

LEARNING

HOW

TO

SEE

with

Brian

McLaren

Season 7, Episode 1

Seeing Nature as an Artist

feat. Dr. Christy Berghoef and Thomas Jay Oord

Brian McLaren: When you are a writer, you go through this writing process where you're alone, it's an act of solitude, and then the book comes out and you have to get out and talk about it. And these days, talking about it means being a guest on a lot of podcasts and going a lot of different places to speak to groups about this book that you created in silence and solitude and privacy. And here's the irony, often it's when you get out and talk about a book that you realize you could have said something much more simply and crisply and directly, and you never thought of it when you were in the writing process.

When I wrote this book, *Life After Doom: Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart*, there is one sentence I wish I would've thought to include in the book while I was writing it, but it only came to me in the context of talking about it. First, I should say a major task in the book was to help people understand our current situation. And by our current situation, I mean what many people call the multi-crisis or the meta-crisis or the poly-crisis. This idea that we have several problems, big problems in our world, and each of those problems make the other problems harder to solve. Climate change is an obvious one of those crises, but I like to say it's the visible tip of a huge melting iceberg of ecological overshoot. The idea that we're taking more resources from the Earth than she can replenish, and we're pumping out more wastes than she can detoxify.

In addition to overshoot, there's a tiny group of billionaires and multimillionaires who control more wealth and power than 85% of the world's population. That inequality of wealth and power is related to our ability to deal with ecological overshoot or not. In addition to overshoot and power imbalances, there's the multiplication of weapons and the mass production of hate to motivate people to use those weapons.

So I wanted to help people get a feel for our current situation. And then I wanted to help people get a sense of four possible scenarios of how our current situation might play out, and that's a lot to ask people to process. And what I wish I would've said at the end of the book is something very, very simple. It would've helped people take all of the somewhat heavy and challenging information about our current situation and future scenarios and would've given them something that they could do something with. So here's that little statement, "I don't know what the future holds, but I know how I want to show up." I don't know what the future holds, but I know how I want to show up.

Knowing how we want to show up is the real point. We all have this inbuilt desire for certainty. We want certainty about what is happening and what's going to happen, but eventually many of us come to terms with the realization that we have to live with some amount of uncertainty. If we claim to have certainty, very often we're just forcing it and pretending to make ourselves feel more in control, but we can deal with the uncertainty of these times far better if we have clarity on how we want to show up. And that's really what *Learning How to See*, this podcast and especially this season of this podcast are really about. I hope that through listening to this season of this podcast, you'll have a clearer idea of how you want to show up in our world.

In our previous season, we looked at how we see nature, how we're learning to see nature in a fresh and new way. And in season seven, we're going to continue on that theme, how we see nature with a special emphasis on how that new way of seeing gives us a new way of showing up. If you are new and you enjoy this podcast, I hope you'll tell some friends about it.

Maybe you'll get some people together to talk about it over a meal or coffee. And you'll learn more about this later, but we'd like to ask you to help us create this season's final episode, more on that later in this episode. Thank you so much for being part of the Learning How to See experience and community, and I'm so glad that you can join us for learning how to see nature with a special concern, with learning how to show up.

I imagine you've heard this joke before and it goes something like this, "A minister, a priest and a rabbi walk into a bar and the bartender says, 'What is this, some kind of a joke?'" There's another version of the joke, it goes something like this, "A pastor, a priest, and a rabbit walk into a bar and after a few drinks, the rabbit says, 'I'm starting to think I'm a typo.'" Well, look, it might seem like a long step from a dad joke to a Latin theological maxim, but try this on, Richard Rohr taught me this maxim since Protestants like me don't normally learn a lot of Latin. Here's the saying, "Quid quid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur." That means, what is received is received according to the manner of the receiver. A minister, a priest, and a rabbi might see things differently because they come from different religious traditions, their different backgrounds, give them different perspectives, different points of view, a bartender sees things differently.

And when it comes to the natural world, people see it differently. A real estate developer, he looks at a beautiful mountain covered in pine trees and he thinks, "Wow, we could cut down all these trees and pave this prairie and dam this creek, and we could create an incredible housing development or resort for skiing or something." A paper manufacturer sees a forested mountainside and he thinks, "How much lumber and paper that he could make from those trees and how much return on investment he could get for leasing that mountainside." Meanwhile, an angler would see in that view a trout stream coming down the mountainside that he'd like to protect. An ecologist might see an endangered species of fish that needs to be preserved. A theologian, depending on his or her background, might see theological justifications for selling that land to the real estate developer or a manufacturer, or for preserving it with the angler and ecologist.

