

LEARNING

HOW

TO

SEE

with

Brian

McLaren

Season 6, Episode 8

Seeing Nature as a Seeker

feat. Jim White, Tony Jones, Wes Granberg-Michaelson

Brian:

If you are ever around a person who is known as a birder, one of the questions you can ask them that they will love to tell you about is what was their spark bird? Spark bird is the bird that just about every birder can tell you spark their interest in learning more about birds. I remember there were really two major spark birds in my life. One happened when I was, I think 10 or 11 years old. Like any kid growing up in the eastern half of the United States, there are some birds you learn the names of whether you want to or not. You just pick them up. Oh, there's a robin bouncing across the front yard, cocking his head and looking for worms. Oh, there's a bunch of sparrows. We didn't know that they were English sparrows and had been an introduced species, but there's a flock of sparrows chirping and chattering because you threw out some bread crumbs for them to eat.

Of course, people could identify a cardinal for its bright red color and its perky crest on its head or a Jay or a crow or a starling. But one day I was looking out my window. I think I was daydreaming while I was supposed to be doing my homework, and right by my windowsill, a sparrow landed, but there was something wrong with the sparrow. Instead of being brown and tan, it had a reddish head and I thought, hold it. Sparrows don't have a reddish head, and so I just thought that's strange. Someday I have to find out the name of that bird. So I thought of it when I was at the library not long after that. This was before the internet, of course, where you just look it up online. And so I went and found a book about common birds and I found out it was either a house finch or a purple finch, and I had to figure out how to tell which it would be.

And when I saw that bird again and when I heard one sing, I knew it was a house Finch. The first bird I was ever curious to find its name and learn something about. Some years later, we were on a vacation down in Florida where I currently live, and I remember standing on the deck behind a house and seeing this black and white bird soar and glide and dive, and I just had never seen such a graceful bird. We were driving along and stopped at a tourist trap and I went in and found a book on the shelf at the store, at the gift shop at this tourist attraction and I found the name of that bird. It was called a swallow-tailed kite, and I always remember being in such awe of its grace. Then I never saw another one for maybe 10 or 15, maybe 20 years.

By the time I saw another one, I remembered looking it up, but I couldn't remember the name. I'm recording these words in late January and I know in about three or four weeks here where I live now, the swallow-tailed kites will return. This love for learning the names of things and learning that the life stories of different creatures, that's been such a big part of my life and that's why I'm one of those people who you might call a birder and you might see me with binoculars walking around sometimes. There's something similar that people experience when they love fishing or they love hunting. They're drawn to the outdoors because they want to connect with certain species. They want to learn all about them. They want to understand them. Interestingly, when they love those creatures enough, they want to be sure to protect the environments where those creatures live.

There is something about this encounter with fellow creatures that goes so deep in our evolutionary history. For those of us who live in a civilized world now where we feel so removed from natural things where our food comes in styrofoam and plastic wrap, there's something about re-encountering creatures as fellow creatures, sometimes as predators, sometimes as potential prey, but there is something about this that is deeply meaningful to

many of us. In today's episode, we're going to explore what it means to go into the natural world with a search image in mind, looking for something, seeking something, hunting something, angling for something to encounter it as a creature meeting a fellow creature.

Listen, as I read from *Life After Doom*, this is a short reading from my book, *Life After Doom*, and this is from chapter 13. Not long ago, I was up to my knees in a mountain stream taking a break from the intensity of writing this book. I was peering through the amber-tinted current of the cobble beneath my feet. A fellow fly fisher once shared this advice, be where your feet are. Since then, I pause frequently and simply focus on the between my feet. Each rounded rock I knew had once been part of the snow-capped mountain ranges behind me.

It had broken off as a jagged boulder and been slowly, gradually smoothed by tumbling against other rocks for millennia of millennia. The rock beneath my right foot, white quartz, that rock by my left foot gray schist flecked with Mica between the two zebra schist banded with gray and white. Right in front of it, black gneiss dotted with pink quartz. Rocks in this stream I had read are over 1.8 billion years old, and over those vast expanses of time, these rocks from long gone layers of surrounding mountains had tumbled into place between my feet.

