

**LEARNING**

**HOW**

**TO**

**SEE**

with

**Brian**

**McLaren**

Season 6, Episode 9

Seeing Nature as a Gardener (Part I)

feat. Brett McLaren and Rachel McLaren

Brian McLaren: I had a really special relationship with my grandfather. I just loved everything about him, my mother's father. One of the things I remember from my earliest childhood, was visiting him. And in his yard, he had beautiful flower gardens. As soon as the long winter up in Rochester, New York was over, he would go and buy petunias and marigolds. And later, he had a vegetable garden as well. But he loved to have beautiful flowers and vegetables growing in the yard. I have this primal memory of a giant tree in their backyard that was blown over in a storm, and so they cut off the stump of the tree. And at the base of this stump, he filled it with flowers. In the absence of the big beautiful tree, now it was just a feast of color and beauty and wonderful smells.

When I was a little bit older, my dad became a gardener, and he loved to grow tomatoes and squash. And when I became a little older, and I was a teenager, for a couple of summers, I worked on a farm at a summer camp. I remember, we built a barbed wire fence, six-feet tall to try to keep the deer out of the garden. And then that fence had to be adjusted to seven-feet, and eight-feet, and nine-feet, because we learned how high those deer could jump. And I have such good memories of planting and harvesting tomatoes and potatoes. All of my life, I've enjoyed gardening. Today, I've got a little over a dozen mango trees in my yard. And in fact, right now, it's mango blooming season, and so I'm anticipating enjoying the sweet fruit later this summer. I've enjoyed learning how to graft and prune, and how to identify and treat diseases and deficiencies. And when you're a gardener, you see the world differently.

In fact, a friend of mine says there are really only two ways that we see the world. One, is like a warrior or a knight, and the other is like a gardener. I think the world itself, invites us to see the world like a gardener, to see our participation and cycles of life that are bigger than any of us, that we get to be part of, we get to benefit from, but we also have to put something into it. And so I invite you in this episode of Learning How to See, to learn to see like a gardener.

Listen, as I read from Life After Doom, this is a short reading from chapter nine of Life After Doom. Have you ever noticed that in Genesis, as the Bible begins, the icon of human dignity, freedom, and goodness, is not a priest offering sacrifices, a Pharaoh enthroned in a gilded temple, a conquistador sitting on a horse with his sword held high, a rich white man in an expensive suit, sitting in a boardroom or standing in a pulpit, or an angry religious zealot in the US, or the Middle East, holding high an AK-47 or AR-15. No, it's a couple of naked indigenous people living in a garden in harmony with each other, with themselves, with all their fellow creatures, and with the Earth itself. They don't even get a creation day of their own. They're created on the same day with living creatures of every kind, cattle and creeping things, and wild animals of the Earth of every kind.

They are made from the earth. In fact, the name Adam means child of red earth. These earth children are one beautiful wild species among many. Yes, earth children are given the breath of life, but so are all the other animals. Yes, they are given dominion from Genesis 1:28, a fraught word to be sure. But why should we let the colonizers define that word in their own image, as if it meant domination? Why assume that dominion in Genesis means a license to kill, exploit, torture, or drive to extinction? Why not assume that dominion means to exercise the same tender, loving, responsible care the Creator has, as the Creator's image bearers?

In this light, the text is suggesting that these humble earth children bear kingly dignity and responsibility to care for the well-being of every creature in the realm that has been entrusted to them. Just as a good king must preserve justice and safety for every citizen, the primal humans must cherish and protect each bird of the air, each fish of the waters, each creature that moves across the ground, each tree, each wildflower, each unfurling fern. That ecological interpretation is reinforced a few verses later in chapter two, when in place of exercised dominion, humans are instructed to work with the earth and care for it, not squeeze every penny of profit you can from it.

I'm so happy in this episode, to be able to introduce you to my two older children, Rachel and Brett McLaren. They are going to talk to you about their experiences in cultivation and restoration of the land. And you're going to hear them speaking about the power of curiosity, when we open our eyes to the natural world and let something spark us. Isn't that a beautiful word, to spark your curiosity? And you're going to hear a lot about the idea of investment. What happens when you don't just see nature as a grocery store that you take out of, that's more like theft than it is an investment. When we see nature as something that we put into, that we put ourselves into, and our time and our effort, sometimes failure and frustration, and above all, our choice and our passion to get involved, you'll hear a lot about investment.