Each of us comes to see every tree, every meadow, every stream, every wave rolling in on the beach. We see with different vision. We bring our own different backgrounds and perspectives, needs, interests, desires, problems to whatever we see. And an artist would bring his or her unique perspective to that landscape as well. We might imagine a joke that begins, "Two photographers walk into the wild," but of course that wouldn't lead to a punchline that would lead to a beautiful conversation.

We're going to begin this season of Learning How to See, focusing again on learning how to see nature, but now with a benefit of two artists, two gifted photographers whose work I deeply appreciate. And I hope that as we engage in this conversation, you feel that your view of this beautiful and wounded natural world is enriched and deepened.

Welcome everyone to Learning How to See. I have been looking forward to this conversation for a long time. I am fortunate enough to have two fascinating friends who among many other notable accomplishments in their lives are just gifted wonderful photographers. I've known them both for years. I love them dearly. They have never met each other in person. So what I thought we would do to begin is I would invite you Christy to introduce yourself to Tom and vice versa. So let's start with Christy Berghoef, could you introduce yourself to

Tom and we'll let everybody else eavesdrop?

Christy Berghoe...: Sure, yeah. Hey, Tom.

Thomas Jay Oord: Hey.

Christy Berghoe...: I live in West Michigan, a little town called Holland. I was raised on a 40-acre flower farm, and after college moved away and just 10 years ago after 20, 30 or so years out in the world, moved back to this 40-acre flower farm and that's where I currently live with my husband and my four kids and we're church planters in the United Church of Christ and navigating the conservative area that we live in, which has been pretty tricky. You're obviously navigating some of your own waters these days. But yeah, so I'm a contemplative photographer. I do that on the side. I also do a lot of portrait photography and yeah, I'm a writer and a gardener.

Brian McLaren: Excellent. That's fantastic. Christy, thanks so much. And I've had the joy of being on your farm and seeing that and knowing your family as well. Yeah, Tom, you recently made a big splash in Newsweek among other places. You've had a lot going on in your life, but maybe you could tell Christy a bit about yourself.

Thomas Jay Oord: Well, my primary role in terms of professionally is that I direct some doctoral programs in open and relational theology at a place called Northwind Theological Seminary, which is actually in Florida down where Brian's at, but I live in Idaho. Idaho is a land that two thirds of the state is public lands, and I get to spend a lot of time in the wilderness. My primary focus is nature photography, landscapes, animals. I don't do many portraits, Christy, although I've been asked to do some weddings and they've turned out rotten. So that's not my skill set.

Brian McLaren: And Tom, maybe just say something about what has had you in a lot of headlines lately.

Thomas Jay Oord: Yeah, I underwent a trial, an official trial in my denomination, the Church of the Nazarene, for being queer-affirming. I was given charges in the summer of 2023, and the trial was in July of 2024. And the verdict of that trial is that I'm no longer a part of the Church than Nazarene. They took away both my credentials as an elder and my membership. And so I still haven't got it out of my system that I keep saying I'm Nazarene or my people. After 50 plus years of being in this group, it's hard to change those habits.

Brian McLaren: I should say, Tom, my sense is that you probably are still the most respected and well-known Nazarene theologian, even if, or at least among Nazarene people, even if some folks wish that that weren't true. And I should add both Tom and Christy, our authors have done some beautiful and important writing and have many, many different avenues of spreading good in the world. But this podcast is called Learning How to See, and we are talking in this season about learning how to see nature, learning how to see the natural world. And when we say nature, all that we mean is the world that was here before we human showed up and the world that would be here if we humans disappeared, this amazing cosmos and universe that we're part of.

And I should tell you both, it's funny for me to be talking about learning how to see today because over the last two weeks I had cataract surgery, and so I had my lenses, old lenses taken out and new artificial lenses put in. And I don't have any glasses right now. I probably will need them eventually, but this is the first time in 42 years that I have not had glasses on. The new lenses they put in my eyes, they put my left eye to have distance vision and my right eye to have closer vision and apparently the brain is able to figure that out and negotiate that, and my brain has not figured that out yet, so-

Christy Berghoe...: Oh, wow. Yeah.

Brian McLaren: So things look a little strange to me at this point, although the promise is there that I will have a better vision when the whole process is complete than I've had it in a long time. But I wanted to begin by asking you each how did you get into photography, and especially the kind of photography you now do? Maybe you could go first, Tom.