As I gazed, I suddenly saw my own body of muscle, blood and bone in a shimmering reflection on the water. As the current ran between me and these ancient cobbles, my entire lifespan seemed compared to each rock utterly insignificant, a flicker, a flash, all of human history the same. In that contemplative moment, I felt the immensity of time, awesome and dizzying in its vastness, the vastness felt familiar, recalling the immensity of space that I've often felt beneath a clear night sky or standing on the rim of a vast chasm. I felt a strange sense of respect for those stones. So old, so durable compared to fragile, fleeting, fleshy me. Lines from the indigenous poetry of the Bible came to me, a lasting effect of my years as a pastor and preacher. When I consider the heavens the work of your fingers, what are we humans that you're a mindful of us, from Psalm 8.

All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass, from Isaiah 40. Lord, let me know my end and what is the measure of my days? Let me know how fleeting my life is, Psalm 39. We are foreigners and strangers in your sight as were all our ancestors. Our days on earth are like a shadow from 1st chronicles 29. For we are but of yesterday and we know nothing for our days on earth are but a shadow from Job 8. And finally from Ecclesiastes 1, fleeting, fleeting, all is fleeting. For the briefest moment aided by those ancient rounded rocks and ancient biblical texts, I felt deeply what my mind understands but struggles to fully accept. Of course, our civilization will pass away like a surge of water flowing between my feet, like a fleeting shadow or a wave rolling across a field of grass. Of course, just like my individual life, our civilization will reach an expiration date. Of course, I knew this but hadn't felt it as intensely as I did in that instant gazing simultaneously at my reflection, the rushing water and to stones underneath.

In today's episode of *Learning How to See*, you're going to meet three friends of mine who share a passion for the outdoors. Some are primarily fishers, one is primarily a hunter. I know that these subjects of fishing and hunting can make some people feel very, very uncomfortable. There are a lot of ethical questions associated with the harvesting of meat

or even recreational sport fishing, even if it's all catch and release and so on. There's a lot of questions about this. We're not going to try to solve those kinds of ethical questions in this conversation. Let me just say that if you've thought about these issues very deeply, you quickly realize that not being involved in hunting or fishing doesn't solve all of our problems. For example, if you're a vegan and you only eat plants, you have to realize that all of that land needed for agriculture is land that's not available for animals.

And so very often, even people who feel I don't have any negative effect on living systems, well, it's not that simple. Add to that all the complexities of being part of a fossil fuel economy and consumptive economy and living at levels of prosperity that many of us live. This is a complicated and important question. So what I want to encourage you to do is if you feel discomfort, instead of projecting that discomfort on any of our guests or me or this podcast, I invite you to let that discomfort help us think about how we want to live with the earth going forward. And that's a joint venture. It's a question that we have to answer together, we have to answer together. And every day that goes by without us thinking more deeply about it is a day that we're not addressing one of our most urgent questions and challenges.

But what I'd like to invite you to do in today's episode is to let three of our guests help us all to think more deeply about how we see the natural world. Every time people who walk out into the wild, every experience they have deepens their way of seeing the natural world. And some of us have virtually no experience at this at all. And so I'd like to introduce you to these three friends today as aids to help you in thinking about how you see the natural world and in opening your own perception, your sight, your hearing, smell, taste, touch, and just the experience of presence to open yourself to what may be waiting for you to grow into as you continue this process of learning how to see.

Welcome everybody. We are so happy that you can be part of Learning How to See. This episode, I struggled with what to call this episode because I wanted to bring together people who spend a lot of time in nature by choice, hunters, fishers. I was looking for a mushroom hunter, didn't find one of those, but I was looking for people who go into the wild looking for things. And so I suppose the title I'm going to use is seekers or in some ways we might be hunter-gatherers in some way, and we look at the world in a special way through that kind of experience. I know some folks have strong feelings against fishing and against hunting. We're not really going to talk about those ethical issues. All of us have talked about them and thought about them a good bit. But what we're really going to focus on is our experience of encountering nature, seeing, experiencing, encountering the natural world.