And you'll also be invited to think about your experience of going to the grocery store, where you only see objects, usually wrapped in plastic or cellophane, or in a box, that in some ways makes you be able to forget about the whole process, the weather, the soil, the rain, and the labor and care, and intelligence and wisdom that went into that product, the process behind the product. And it's my hope that by the end of this episode, you will look at this world differently, that you'll look a little more the way a gardener looks at the world, see how that enriches and deepens your own experience of seeing.

Welcome everyone. I always look forward to doing these interviews. I have such amazing guests who join me, but the two I have with me today are extra special, as you'll see. I have my four children, I have my older two here with me, my older daughter Rachel, and my older son Brett. And we're talking about learning how to see, and we're talking about learning how to see nature. And there's a certain way that you see nature when you're a gardener, when you're interacting with nature as someone who cares for nature, and so that will be the thrust of our conversation today. And I'm going to invite each of you, Rachel and Brett, to introduce yourselves, tell folks a little bit about your family, your work, where you live, and maybe even your main gardening interest of each of yours. So let's start with you, Rach.

Rachel McLaren: Great. Hi, my name is Rachel McLaren. I'm an associate professor at the University of Iowa in communication studies, the mom to three kids, who are elementary and middle school age. And I live in Iowa, where I have a couple of acres of both prairie, a little bit of forest, and a pond, and so caring for different ecosystems. And I do have a small plot for gardening as well, but Brett's much better at that than I am.

Brett McLaren: Yeah, and my name's Brett McLaren. I am a father of two young girls, 13 and 10. I'm a pragmatist, not a philosopher, so I'll try and not steer too far out of my lane. But I heard this quote, "To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow." And I'm just an enthusiastic person, I love thinking about the future, and gardening somehow tapped into me, this excitement

about the future when you plant a seed, and getting to follow that process through the end. So that's been fun, and just been purely a hobby for me. Work-wise, I, about 10 years ago, founded a technology consulting firm, and so I'm still operating that firm today, and gardening for fun.

Brian McLaren: That's great. I thought it might be good, just I'm curious in what each of you'll say about this. But obviously, I had a love for the outdoors since my childhood, since my dad, your grandfather, took me up a hill behind our house in upstate New York, to where there was a little pond. And I still picture my dad having this plastic bucket, and having these black rubber boots on, stepping into the pond, and sinking it down and slurping in a couple of globs of frog eggs, and bringing them home. And I watched, and we put them in a goldfish bowl in the middle of the kitchen table, which showed how much my mother was tolerant of my young interests. And over the next couple months, we watched those little tadpoles hatch and grow, and become little frogs that we let go out in the yard. And so that was part of my life. And I'm interested, what do you both remember about how you began to love and see, and enjoy nature? And where has that taken you in your lives this far? Let's start with you, Rach.

Rachel McLaren: Yeah. I mean, I remember always doing outside things growing up. I'm sure I was reluctant at different times, not always as enthusiastic as maybe later, I became. I think that my love has always been a curiosity for animals as well as plants, certainly enjoying flowers. But I remember going on hikes, flipping over logs, being so curious about what we were going to find. And I think that curiosity of what's out there, and then once you see something and it's sparking that curiosity, wanting to know more. And that's still something today. I still text you dad, when I say, "Look at this, look what I found," because I know as a fellow nature enthusiast, you will also delight in those things. Or I heard this owl last night while I was falling asleep, or we've been seeing bald eagles right now, along the Iowa River, and so just that eye for noticing what's out there.

And then I think that you always had education, you always had that knowledge for us. So if we would find something, it probably would've been a different story if you were like, "I don't know what that is, who cares?" But you're like, "Guess what this is, and look what we can learn about this, and let's watch this thing grow," or "Let's bring this home and examine it." And you've continued that with our kids as well. Every time we come to visit you in Florida, finding new things to put in an aquarium, even for a time, so we can observe them and see them, and learn about them, and respect them.