Thomas Jay Oord: I picked up the camera in high school and was a yearbook and newspaper photographer back in the days when we had dark rooms and spent a lot of time in there. And then I set it aside until about the year 2000, and then I picked up, digital was coming on, and the camera became my tool for exploring nature in the outdoors. I realized I needed to get away from my work as a theologian at a university and have time alone and so I thought I'd get out and walk in nature, and then I thought, "Well, I'll bring the camera along." And then that became a major way for me to express myself while getting some exercise and a lot of other benefits have come from that. But that's how I kind of started in the early 2000s.

Brian McLaren: And how about you Christy?

Christy Berghoe...: Yeah, I was in fifth grade when we went on a road trip across the country and my parents were always dragging us all over the country on these road trips, camping trips. And when we got back, I don't think I had a camera, because I was in fifth grade, but when we got back, my dad took, he was into photography and he always took slides, so we didn't print a lot of photos. But after we got back, we had the family over and we had a slideshow, and there was one image that my dad took, and it was at the Great Salt Lake, and it was foggy that day, the lake was a perfect calm, and at the end of this kind of old, concrete, a dock or something that went out into the water, there was a tree that grew up out of it.

And the image was so beautiful. And I just remember looking at that and like, "Oh, stop. And then I go back." And just my mouth fell open and I couldn't believe just how much that image moved me, got inside me. And so then for my next birthday, I asked for a camera and it was one of these little cheap point and shoot cameras with the film. And that was the beginning for me.

Brian McLaren: Tom, I'm looking at your face as you listened to her, and it looks like you understand that feeling she had at that moment.

Thomas Jay Oord: Yeah, definitely. I was also thinking about my very first camera, which was a

110 point and shoot, like you said, and I remember being in Yellowstone National Park, and I wanted to get a picture of this bull moose. And that particular camera, the lens, everything looked far away. So I got on my belly and I got up close to that moose and took this picture, and my dad was like, “What are you doing? Crazy, man.”

Brian McLaren: Oh, that’s so great. That’s so great. Christy, in many ways your international gallery is Instagram. I wonder if you could just share with folks what it’s like having almost daily, if not daily practice of shooting photography usually in the same 40 acres of land and sharing that through Instagram.

Christy Berghoe...: Yeah. Well, so I grew up on this small 40 acre farm, and we did not have a lot. I mean, at times it was week to week, month to month living. And so because we didn’t have much in the way of stuff, I wore my brother’s hand-me-downs to school. This was our situation. We drove old rickety cars, our house, the plaster had cracks in it. I mean, this is how we lived. And we didn’t have much, but also we had everything, and that was the 40 acres for me. I spent my childhood crawling on my belly up to the edge of the pond to catch the great blue herons and the muskrats and the sandhill cranes and everything that was going on at the pond. And I used to sneak up so quietly and watch.

And we have woods on the property as well and so my dad made sure we know all the trees in the forest, you have to know them by name. And we knew where the vulture nest was in this old hollowed out tree, where his nest was. And the stench that came off, that became an annual thing because the mother would bring these carcasses for the babies to feed on. And so I really, really got to know these 40 acres very, very intimately, I used to run around barefoot on the farm. And as I was a runner in middle school and high school and would literally run all the trails, there’s trails all over the farm barefoot. And so even my feet got to know the... I knew where it was moist, I knew where I had to go run on tiptoe because there were pinecones scattered across the ground.

And so I just had this very, very intimate relationship with the land. And when we moved back here, I pulled out my camera to see it from all different perspectives, different lenses gave different perspective to different elements of it. And so I really, I became almost dependent on my camera to see. I wanted to rediscover and see the land around me and reacquaint myself with it and get back to that kind of intimate level of relationship that I had with it. So yeah, so on Instagram, I’m often just posting little stories and little pictures of all the goings on that are happening around the farm.

Brian McLaren: And could you describe for people, of course, we’ll put all the links in the show notes, so one of my hopes is that every person will go and immerse themselves in both of your work. And I should say I’m a huge fan of both of your work. It touches me, it nourishes me. It’s something I look forward to, and it’s a gift from both of you to me, and I hope others experience that. But I wonder, Christy, just give folks examples of the kind of images that you’re drawn to.

Christy Berghoe...: Yeah, it can be my chickens, it can be my chickens in the backyard, sometimes it’s them and their personalities. Because I’m on a flower farm, it’s often flowers and just the internal, even views of a flower very, very close up with the macro lens. Sometimes it’s a wide perspective of a whole field of flowers, and that can do a totally different thing to you

than looking inside one. But also I am really interested in the relationship between the bugs and the plants. So it's often a butterfly on the verbena or a bee on the allium. So I'm really fascinated by the community that is happening in the garden. So there's a lot of that as well. And the pond, obviously, the pond is a beautiful spot in the woods, but it's all of the life and all of the things happening and thriving in this community on the farm.