The human dimensions of it, if we want to talk about the spiritual dimensions of it, because the four of us in this conversation all have plenty of pew time and we have all been in ministry in many different settings. And so I'm so happy to introduce three dear friends of mine and I'm going to introduce them one at a time. I'd like to start with my friend Jim White. Jim, I'm going to invite you to tell a little bit about yourself, but I just want to say Jim and I shared a very tender moment some years ago where I was really scared that I had lost Jim along a river.

We had set out together way, way out in the wilderness. And I couldn't find him, and I ran downstream where I thought he was. I went a long way. I couldn't find him there. I ran upstream. And anyone who's had a friend in the woods you can't find, it's a horrible feeling. And then when we found each other, it was something I'll never forget. And Jim, maybe you can tell a little bit about yourself, and if you feel like telling a bit of that story, that would be great too.

Jim: Sure, sure. We were in Wyoming. We took my four-wheeled vehicles way back in there to a stream that's supposed to have some good cutthroat trout on it. And almost everybody went upstream. And I said, "Well, I'm going to go downstream." And so I went down a good to a long ways and couldn't catch a fish. And finally I realized when I saw a grasshopper being taken that I needed to put on a grasshopper. And so I took off, clipped off my flies and put a grasshopper on, but I couldn't get it on because I couldn't see to get the tippet through the eye of the hook. And I tried and tried and tried and was so frustrated that I just wanted to die. And so I just went back to the camp where the cars were, took about 30 minutes to get there, sat down under the tree and bemoan my blindness. I guess you probably passed me going downstream. I don't know exactly how it happened.

Brian: That's right. And Jim, for people who don't know you, there's a reason why to not be able to see when you're fishing, why that would matter so much because you have a lifetime of passionate fly fishing. That was an intense day.

Jim: Yes, yes.

Brian: And had you had a diagnosis of an eye condition at that point?

Jim: Well, I knew from even five years earlier that I had macular degeneration and it was just coming on and coming on. And so today I've given up on fishing by site. I can't see that little fly floating down the river. I can't hardly see a big indicator, bright orange very well. And so I'm learning how to fish anew by streamer fishing and feel rather than sight.

Brian: And Jim, so for us to be talking about seeing the natural world has all kinds of emotion with it for you, I'm sure, because so much of your life has been about enjoying the beauty of the natural world. So thanks for being with us and for what you'll be able to offer in this conversation. I want to next introduce Tony Jones, who Tony and I have been friends for years, by the way, I should say, Jim writes wonderful books, books about church history, about theology, but also funny and wonderful and intelligent books about fishing. And Tony, I'd love your writing. Maybe you could tell us a little bit about your career and maybe especially about your next book that's coming out.

Tony: Yeah, for sure. Thanks for having me on, Brian and I'll those you two guys. I think you two other guests have probably fished more with Brian than I have. But I will say that I took Brian into the Boundary Waters Canoe area, Wilderness one time, and we were the very first night, as I recall, the very first night, Brian took off his shoes and waded in ankle deep into a lake and on his first or second cast caught a walleye.

That son of a gun. I've never caught a walleye. I go to the Boundary Waters every year. Never caught a walleye, Brian. Yeah, no problem. First cast. So that's maybe why I hunt more than I fish because I'm a little more successful. It's funny, I've been thinking about this, what's my... How do I identify? Because for so many years I identified myself as a pastor and a theologian and really as a what you'd call a professional Christian.

And I'm probably less all those things. I'm not a pastor at all anymore. I'm probably not really that active of a theologian, and I feel like I'm May a little bit less Christian than I used to be. It's not as central to my self-identity as it used to be. So that had been my journey. Brian, that's where you and I, we spent many years together speaking at pastors conferences as part of the emerging church movement and making trouble for ourselves and others.