Brian McLaren: Oh, thanks. How about you Brett?

Brett McLaren: Yeah, and for me, anyone that follows my dad, Brian McLaren fans out there, you may not think... Well, you may think of him as a pastor or an author, but you may not realize just how extreme his obsession with nature is. I mean, this guy, to grow up with a father who's one part croc hunter and one part biologist, it's just a totally wild experience.

And so we'd spend our weekends going out to the swamps to find turtles and frogs, and things like Rachel described. And then also developed a real passion for fishing. And so growing up fishing rivers for smallmouth bass, and then deep sea fishing for things in saltwater. And then most recently, I was sort of forced to fly fishing as well, which I've began to develop a love for as well. So growing up with that kind of just passion in the family tree around nature, and getting to be outside so much, it creates something in you that you never lose. I feel almost like it's wearing a different pair of glasses than most of the rest of the world, because when you see a tree and you know the name of it, and you know whether it's in its normal range or not, or when you see an animal and you know that that's one type versus another, it just adds joy and excitement to life that you don't get without having that awareness, and so that's something I've really appreciated.

Brian McLaren: No, that's great. Well, it's been such a delight for me to share that love with both of you still today, and then watching your own kids catch it from you. I'm trying to remember where I developed a love for gardening. My mother liked, and my grandfather loved growing flowers, but then my dad got into vegetable gardening. And I remember a short period of time where I had a pretty good garden along the side of our house when you guys were younger. But Brett, you caught this bug. And I got to about halfway through first grade in gardening, and it feels to me, like you're in graduate school of gardening. Talk about just why gardening has hooked you. And I'm interested in... There's the work of digging and planting, and all that, that has its own pleasure and delight. I'd love to hear how you feel about that, but also just what you feel gardening has done to you as a person.

Brett McLaren: It's a lot. It's actually pretty deep. Truly, in terms of how it impacts my life, and I think about it a lot, and I feel like I learned a lot of things about my business, and even family, and just life in general. But I'll tell you, I remember my grandfather growing a garden and wanting to show it to me every weekend during the summers. There are a few things I could care about less at that time. And so in some ways, I was the least likely to have caught this bug. I think what actually got me hooked is when I felt like I saw behind a curtain about another aspect of just life in general, and that's this idea around variety and diversity in the world. The world is 100 times more interesting than you might think, when you realize that a mango is not a mango, a peach is not a peach, a tomato is not a tomato.

And what I mean by that, there are actually hundreds of varieties of mangoes and peaches and tomatoes, and there's so much variance in the taste and the texture, and how they grow. There are mangoes that taste like coconuts, and tastes like pineapples, and tastes like citrus. Or there are figs that are sugar figs, or honey figs, or berry figs, and they come in green and brown and purple and black. And when you start to realize that the things that you see in the grocery store are not the extent of variety and diversity in the world, aren't even close, that just opens up a whole new world that you want to explore and learn about, at least for me.

And so yeah, I just ventured a guess. The majority of the population doesn't even realize this, and I felt like I had discovered a secret or something, and that veil was removed. So now, when I garden and I want to grow tomatoes, I grow 20 different

varieties of tomatoes. And I want to try all the new ones and the latest cross breeds and everything, and then maybe regrow just the best of the best that I've had before. And it's tapping into something that humans knew about for all of evolution, for 20,000 years since being hunter-gatherers. But we've lost with the mono-cropping, and just going to the grocery store now for our food. And that discovery has been an exciting one for me.

Brian McLaren: Brett, I know you said you're pragmatic, you're an entrepreneur, and business has been a big focus of your life. I'm not asking you to be more of a philosopher than you want to be. But tell me, because I think something that both of you share, is you both appreciate good food. You're kind of foodies, and you appreciate well-prepared, well-cooked food with good recipes and all the rest. And this goes down to the taste of a particular tomato, or a particular pepper, or we could rhapsodize forever about mangoes. But tell me, does it feel to you like the development of a palate, and the development of a taste for diversity in many different areas of life? I don't know. I just feel like that's a big deal that a lot of people don't think about very much. Any additional thoughts on that from you?