Brian McLaren: Yes, yes. And when I think about all of your images that I've enjoyed, you bring the texture of rocks and moss and you are drawn to weather, you capture beautiful images from different types of weather and sunrise and sunset and all the rest. So yeah, it's wonderful. When we talk to people about learning how to see, I think this is one of the things that photographers do, they see and they capture and they invite us to see the way they see. So Tom, you said that you go on hikes. Would you let folks know, I mean, you pack a heavy pack and you head out into deep, deep wilderness for days at a time. Tell us what that's like and what draws you and give us some feel for your work, even though I hope that every single listener will go in the show notes and go take a look.

Thomas Jay Oord: Yeah, I think one of the things that characterizes my love for the outdoors and my nature photography is my vision, my attempting to see what's wild, untamed. And so I'm drawn to images, landscape images of plants, trees, mountains that suggest something that's not docile that you can't control. I also grew up on a farm, but the farm I grew up in, my dad was a part-time farmer, he was a full-time school teacher, and he liked to raise Holstein cattle. He was a good Dutchman, grew up on a Holstein farm, dairy, but he would buy young calves and then raise them and sell them back to the dairies as extra income. And on the farm, we had the good animals and the bad animals. The good animals were our chickens, our pigs, our cows, our horses. The bad animals were those coyotes out there who could threaten our livestock or the rattlesnakes that might threaten us and our creatures.

And as a kid, I had this strong dichotomy of good and evil written in to be based on the animals. In fact, we would take our guns and go out and try to kill the coyotes around the area. And when I was older, I decided I needed to change my mind about these other creatures, these wild creatures in these wild places. And I remember deciding that if all creation has intrinsic value, then I should try to be a friend to creatures. I developed a habit of saying "Hello, friend," to the squirrels, the butterflies, and even the coyotes. So it was a learning to see that shifted my thinking that there were good animals and bad animals to thinking that all animals have intrinsic value and their potential friends. And that has really helped me, especially in cases in which I come up deer or moose with young, I say, "Hello, friend." And then I try to talk in very calm voices, and that allows me to get closer to get photos that I think are more interesting.

Brian McLaren: There is a certain attraction to danger that you have or what other people would think of danger. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

Thomas Jay Oord: Yeah. I don't know what it says about me, Brian. Yeah, there's something about taking risks, I like to think they're calculated risks. My wife sometimes wonders how my calculations run. But calculations, hoping that there might be something astonishing or an experience for me in the world that is unique and memorable. And so that means going on long solo hikes, it means taking risks, getting out on rocks and getting a better angle. It means taking close-ups of rattlesnakes. And I've only taken a few grizzly bear shots in which

I was too close. But those kinds of things, I don't know, because I'm not as afraid of creatures as I once was, I don't think they're as risky as what other people might think, but there's still some risk involved.

Brian McLaren: And I think this is something, when we use the word nature, for some people, the word nature, if I were to use the name Thomas Kinkade, that painter, I don't know if that would evoke something, but it's like this very... Everything's domesticated and nice and sweet and harmless, and even though it's wild, it's tame. But any of us who interact with the natural world know there really is danger out there. Christy, you're out by the pond and there's a thunderstorm coming and the clouds can be some great shots, but that lightning can put a shiver up your spine. So talk to me about that, about... Because I think something both of you do in your nature photography is you aren't just making everything sweet and nice, you're helping us feel the edges of it as well.

Christy Berghoe...: Yeah, I mean, it's true. It's easy to say everything's so pretty and everything's so lovely, but there are predators. For example, I wrote an essay recently about, I used to have a real fear of spiders and particularly garden spiders, which are these big black and yellow ones with the long thorny black legs, and they show up in the flower beds every year about this time. And when I was a kid, I would bat those things away. I didn't want to be out in the fields with these things, so I would kill them, essentially. And as I came back, I began to see after a good talk with my mom about how, "These are our collaborators. They're not the enemy. They're working with us. They're eating the grasshoppers, which are destroying the flowers, and we don't have to spray the flowers if the spiders are allowed to thrive and take care of the grasshoppers."

And so several days, just witnessing this spider who we came to call Mabel in her web. Bugs fly in, we watched a large grasshopper go in there and she just moved on it and shot her venom in there and wrap that thing up. And it's like there are hard parts of nature, things die, things have to die, so other things can live, but it's also, I just find it beautiful to see how all of this has purpose. It's not like senseless, it's not senseless violence. I don't know it's... It all has purpose, it's all a part of the community, and it's all part of a big balance that's going on in the world and the earth for sure, and probably a balance that we would do well to learn from.