But my latest book is called *The God of Wild Places*, and it's a memoirish type book. It's about my journey out of the church and into the wild, into wild places because I went through a really trying time in my life. Brian was a dear, dear friend to me during those times. And frankly, the church did not offer me a whole lot of support and a whole lot of solace. But when I got outdoors, when I was stomping around in a cornfield, trying to shoot a pheasant, when I was paddling in the boundary waters, when I was trying to track an elk in the San Juan mountains of Colorado, that became the centerpiece of my own spirituality.

Brian: Thanks so much. And Wes Granberg-Michelson. And I have fished in Yellowstone many years with a group called Ick Theology, which I think is one of the best. It was theologians who fly fish. It's just such a perfect pun. And really Wes played a big role in me getting more serious about fly fishing because he gave me a good fly rod as a gift and invited me on some wonderful adventures. Wes, you have a huge theological and ecclesiological resume. What would you like us to know about your professional and pastoral life and about your life as an outdoors man?

Wes: Well, thanks, Brian. About my professional and pastoral life it's in the rear view mirror. I was a church bureaucrat in charge of the Reformed Church of America for about 17 years. Done a lot of things ecumenically with the World Council of Churches, and presently still very engaged with the Global Christian forum. But what I most like to do now is write and fish. And I'm working on another book. The last book I did was called *Without Oars* that Brian was kind enough to say some kind words about.

Brian: Beautiful book.

Wes: And we go through these seasons of life. I was on a retreat a couple years ago, it was a year in retreat, and the retreat leader said, "What word would you like to use to characterize yourself in the coming year?" And I thought a little bit, and I said, "Elder." But I said, "But not like an elder in a session or a class of Reformed church, more like an elder in a Native American tribe or an African tribe and culture." And they said, "Why?" And I said, "Because you could share wisdom and you don't take any responsibility." And I think that's where I am. I've had the privilege of taking responsibility for lots of things, now that's in the past. And now I could focus more on sharing wisdom, hopefully, and also fishing. Yes, Brian, and I've had some great times fishing, including in Yellowstone, the most memorable, which we're in the Lamar Valley and with a couple other guys that were part of the group.

And Brian is still down fishing. We're watching him and he's intent on trying to see what he can do. And then we look in the background, we see a grizz that's roaming, which Brian has no idea how grizzly bear has suddenly come into the picture. At that point, we were afraid. We weren't worried about fishing anymore, we were worried about Brian who was completely oblivious to what was going on. There's probably a sermon in there, at least a story for a book. But I'm really glad to be with you, Brian.

Brian: Thanks so much. Thanks. Well, gentlemen, I'm sure you've heard that quote attributed to Henry David Thoreau, many go fishing all their lives without knowing it is not fish they are after. I'd love to just hear each of you reflect when you go out into the wilderness doing what it is that draws you there, what do you think you're after? And there's not one right answer, obviously there's many. But I wonder if I could start with you, Jim, what has drawn you out all these years? What do you think you've been after?

Jim: Actually the last chapter of the book, Fly-fishing the Arctic Circle to Tasmania, I talk about the meaning of fly fishing, and I try to line up the suspects, I think for the meaning. And sometimes, first of all, you got to say it's for food and 80%, 90% of the people that fish in the world are after sustenance to make a life or make a living. But beyond that, there's all kinds of reasons that people engage in the sport, especially the catch and release world that you and I, and I assume... What's the third person's name? Wes, are you a catch and release fisherman?

Wes: Absolutely. I'm on the board of our local Trout Unlimited chapter.

Jim: All right, well, so there's the excitement of it all. That's one of the reasons the comradeship in fishing is going on. Just being in nature and that nature mysticism, which I probably think that all four of us share. And maybe sometimes moments of illumination in which it seems like one is transported out of one world into something else. So that's the first response to what you're asking, Brian, I think.

Brian: Tony, anything you'd like to add to that?

Tony: Yeah, I've thought a lot about this and I agree with Jim about, it's very important to me to be a part of the process of acquiring my own food. That's become just a primary reason that I go out. Courtney and I are now empty nesters, and our goal is that we would stop. We're hoping to soon stop buying meat that we'll only... All of our meat will be meat that I've hunted or fished. But I think the deeper, I guess what I've come to currently, this is always in process for me, but I think it's getting in touch with my ancestors frankly. I think that when I went through this difficult time in my personal life that I've alluded to already, I felt really disconnected. I guess I felt disconnected. I was so discombobulated. I felt like my head was spinning or that I was lost.