Brett McLaren: Yeah, I'll share a quick story that I think kind of ties into that. The question often comes up in small talk, "What's the best meal you ever ate?" And I'll tell you, my first sushi experience in Tokyo was pretty darn life-altering for me. But if I'm honest, the best meal I ever ate was a bland, large-mouth bass cooked over a fire, with no salt or seasoning of any kind. And it's because my crazy friends and I, decided to go on a survival adventure. We'd watched one too many episodes of Survivor Man on Discovery Channel, or something. Which is better, I suppose, than one too many episodes of Naked and Afraid. But we had gotten this idea, and so we went out on this adventure, and we didn't eat for the first 36 hours of this trip. And finally, we finally managed to catch a fish, and we finally managed to start a fire with this little spark block that we didn't know how to use, because you can't use matches or a lighter on a survival trip.

And we cooked this thing up, and nothing, I mean, nothing has ever tasted that good. And I've reflected on that, like why did... It was a real experience of it was the best tasting thing I'd ever had. Why is that? And it's somewhat similar to the feeling that I get when I grow my own food in the garden. It's just the time and energy and effort that went into that process, and the story behind it, and being engaged with it. That's all part of the experience when you eat food, right?

Otherwise, sure, it's just salt and fat, and the things that human nature kind of makes you crave. But when you add all of that back in to what you're eating, the eating experience is amazing, every bite comes with a sense of pride and intrigue. What's this variety going to taste like? And I spent my last 80 days growing this from a seed, and all of those things, they kind of play into it. You value it more, you don't want to waste it, whereas you have no problem throwing out half your meal at a fancy restaurant. And so compare that to the dopamine hit of scrolling on Facebook, or playing Candy Crush on your phone, or something that's totally different. It's just like a total different spark of joy that you then start to crave. And life doesn't feel quite as complete without getting to have that, at least in some of the food that you eat, for me.

Brian McLaren: Gosh, Brett. And it strikes me, you're an entrepreneur, but this feels very much like an investment as opposed to a theft. Like this thing of investing yourself and investing time,

and all that goes along with that self-giving. And then the return on investment, which I imagine has a lot to do with what you feel as an entrepreneur. So yeah, a lot to think about there.

Rachel, I've been intrigued in the last however many years that you've lived in this beautiful property you mentioned, watching your love for some prairie on your property. Could you talk a little bit about Iowa and its environmental history that brings you to understand how valuable prairie is?

Rachel McLaren: Well, Iowa is the most altered state in the nation, in terms of its natural landscape. Used to be majority prairie, is mostly farmland. And so moving here, the previous owners had reestablished a large portion of the property as being native prairie, so native prairie plants native to Iowa. And I really felt like once we bought this house, that I wanted to not ruin it. I mean, my main goal was like, "I don't want to ruin it." And I really see this as sort of paying back for all of the damage that our ancestors have done to this land, and trying to restore it somewhat, to any part of it, to being how it was before people came through and removed all of the prairie and planted farmlands, and things like that. I'm looking out at it now. And so it's been really interesting to learn about.

And it's been the first year that we had the prairie, I remember, I had a list of all the seeds that were planted, and I just wanted to identify them. Every time a new plant would come up, I'd take pictures, I would look online, I would check it off. "Okay, look, we have foxglove beardtongue. Okay, look, we have Echinacea." Oh, look, we have... What do we have that's here? And then from there, has been so many lessons actually, just like Brett was saying, so many lessons, learning from tending to the prairie, from getting to know it. And as Brett was talking, I was just thinking about how much more we get to know about something when we have invested more in learning the whole process. What is this plant like and dislike? What plants does it like to be near? What are the biggest threats to this particular plant's survival, whether those are other insects or other weeds?