Brian McLaren: That's a significant statement to make because this is one of our challenges, isn't it? That we humans have dominated the world in such a way that we have thrown so much off balance in our favor. And I'm sure that when the two of you are out there with your camera, you aren't trying to turn your photographs into a sermon to make people care about climate change or ecological destruction. But I would think that you have some sense of how, when other people... Well, let me say it this way, I'm sure that you have sense that in your own discipline of taking photographs, you are affecting your own relationship with the earth and in sharing those photographs, you're inviting other people to deepen their relationship with the earth. I'd love to know Tom, does that ring true and does that stimulate anything in you?

Thomas Jay Oord: Yeah, one of the struggles I have is that I know that if I make photographs that are beautiful, that it will probably incline some people to take extra steps to protect that area because we want things that are beautiful in our lives in general, but it also will inspire some of them to go out in that area and perhaps their presence will taint that area. So there's just

like this strange thing that I'm wrestling with all the time, how much do I want to show the beautiful world I encounter in very out of the way places, worrying that lots of people will join me and they won't be so beautiful, so it's a delicate balance.

The issues that I face in Idaho, in a land that's 83,000 square miles, 2/3 of it which is public lands, I've got a lot of place to roam, but I'm also living in a state, many of whose citizens think that the land is something you use primarily rather than appreciate or tend to. In fact, the national forest, every time I go into the national forest here, there's a little sign underneath the name of the forest that says, "Land of many uses." And I think that language inclines us to a certain framework or a certain approach to the land that is sometimes not very helpful. And Idahoans in general tend not to think of how to protect or use the land responsibly, you might say. We tend more to think of that as our resource that we can use in whatever ways that are good for us right now, not thinking so much about future generations.

Brian McLaren: Powerfully said, powerfully said.

Christy Berghoe...: Yeah, that just triggers all kinds of thoughts. When I think about... Around here, there are still some small farms, just family farms, family run places, and then we also have increasingly large corporate farms just buying out the small farms and putting massive corn crops and whatnot in. And it's almost like if you don't have a relationship with the land, I think you're much more inclined to just abuse it and use it for your quick, short-term profits and purposes.

Whereas when I look at my parents and how they have farmed their land, it's a generational farm. I grew up there, my dad grew up there, and so there's this ability to call everything by its name, the animals that live there, all the trees and the plants and the shrubs. My dad, for example, he used to go around the milkweeds in the fields so as not to disturb the milkweeds because we know the monarch butterflies need the milkweed. So he would tell the kids working for him in the summer, "When you're weeding, don't pull out the milkweeds." We just took such care to preserve all these things. And a corporate farm doesn't care, they're going to get what they can out of it without thinking long-term consequences and I really think it's because there is no relationship with the land. I think it just changes everything.

Brian McLaren: Yeah. Learning How to See, we'll be back in a moment. I have been kind of fanatically quoting three sentences from the 20th century Catholic theologian Thomas Berry lately. Let me read them to you. These were three sentences he said in many, many settings. 40 years ago, maybe he would say, "I can summarize our current situation in three sentences and here they are.

First, the glory of the human has become the desolation of the earth." You let that one sink in. "The glory of the human has become the desolation of the earth." Second, "The desolation of the earth is becoming the destiny of the human." That one kind of sneaks up on you. "The desolation of the earth is becoming the destiny of the human." And then the third, "All human institutions, professions, programs and activities must now be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore, or foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship. Everything we humans do now has to be judged by the extent to which it inhibits, ignores or fosters a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship." Before we go in

any particular direction, any initial responses to those? Do you see why I'm kind of obsessed with those sentences? I just feel like they pack a punch.

Christy Berghoe...: Absolutely. Yes to all of that. I mean, I feel like this is the focus of my life right now, this very thing, this very thing, and reestablishing in whatever way I can, being a part of reestablishing this much more healthy relationship between people and the earth as well as between people and people, which all comes into play in the same way. But yeah, absolutely a hundred percent everything he said.

Brian McLaren: I was thinking about something that a friend, you both may know well too, Shane Claiborne used to say, he said, "It's not that the rich people hate poor people, it's that they don't know any poor people." Our lives get arranged so that rich people don't know poor people. And so rich people conduct their lives without any sensitivity to what the real lives of poor people are like. And I think there's something similar... When you talk about living on 40 acres multi-generationally and knowing the land, having a name for the garden spider and not just saying, "Oh, that's an oak tree," but you've known that oak tree for 40 years or whatever. This seems to me something of what both of you do in your photography. You help people see and know the land so that it's not just completely foreign to them and it's not just something to be plowed under for crops or board feet of lumber or a golf course or whatever.