I used to have dreams that I was falling and I was screaming for help and no sound was coming from my mouth. This is how like into my psyche that this trauma was. And I felt like when I went out to hunt and fish and canoe and hike all these outdoors endeavors, that became more and more part of my life. I felt like I was reconnecting with all of my ancestors who'd gone before me and who knew something about the world that I did not seem to know because I was in this technocratic society and it had stripped me of these

primal notions of acquiring your own food and being in touch with the whole created order. I had a very, very famous hunter, Jim Shockey on my podcast one time, and he said, "I think you're just getting in touch with your ancestral soul." And I said, "Why have I never heard a sermon in church about that?" Because that's right on the money for me. It crystallized something for me. So that's I think what's drawing me outdoors these days.

Jim: Do you know José Ortega y Gasset?

Tony: Yeah. One of the great hunting writers of all time. Yeah.

Jim: I think you're telling me that his taken view, that's not the kill that's important, but the going out, but you're saying the acquisition is important to you now.

Tony: For me, I see the whole process of as a whole cloth, I work very hard at certain ethical things when I'm hunting. I don't high five people after we kill an animal. I consider it a sacred act, the butchery of it. I have a whole chapter about butchery in my book. I'm not a catch and release guy, frankly. I mean, you can't catch, you can't shoot and release a pheasant, you know what I mean? Or a deer. But I do catch and release some fish, but mainly I keep them and eat them. So yeah, that's a big. The whole process I think puts me in touch with... It puts me in touch frankly, with how humanity lived for whatever, a hundred thousand years, up until the last hundred years.

Brian: Beautiful. That phrase ancestral soul is... That's a fascinating phrase. Wes, what are you thinking?

Wes: Well, I think I go out to a river to fly fish for probably three reasons. First, it's one of the same words that Tony used. I want to connect, I want to connect to God's creation and connect at an emotional level, and then I want to connect to water. I want to be in water, and I could say a lot more about that. And then within that, I want to be in the presence of God in a very different way, and those things all draw me. I haven't written the kinds of things that Jim has about fly fishing. I did write one article or chapter sometime ago called Fly Fishing as a Spiritual Discipline. It was actually one of the most favorite things I've written, even though probably no one could even find it anymore.

But I compared the way I learned to fish, which was on a lake in Wisconsin where I got night crawlers at night and put them on a hook and went out to the particular point from the pier of our cottage and put the night crawler down and waited and then pulled a fish up and hauled it in and gave it to my grandmother to clean. Compared to when I then learned to fly fish. When you enter into the water, you have to be a part of the river. You have to understand all that's going on. You have to relate to its life in order to have a chance of knowing where fish might be. The whole point isn't catching. The whole point is presence.

And it's like that describes the difference in how I've learned to pray. I learned to pray by just throwing down a hook with a night crawler and saying, "God, do this, God do that. Pull it up, get me an answer." And now I think of prayer as presence of entering into presence. And I like the fact that that's the difference between bait fishing and fly fishing. It's also why I love that Norman Maclean says in *River Runs through It*. The disciples were all fishermen, but John, of course was a fly fisher. That's the best description of the difference between the synoptics and the Gospel of John I've ever heard.

Brian: That's great. We've hit on this in various ways about the social dimension of going into the outdoors with other people who love it and share our passion about it. I want to come back to that maybe at the end of our conversation. But I'd like to invite us to think as specifically as we can about how we see nature and the natural world creation, how we see it and experience it, hearing, sight, taste, all the ineffable dimensions of being in the presence of trees and water and granite and shale and pheasants and trout and all the rest. The actual bringing our bodies into the presence of those other physical entities. I'd like us to think about that and using the word seeing to apply to all of that. And why do you think in some way that becomes for us a spiritual experience or an experience of comfort or consolation or value or meaning? And maybe you could take that in any direction you'd like to go, but how does this in some deep way connect you to what matters most? Tony, would you feel good starting on that?