And it makes me think even about raising children. You could see a person, a fully-formed person, and what they bring to the world. But something about seeing something through its many stages of growth, of its setbacks of... I know Brett does a lot with figs, pruning things, and taking them from year-to-year, and even grafting. How much more we learn about that entity, that organism, through seeing it through its many seasons of growth and change. And more so than we would just by looking at the outcome of something, or the end product of something. A flower that we might get in a bouquet, versus seeing something as it's year-to-year and season to season. I could say more, but those are some initial thoughts

Brian McLaren: You've really got me thinking, because I'm super interested in the whole idea of process. And Brett, what you were saying about encountering a food in a grocery store, shrink-wrapped in plastic or whatever, and all you see is the carrot, or all you see is the tomato and cellophane, or all you see is the perfect apple, but that's not the truth. Each of those has a long growing process, and each of those involve soil and air and things you would never know. And probably, for so many of us, our lives are only picking up shrink-wrapped food. Oh, my goodness. And the process of watching this prairie develop. Something I got to observe and participate in, is you had an infestation of thistles and you didn't just want to go dump a bunch of chemicals on the land to get rid of them. I'm

embarrassed to say I would've been tempted, but you tell everybody about how much work that was, and how frustrating it was, and how valuable it was.

Rachel McLaren: Yeah, we've dealt with thistle for sure, in the prairie. We've also had sweet clover that we spent many, many hours hand pulling last year. And we have honeysuckle that's part of our forest, that also Brett has helped try to eradicate. And I think there's been a couple things with this process of removing things that threaten the survival of these native plants that we would like to be here. And also the double edged sword of these things. Like thistle as it was growing, first I hated stepping on it because it was very prickly. But the bees actually love the thistle, and I was torn at different times between saying like, "Wow, this is providing food," but thistle are really hard to remove. And once they come up and all those seeds spread, they spread quickly, and they could, over a couple of years, just overtake this prairie that so much time has been invested in, trying to grow these native plants.

So yes, it's been hand-removing these things with a shovel, cutting them down. You have to have gloves. I've gotten pricked so many different times. I bring my wagon around, and shove it in there. And then even after they're dead, I mean the seeds, a lot of times, try to spread. They really have an instinct for survival, and we can respect that about those plants. And then last year, we had a bunch of sweet clover, which you may have noticed, a lot of times it grows along highways. It actually looks kind of beautiful. It's actually used as a cover crop as well, there's yellow sweet clover and white sweet clover. But the only way to remove it is by hand-pulling it. And unfortunately, it can look like some other plants when it's first starting to grow and it doesn't have flowers.

And I had seen it the year before, and thought, "Oh, that's probably supposed to be here." And then the next year, is really when all the flowers came. Some of the plants were as tall as I was, some of them required multiple people pulling and pulling so hard, and making grunting sounds, and then you end up falling on your butt when it finally releases from the ground. And then we had to put it into trash bags, because otherwise, it'll spread. And wait until it kind of turns to mush before we could even get rid of it, so it was a long process. And it's so easy to get overwhelmed through that process. It's easy to look out at our forest, Brett was there with a chainsaw, and say, "It's all honeysuckle. How am I ever going to restore this to a better state, where this is more in control?"

And that's one advice that I've gotten from other people. Some experts here have said, "You have to take the long game with this. You have to think of this as like, okay, I'm going to spend a couple Sundays a year, where I'm going to get out there with the chainsaw and cut down the honeysuckle, or a couple Sundays during growing season in the prairie, and pull out these plants," and know that I might not do it all today, but every little bit that I can tend to this, and I can start to work on this, eventually, maybe I will eradicate it, or maybe this is just part of the process. We never stop weeding. And that's the thing, there's so much about this that we wish there was a destination, where it was like, "If I just do this, I'm going to be done." But we're only done for that period, and then there's going to be more that are going to come up.

And that's true of typical gardening, I think that's true of working with prairie. But just that long game, and also that invitation to see it as part of the process, as opposed to a problem. It is a problem, right? And it needs to be tended to, but at the same time, we should expect



that that's going to be there. And I think that's sometimes, when I've encountered suffering about any type of process that I'm in, is where this belief that it shouldn't be this way, right? As opposed to this recognition, that this is part of what it means to have a garden, or to have a prairie, is that you spend time removing the things that are threatening the growth of the other species. It is to be expected, it's part of the growing process. It doesn't mean that that somehow all is lost, or that it's not worth it to continue fostering through that process.