Tom, you are, I don't know if this is the case, I kind of think it is, that the history books will talk about you as the father of open and relational theology, you're one of the main figures who's made that field of theology, known open and relational theology. So much for you as a theologian is about relationships. And I'd love to know how that, this phrase from Thomas Berry, "Mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship," how that strikes you as a theologian.

Thomas Jay Oord: Yeah, I think that's crucial. For me, a major turn in my life was coming to realize the importance of the idea of intrinsic value. So it's common for us as humans to say, look, at least in the Christian tradition, we're made in the image of God. We have real value, we have dignity, and that ought to be preserved. And that's why it doesn't matter your color, your race, your gender, your sexuality, we're all valuable, we're all valuable to God, and we're valuable to each other because we live in a relationship.

But one of the things that open relational theology does is to say we need to extend that beyond the human realm to all creatures great and small. It doesn't mean that the mosquito has the exact same amount of value as my wife does, but it does mean the mosquito has value, intrinsic value. It's not just good for what it can do for me and others, it's good for itself. And if all creation has these kinds of intrinsic value, and if there's real relationality between us and other creatures and other creatures and other creatures and the whole thing with God, that means that our actions always have implications far beyond ourselves. There's always a ripple effect. And I happen to think that effect even means God, that what I do to the creatures of this world is also doing something to God. Just like Jesus said, when you act toward the least of these, you did it unto me. I think we can say that in terms of the way we treat our planet and the creatures on it, that we are acting in ways that truly affect the God of the universe.

Brian McLaren: So people of faith then have... In many ways, we all know there's centuries of

religious behavior and tradition and dialogue and argument that drew people away from taking the earth seriously, what mattered was heaven or hell. What mattered was the soul, not the body. What mattered was the spiritual realm, not the world of snowflakes and pine trees and sunflowers and sunfish. And so you're saying that our relationship with the earth is inseparable from our relationship with the creator as well, whether we realize it or not.

Thomas Jay Oord: Yeah, that's what I'm saying. I like to use the word entangled. We are entangled with other creatures and entangled with God. That makes some theologians really uncomfortable because they want a God who can up and do whatever God wants to do and is transcendent and is totally unaffected by us and that's been the major view among professional theologians, not only in the Christian tradition, but in Judaism and Islam as well. But the proposal I'm suggesting here is that we should think of God as truly interrelated with the world, and that means how we act makes a real difference to everyone.

Christy Berghoe...: Yeah.

Brian McLaren: And this brings a kind of sacredness to the world, then. The entanglement of God with the world bring any sense of holiness and glory and transcendence that we associate with God suddenly is entangled with the tiny thing, Christy, that you capture one morning when you're walking through the field that just the dew drops on some grass in the fog or Tom, that scene of rocks and chasms and just the way in some of your photography, you capture expanse and magnificence, that all of this is deeply entangled. For that reason, I suspect that for both of you, your photography feels like holy work to you. It certainly feels it to me as I experience it. Does it feel that way for you?

Christy Berghoe...: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, certainly. I've long felt and sensed and said to some people, some people find it weird, but when I'm with the earth, when I'm close to the earth. Now there's a spot up on this hill on the farm, it's an alfalfa field. And when I was a kid, I would lay on the field at night, I would throw a tarp down in the grass and sleep under the stars and we used to watch meteor showers out there when we were kids and name the constellations.

And during the day, I would sit and watch the clouds, at two o'clock, every day at two o'clock in the summer I'd run out there because the cumulus clouds are going to come over. And I always felt like this is my sanctuary. This is a sacred space. This is the divine. And in some ways, I often think about as well the earth as a strong woman, the earth is a strong woman. And so of course the powerful men of the world have no problem exploiting her, but also this strong woman for me is kind of this essence of the divine. And I feel my best connection to the divine when I'm close to the earth.

Brian McLaren: Anything you want to add there, Tom?

Thomas Jay Oord: Yeah, I do want to add something there. We emulate what we venerate. And I think too often in theology, we have venerated the solitary monarch who rules overall from a somewhat detached perspective. But if we were to venerate that mother who tenderly cares moment by moment to her children and others in the world, that would be a different way of thinking about worship and the worship of what is holy. And I happen to think God's a whole lot more like a loving mother than a distant monarch.

Christy Berghoe...: Yeah. And we come from this mother earth, we come from her. I mean, our creation story has us scooped from the ground. It's our essence. And when we die, we return to her, kind of return to her bosom, just into the earth we go and we deteriorate, and the worms come. And I mean, we're all a part of it. So when we harm the earth, we truly are harming ourselves, I think. And when we disrespect the earth, we're disrespecting ourselves in a way as well, I think.