Tony: Yeah, sure, Brian. To draw contrast between the indoor spaces of church and the outdoor spaces of the wild, I grew up in a reformed congregationalist church, so I have very similar theological lineage as Wes and Jim and I grew up in that. I mean, I can close my eyes like any one of us could and imagine that sanctuary, we called it a meeting house, not a sanctuary. That's how congregationalist we were. But it's full of right angles. It's full of right angles in the pews and right angles in the window frames and right angles in the cross over the pulpit. And when you go out, when I go out into the wild, there's no right angles. Everything's twisted and broken, and you walk 10 feet into the woods and you see trees that are dying that have fallen in a storm and are composting and being turned into hummus and are being lived in by millions of beetles and mushrooms are growing up between the cracks.

And that to me was a more accurate reflection of my actual lived life in the wilderness than what I was experiencing in a Reformed Worship service that was basically the same. Every Sunday followed the same order, went 58 minutes, had a 23 and a half minute sermon. Everything was so ordered and it's in the Presbyterian book of Worship or whatever. Worship should be done decently and in order. And in the wild nothing is decent and nothing is orderly. It's messy. There's animals killing other animals. You got to watch where you walk or you're going to step into a badger hole and break your ankle or stub your toe. It's just duck your head or you're going to whack it on a tree branch. And that to me seemed a more accurate reflection of my life as a human being. So that's where I tend now to spend more of my time.

Brian: Beautiful. Jim, how about you?

Jim: I just need to dissent from some of that. I think that the overwhelming sense of awe is the way to begin to understand what's going on. But I think that the sense of awe, the beauty, the getting transported in your feelings when you experience a gigantic waterfall or the ocean or mountains or whatever it is certainly not deep enough. And so Tony, is there any limitations or drawbacks or anything wrong or limiting about the hunting world? I mean, I've killed a lot of elk and pheasants and quail and rabbits and stuff in my life, and I've certainly enjoyed it. And I'm a hunter who's doing that not for game, not to eat, as the experience of affirming myself as a guy that wants to have a good experience. But what am I saying?

Brian: Yeah, Jim, I think you're trying to say, I wonder if part of what you're responding to is that

there is something maybe that you experience in the world of church and theology and so on that adds some depth and meaning and understanding to those outdoor experiences that you wouldn't want to have one or the other. You wouldn't want to be without. I'm just guessing that that might be part of what you're responding to.

Jim: I think so. Do you other fellows acknowledge that you're involved in a nature mysticism?

Brian: How would you respond to that, Wes?

Wes: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely, Jim. For me, that's really part of the experience. And I think that it comes from a response to the worldview that we've all inherited and lived with, which puts up such a separation between the spiritual world and the natural world. I mean, I like to tell folks that in Hebrew, there's no word that you can translate to mean what nature means in English. When you say nature in English, you're talking about an experience of the natural world that's unto itself, and that's a concept that doesn't exist in the Hebrew language, meaning in the Hebrew thought that you're intrinsically connected between humanity, the created world, and the creator. It's much more like Tony's been saying much more like Native American worldviews. And for me, when I go fishing, it's partly a way of putting myself back into that kind of connection that I know is most real.

And it's also, it's really interesting. It's why I want to go into the water. I want to be in the stream. I want the water to be flowing past me and through me because I feel at that point it becomes more of a mystical experience because all the symbolism in the scripture about water is so powerful and overwhelming. And also if you think of it psychologically, water in dreams it means the subconscious, it means our inner world. When I stand in the stream, when I'm not frustrated about what I'm... I don't know what's going on, don't know what's action and all that, but when I really get there, I feel that I'm in a different kind of connection to the world of creation and to the creator. And for me, that is a form of mysticism. Jim,

Brian: I'm thinking of Tony, your phrase, an ancestral soul or in some way our deep human identity. And Wes, I'm thinking about that word nature in a way. Part of what I think I mean when I say that word is reality, but in a way we live in such a social reality and such a cultural reality and even theological and economic realities, and God knows political realities that can become so real and so all-encompassing that maybe part of what we are yearning for is to reconnect with something that is even more deeply true about us. Even if I use these words, I feel like it takes us... It can be distracting, but the words I want to use are to rediscover ourselves as primates and mammals and animals and living creatures and part of the evolutionary unfolding story. And that's not to separate from the divine, but it is because that feels more connected to the divine than so many of the sophisticated civilizational social structures we've created. Tony, does that ring true?