Brian McLaren: That ring any bells for you Brett?

Brett McLaren: Yeah, I think. Although, what I'll say, Rachel, I think avoiding the weeding and the process piece of that, is what most of us do every day by just buying our food and not having to think about it. We've essentially outsourced that part of human life to someone else. And more and more, I think it's two big giant conglomeration companies out there that are the ones doing that. And they're doing it in a way that, I think, the whole world is waking up to, realizing that it's unsustainable. And you never think about something as basic as topsoil being in limited supply. We just think that these things will go on forever, and suddenly we're realizing, "Oh my gosh, ground wants to be covered. Nature wants to cover the ground so that it stays alive." And if you don't and you just strip it every year, grow your crops and then strip it again, and it rains, your topsoil washes away, or the wind blows, it blows away.

And that you eventually run out. And so now, things like you mentioned, cover crops and all the rest, are these ways, I think, that we're starting to look back to nature for the answers to some of these things. And if you guys, anyone who's willing to listen to a podcast about gardening, I promise you, I promise, if you have not seen the movie, the Biggest Little Farm, that actually my dad forced me to watch against my will, and I'm so glad he did. It will take you 90 minutes to watch this movie, but it will change the way you see the world, full stop.

Nature finds balance over time, and that's the world that we live in. And when humans throw it out of balance and throw it out of whack, we have to get it back to balance. And we've done that as people, at least in recent times with chemicals and sprays and big machines and things. And what this movie showed me, and everyone who's seen it, that there's a way to then leverage nature-based solutions to be part of the solution. And the world's just waking up to the fact that nature is actually pretty darn good at solving problems if you harness it, and you mimic it, and you leverage it in the right ways. And that's a new cool element of gardening and growing food, that is kind of also exciting for me to see, because it demonstrates, to me, progress. And I think that's pretty cool.

Brian McLaren: As I listened to both of you talk, I felt this balance of the work of cultivation, trying to bring out special qualities of the earth, and that cultivation can be done in respectful ways or disrespectful ways, ways that are sustainable, ways that are not sustainable. Sometimes ignorance leads us to harm the earth as we're trying to cultivate it. And then Rachel, I'm thinking about you with a prairie, you're just trying to help heal and restore land that other people disrespectfully cultivated, cultivated without deep knowledge of how the earth works, not knowing about the value of soil. And it strikes me that in a way, people were just doing what they thought they were supposed to do. And we can criticize them, but we would've done the same thing if we were in their shoes. But now we're in a different situation, and you two are seeing that new situation. I'd love to just hear any closing thoughts from you, about how you see the world from your engagement with it in these ways going forward.

Rachel McLaren: I think that being knowledgeable about the past is really important. Like you're saying, there are so many things that we have so many examples, in so many realms of human existence, of where we thought we knew better as humans. And then we're having to reverse engineer things to make up for, "Oh shoot, nature knew all these things that we didn't realize." I mean, I'm thinking about your state dad, of Florida, and how much trying to go back, "Oh, shoot, we didn't realize that building this highway here, would interfere with all these animals in different ways, and waterways." And there's so many ways that these things are connected. And I think it is easy. I was talking about being overwhelmed earlier, it's easier to feel so overwhelmed when we look at climate change, we look at any problem in the world, whether it's nature-based or human-created, or both.

And I think that when we really start to take care and ownership of wherever we can touch, I think that is the way that I've tried to live my life, in a way that combats that sense of overwhelm about what we can do. Can I fix my whole state? And no, what can I do? What am I responsible for? And I think there's different times where it feels like, "What does it matter if I have a little tiny patch of prairie back here or not? What if I just turn this into something else?" But I think that that not only changes, the small part does change the land, but I think it also changes us, right? And it also gives me something to teach my neighbors about, and my friends about when they come over, and I say, "Can I walk you through? Can I show you? Can I show you what butterflies can only nest here? Can I show you what pollinators are attracted here because of this?"