Brian McLaren: You both have just put into words a way of seeing the world that will enhance a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship, as Thomas Berry said. I'm so happy we got to have this conversation, and I'm so sad that our time is just about up. I want to tell you both a personal story in closing and then invite you to offer a last word.

I was speaking at some big event, I don't know, 15 years ago maybe. And one of the other speakers, in fact, the person who spoke before me was a very famous photographer who did a lot of photography that millions people have seen through National Geographic, and he's given a lot of very big TED talks and other lectures, his name is DeWitt Jones. And he happened to stay over to listen to my lecture, and he came up to me afterwards and he said, "I'm not particularly religious person, but I was really touched by what you said. I have this gathering at my home once a year with some people I meet who I just want to meet each other. Would you be willing to come?"

So I got invited to his home, and on Friday night of the weekend we were going to spend together with group of people who he just invited as an act of hospitality, he said, "I was going to give you all a show of some of my photos tonight." And this was long enough ago that iPhones were still relatively new and primitive, and he had been playing, here he is this great world-class photographer, but he'd been having a blast playing with the iPhone. And he had created these photographs he called drive-bys where he'd literally be driving by and he'd hold his phone out and take a picture, and of course it would all be a blur, but he became fascinated with what was told by the blur of colors.

So for about 90 minutes, he showed slides of some of his recent photography, and he talked about it. And you two will understand this, I would not have understood this if someone said it to me before, but at the end of those 90 minutes, I felt like somebody had taken a bottle of Coke and shaken it up and let it loose in my brain. I felt my brain just come alive because in staring at those images and hearing them talk about them, I literally saw with sensitivity to color and shape and movement that I'd never seen before. It just was this incredible experience.

And Dewitt Jones often says something like this, "When it comes to taking photographs, the experience is more important than the photograph." In other words, the photograph is trying to convey an experience of seeing, but if we focus on the photograph, we miss the experience and the photograph won't be as good. And then he says, "It's our vision, not the camera that makes the image extraordinary. And I wondered if each of you could just offer something to all of the folks who are listening now, and who I hope as soon as we're done, as soon as they can, we'll go and enjoy your photography. What advice would you have to people as photographers and artists to just help people experience seeing, to help people learn how to see, especially seeing this precious sacred earth?"

Thomas Jay Oord: Yeah, for me, there's two fundamental things that are going on in photography. The one fundamental issue is my own experience as the photographer, including my decisions on how to compose my frame, how to deal with the elements like the wind and the light and the creatures and that experience is mine and mine alone. I don't think a photograph can capture everything I'm experiencing. In fact, when I see that photograph afterwards, I have kinds of experiences that no one else does because they weren't there, that wasn't them. And so an important element of photography for me personally is the photographer's own experience and choices that he or she makes when making a photograph that means something to them. But there's another element too, and that's the experience of the viewer who wasn't there when the photograph was taken.

And I have learned over the years when I've asked people, sometimes I give away my photographs as gifts, and I'll send them a link to all my photographs on a Google Drive and say, "Pick one, and I'll send you a framed copy of it." And oftentimes people will pick photographs that weren't that meaningful to me, and I don't think are my best photographs because those photographs say something to them that they didn't say to me when I was taking the photograph. And I think that's the beauty not only of photographs, but of scripture and life in general, that you can't control the experience of those who are interpreting whatever art it is you're providing. But that doesn't mean that you shouldn't give it or that your own experience is somehow of less importance, it's both that we keep together, I think, as artists, as we do our work.

Christy Berghoe...: I love that, thank you. I think one of the things I tell people sometimes, sometimes someone will say, "Oh, how did you stop and think to even look at that thing that we just normally walk right past?" And I think the camera can be a tool that teaches us to see without a camera, if that makes sense? If I have my macro lens on, I'm going out to look inside to look deep inside little things that normally get squashed and walked past. And I think...

This is a little interesting side story. I brought my son up to school, he goes to school up in the UP, and I didn't bring my camera, forgot my camera, and I left my phone on the counter when I left. And so this is nine hours away, and the plan was to spend a couple of days in the UP. It's just beautiful and wild and lovely up there. And I didn't have a camera with me, and it was so frustrating at first because I'm seeing the light and I'm seeing how it filters through the trees, and I'm seeing the rocks on the shore and the waves crashing, and all I want is my camera.

And then what I realized is I'm seeing it, okay, I told myself, "You don't have your camera, now just accept that you don't have a camera. So I was able to just sit and see it and really see it as if I had my camera, but I didn't have my camera. But I was noticing the light and I was noticing the waves as they hit the shore and how far they would roll up and pull back in and all these things that I think if I had not, I usually have my camera in front of my face, maybe I wouldn't have seen.