Tony: Yeah, Brian, I think that's exactly what I'm trying to say. And we're living at the front end of the Anthropocene, and it may be a very short-lived epic if we're not careful, but I guess I want to push back against the Anthropocene. I want to push back against anthropocentrism in which we walk around every day. My kids are 19, 22 and 23. They're just, especially the older ones, I think they're just finally maturing out of that stage of adolescence where they act like the entire world revolves around them. You remember this stage, and we always

make fun of teenagers for this, but I think as a species we are oftentimes, it just seems like everything revolves around us. We're so anthropocentric and we think that we are all that matters. And of course, we're not all that matters. I mean, we know this as clergy persons and theologians, and so I think that we have to be deliberate about that when we go out.

Yeah, Jim, like you, I mean, I have fun when I go out. These are enjoyable activities for me, but there's a lot of stuff I do that's fun and I choose not to do it, but I choose to continue to reinvest myself in wild places because it's my little, I guess I'm pushing back. And look, I take plenty of heat already. It's starting for my book because I talk so openly about killing and eating animals and butchery, and that's not particularly politically correct right now among in progressive mainline Christian circles. But it's my little pushback against the Anthropocene and me trying to be more primal, Brian. Yeah, I mean, primal is a word I use in my book that I guess I'm unapologetic that I want to be in touch with something more primal.

Brian: One of the things that is interesting to me as somebody who not only loves the outdoors for all kinds of recreational reasons and deeper spiritual reasons, but also is very invested in our ecological crisis and in figuring out how much can be done to keep the very, very worst from happening. One of the interesting things is that the people who go out to, whether it's hunting or fishing or whatever brings them outdoors, then they want to save and protect what it is that they love there.

Without the experience outdoors, many people don't develop the love to want to protect what it is they love. And I think that's something that when we meet another person who shares this love of wild places, we know we're with people who don't want to see it all paved over and turned into a parking lot. And I wondered if each of us might just close with a brief description of one of your favorite places where your trips outdoors take you. I want to just say it this way. Could you tell us just a brief description of a place you love that you've come to out in the wild? Jim, could I start with you?

Jim: Yeah. Years ago I went and fished the Black Canyon of the Gunnison. You went in there, you walked in there, the guides coming the day before on horseback with tents and pontoon boats. And we floated for three days down that way. And I remember going up a canyon a long ways and being up there with these great rocks above on all sides of me and the clouds above and geese flying and the roar of the water coming up through the canyon, it was just an awesome moment. And I've tried to stay open to awesome moments. Sometimes when I'm kneeling and letting the fish go, I sense that on occasions, I don't know if that's what you're saying, but I one time preached a sermon after I got criticized for going elk hunting called The Irony of the Hunt. And I think that's one of the things you're saying is that those who actually go out to kill game actually end up very much protecting it. That's why there's Trout Unlimited and Ducks Unlimited and regulations.

Brian: Thanks a lot, Jim. Tony, a place you love.

Tony: Yeah. Well, Brian, you've been to our family land in central Minnesota a couple times. And I'll just tell you that there's a mile long two track driveway, and when you pull off of Nokay Lake Road off the pavement onto our property, I have to get out and unlock the gate. And usually I let the dog out so he can run alongside my truck on the road. And right there at

the top of the driveway, it's a special place, just that little, I don't know, 50 yard stretch. It's where I shot my first Turkey. It's where my son Aiden shot his first grouse.

It's where my brother and I planted 400 balsam seedlings three years ago that will in our lifetimes will hardly get to knee height, but hopefully a hundred years from now will be a whole grove of balsam trees that will provide thermal cover for deer and grouse and turkeys and squirrels and bunnies, and any number of wild animals. So every time I turn on to that driveway, all these things come flooded back. And frankly, we own it as a family, but I'm the caretaker of that property at this point in our family journey. And so yeah, that's a super special place for me.

Brian: Thanks, Tony. Wes.

Wes: Well, the place that comes to mind, Brian, is where you've also been. It's the Lamar Valley in the north section of Yellowstone Park. I've probably been there 25 times. When I'm there, a couple things happen. First, it's probably one of the most best and pristine examples of what Yellowstone was intended to be. The radical idea of Yellowstone, much of the park now, it's fantastic, but there's so many people. But Lamar Valley captures what this resistance to all that was going on in the development of the west was really represented by the establishment of Yellowstone Park. And then the fact that Buffalo are there and are there in abundance. My wife, Karen and I, a couple weeks ago, we finally watched Ken Burns documentary on Buffalo, which was just magnificent. And it puts you in touch with all that is there in the history, what Tony said, the ancestral soul. I mean, just that animal puts you in touch with all of that, and it becomes a place that far transcends whether you are lucky enough to catch a couple of cutthroat or not when you're there.

Jim: Brian, do you have such a place?

Brian: Oh, thanks for asking Jim. So many, so many. But where I live here in Florida, I can pull my kayak out to the 10,000 Islands of the Everglades and I can in 20 or 30 minutes be away from the sound of traffic and cars and roads and out in the mangroves. And there are times I'll be out there. Psychologists tell us that our brains have whole set of functions dealing with open awareness and another set of functions dealing with focused attention. And what I find is the act of looking for something, whether it's a fish or gold, if you're panning for gold or whatever you're looking for, is obviously focused attention. But there are times where I'll paddle out, put my rod down, and just sit floating on the water and feel that open awareness and the grandeur and the all connectedness. Everything I know about science enriches the moment but even apart from that knowledge is something I can't really explain that I think maybe is in terms of a closing comment for this rich conversation.

The burden of egocentric, the burden of always worrying about our own little egos and the burden of our species being obsessed with itself. It just feels like it is so good for us to get out in places where we realize they don't ever watch the evening news and they don't care about stock markets. And having a perfect right angle is in nobody's job description. And that is the larger world we get to be part of, and we're about it. It's not about us. So that to me is a gift and a relief, and I think part of the experience of the holy. So I'm so grateful to each of you for this conversation. I hope we'll have another one someday, but this is a once-in-a-lifetime gift. So thanks to each of you.

Wes: Thank you, Brian.

Tony: Thanks Brian.

Jim: Thank you, Brian.

Brian: Thanks so much for investing your precious time and attention in Learning How to See. I'm especially grateful to have you along this season as we learn to see nature in new and deeper ways. I believe a transformation in the way we see the earth and all her creatures will deeply enrich your life personally. And I also believe that our shared future and the future of our planet depend on more and more of us learning how to see nature in a new way. This change in seeing isn't just a matter of enrichment, it's also a matter of survival. As a result of our being part of the season of the podcast, I hope we will learn to see ourselves not only in relation to nature, but also as part of nature. I hope we will learn to encounter the spirit or presence or glory of God incarnate in nature, to see the divine and all creatures and all matter and energy, including ourselves as part of one sacred web or cosmic dance of life.

I hope we will all be converted from destroyers or consumers of the web of life into its lovers and healers. If you're interested in learning more, be sure to check out the show notes for links to our guests and the resources they offer. And you may also be interested in my upcoming book, *Life After Doom, Wisdom And Courage For A World Falling Apart*. Thanks as always to Corey Wayne, the skilled and kind producer of this podcast, and to the whole CAC community, staff, faculty, students, and supporters. If you'd like to leave us a question, brief message your story, you can write us an email or send us a voicemail and you'll find instructions in the show notes. If you enjoy this podcast, I hope you'll share it with some friends. Again, I thank you.