And that actually really ties into food, right, Brett? I mean, bees play an incredibly important role in, even though I'm not growing food in the prairie, in making sure that our food supply is there. So yeah, I think restoration matters, right? And I think there's many things that I'm fighting, honeysuckle is an example, that wasn't native here, that we brought to take care of other issues, and now we've created a whole host of problems. And so it's constantly kind of going back and forth with that. But yeah, I think becoming knowledgeable about your own, the small sphere of land, or place, or space that you inhabit, can help you become more invested in knowing and taking care, and learning, and continuing to educate people around you as well.

Brian McLaren: Beautiful, thanks so much. Brett?

Brett McLaren: Yeah. I'd add a few things. I started by sharing that quote, "To plant a garden is to believe in the future, or believe in tomorrow." And I go further to say that to plant a garden creates belief, and creates enthusiasm for tomorrow. And believing in tomorrow is something that we lack. If you're not careful, you could just feel doom and gloom about everything, about the climate and the environment and the quality of life and hate. But planting a garden, it gets us excited about the future. And that positivity, I feel like, spills over and creates a feeling of possibility in other aspects. And Rachel's talking about restoration. Something that I learned about that I just found fascinating, was to learn about the American chestnut.

And many of you know the story, but it was the most prolific tree in the Eastern United States, as recently as when you were a kid dad. And it was a major, major source of food for wild and domesticated animals alike, for people. And it was completely wiped out to zero, because we imported some other plants that carried disease from Japan, and that wiped it out. And if anyone could measure the magnitude of the impact on nature and on society, it

would just be absolutely immense, just losing that tree. And most of us don't even know that that even happened. But learning about plants has led me to these stories and inspired me. I want to support efforts to bring them back, which is happening now, and to reintroduce and reestablish that balance that we need. If that was a foundation for the food chain for many of the animals around us, imagine if we bring it back, and then we can help to reestablish that food chain. So those are some things that are exciting about restoration.

We talked a lot about preservation as well, about now that we have the knowledge of what we're doing, and the fact that not everything is unlimited, that we need to preserve, I think we're starting to make better decisions about how we do things in the world, like planting cover crops, and some of the things that we talk about. Those are all exciting too. My favorite book is a book called *The Alchemist*, and it has a quote that goes something like this, "When someone makes a decision, he or she is really just diving into a river that will carry him places he had never dreamed of when he first made that decision." And for me, I made the decision to start a garden, or to plant a seed. And many of you, I'd encourage, if you don't already, to take that plunge. And for those that have, know what I'm talking about. That path, you've made that decision to plant that seed, but that path is never a straight line.

There are frustrations, there are pests and disease. You're going to plant too early or too late. You're going to make mistakes. You're going to over-water and underwater, and it can be a process, right? But the key insight through all of that, is that if you were to have thought ahead about all of those challenges, you might never start a garden. And I'd say the same about many aspects of life, even being an entrepreneur, if I had known how hard it would be, I may have never tried. And we, as people, overthink things a lot, but nature doesn't overthink. Nature drops seeds, and it sees where it succeeds and fails, and it just keeps going. And so I don't know, to make a decision to grow garden and tap into some of the value that we've talked about, that you'll get from the food, how you see nature, starting to learn more and build a passion for the restoration and preservation, it starts to turn some of that doom and gloom upside down, and gives us a way to view the world as a more positive place. So it could be really powerful.

Rachel McLaren: I love that. And just the immediacy sometimes, that you can see from your efforts too. Even the improvement that you can see over small changes, I think, helps continue that sort of hopefulness about the future, when you're like, "Ah, look, I've removed these weeds, and now these plants, they can see the sun, and they can grow and they can get even better." And yeah, that was beautifully, beautifully stated.

Brian McLaren: As you were both speaking, it made me think you make a garden and the garden makes you. You make a prairie, the prairie makes you. You make a family, you make a company, you build a community, and then those things build you. And that is part of this mystery of life, that we call sacred and holy, and full of wonder, and full of value. And I think that's what so many of us are trying to get back in touch with, and so much can begin with just deciding, "Okay, I'm going to jump in and get started, have a lot to learn. I'll make a lot of mistakes," but that's how life unfolds. Thank you so much. What a good conversation. I can't get a little choked up, so I'll just stop there and say thank you.

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. 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, a brief message or 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.