But it was a really interesting experience. I'm still kind of processing it. But yeah, I do think the camera can help us see without the camera. And there is this flow of life going on around us all the time at our feet, over our heads, all around us, and a camera can just help you kind of become aware and take note and stop and pause and see these marvelous things unfolding

all around us.

Thomas Jay Oord: What Christy was talking there, it reminded me of this, as a photographer I noticed the world in ways differently than I did before I was a photographer. For instance, I commonly back my car out of my garage, look up and see what the clouds are doing today, where the light's at. I'm noticing the weather. And I've gotten to a habit of saying to my wife, "Oh, check out the clouds today," if she's in the car with me. Or, "Look the way that the light comes off that tree." And what's wild is that now my wife will sometimes be driving somewhere and she'll see the clouds because she's heard me talk about it. And my seeing the world actually has influenced her to look at the world differently. And she'll call me up and she'll say, "Hey, I think we're going to have a great sunrise this morning because look at those clouds on the horizon." And so there's something about seeing the world in a particular way that might even be infectious, that might actually get other people to see it in similar ways.

Christy Berghoe...: Yeah, that's so funny. When I was in kindergarten, you know you had to fill out those little things that said, "When I grow up, I want to be..." And then there's a little box on the top and you have to draw a picture and then write the words. And I said, "A cloud watcher." And my teacher, she said, "Oh, you want to be a meteorologist? That's great." And so I thought, "Oh, I didn't know it has a name, a meteorologist. Yeah, I want to be a meteorologist." And then when I found out what that was, I came back and I said, "No, I don't want to be a meteorologist. I literally just want to lay on the ground and watch the sky."

Brian McLaren: I love it.

Christy Berghoe...: Yeah, I guess that's never really left to me.

Brian McLaren: That's right. Well, listen, I feel like I must be one of the happiest guys in the world right now because I have a hunch that lots of people listening will be infected by both of you, by your ability to see. I have had the joy today of introducing two people I respect very much to each other, at least in this conversation and I hope you'll get to meet in person someday and to introduce the two of you to folks. And our hope, I know for all three of us, is that this conversation will be infectious to people to see, to open up, to seek to experience, maybe share with others that experience, because as Thomas Berry said, "We have to foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship," and I sure am appreciative of how you both do that.

Christy Berghoe...: Thanks so much, Brian.

Thomas Jay Oord: Yeah, thanks.

Brian McLaren: We hope that this season of Learning How to See will inspire you to vote wisely, to walk upon this earth gently and to speak up with grace and clarity whenever you can about our need for a new way of seeing the earth. We hope you'll become part of the growing movement to forge a new and sacred relationship among our species, our fellow species, and our planet. This, I believe, is holy work, sacred work, God's work. I think it's what Jesus meant when he spoke of the Kingdom of God.

I'd like to encourage you to take two walks in the coming days in light of our conversation today, one with a camera or the camera on your phone, and see what that partnership of you and a camera helps you experience. And second, I'd encourage you to take a walk with just your eyes. What do you see? What do you experience? What do your other senses bring to you? Where does that experience take you?

If you'd like to share something about your experience or your reaction to this episode or to a photograph of Tom's or Christy's, you can email us at podcasts@CAC.org or by leaving a voicemail at CAC.org/voicemail. We need your responses to be brief, about 175 words in writing or under a minute spoken. If you'd like to learn more about why I care so deeply about helping us live into a new relationship with this beautiful planet and our fellow creatures, I hope you'll check out my new book, *Life After Doom*, and also my book, *The Galapagos Islands: A Spiritual Journey*. A sincere thanks to our guests, Thomas Jay Oord and Christy Berghoef. I hope you'll follow the links in the show notes to learn more about them and to enjoy some of their photography and their work and theology, spirituality, and beyond.

A big thanks as always to Corey Wayne and Dorothy Abrams who produce *Learning How to See*, thanks to April Stace for her musical support. You can explore her music through the links in the show notes. Thanks to Sound on Studio for their help in post-production. Thanks to the Center for Action and Contemplation for making *Learning How to See* possible. And finally, a special thanks to you for your interest and investment of time. And thanks for sharing, *Learning How to See* with others if you find it meaningful.

As a parting moment of shared contemplation, I'd like to read that quote from Thomas Berry again, three basic facts about our current situation. Where does that final phrase take you, mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship? Number one, "The glory of the human has become the desolation of the earth." Two, "The desolation of the earth is becoming the destiny of the human." Three, "All human institutions, professions, programs, and activities must now be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore, or foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship."