and just let this settle and see what comes back, because there has been so much precious love and wisdom and insight. I am grateful for each of you, and I think the four of us are so grateful for the questions that came in. What amazing humans and what a beautiful community, and glad to be part of it with each of you.

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 especially thanks to each of you for listening, for your attention, for your care, for your interest in Learning How to See. If you found this series helpful, I hope you'll share it with someone you know and love.