

LEARNING

HOW

TO

SEE

with

Brian

McLaren

Season 7, Episode 7

Seeing Nature as a Friend

feat. Corey Wayne and Mike Petrow

Brian McLaren: Welcome everyone to Learning How To See. I have a special opportunity in this last episode of the season. I am this time in the interviewee seat and so I get a chance to respond to questions that come from our producer, Corey Wayne, and from Mike Petrow, head of F3, an important team at the Center for Action and Contemplation. So my friends, I'm happy to be with you and looking forward to this conversation.

Corey Wayne: It's always great to be with you, Brian. Hey, I just wanted to start this off. Since you're now in the interviewee seat, you always begin your interviews by asking your guests to introduce themselves, and while we've heard you introduce yourself in a couple of different ways across each of the episodes, how would you introduce yourself today?

Brian McLaren: Well, let's see. I first would say I live in Southwest Florida. It is a beautiful late fall winterish day here, which for us means temperatures are perfect in the seventies today, beautiful sunshine. Yeah, I just said to my wife a few minutes ago, this is the kind of day in the middle of the summer when it's 93 degrees and super humid where we can't believe it will ever be this nice again. So it's a beautiful day here. I was born in upstate New York and lived in Maryland most of my life, and I was a pastor for 24 years before that, a college English teacher and for the last 17 years or so have been a writer and public speaker, and I get to do creative and enjoyable things with people like you two.

Corey Wayne: Amazing. Thanks Brian Dr. Mike Petrow, how would you introduce yourself?

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh. I was utterly and completely unprepared for this question. I would introduce myself as a nature-loving mystic with occasional scholarly proclivities, companioned by good friends, amazing teachers, and the best cat in the world.

Corey Wayne: Who is presently on-screen, but our listeners cannot see that.

Mike Petrow: Yes, he got very excited about this conversation, really clearly wants to be a part of it.

Brian McLaren: Hey Corey. How do you introduce yourself?

Corey Wayne: Brian, I wasn't prepared for that. I was just prepared to talk to you two. Well, I'm a lover of nature as well. I used to love nature as a kid and I lost that as I went through adulthood. And then I moved to New Mexico and rediscovered my love for nature and now I can't imagine my life without it. So very into nature, synthesizers, I brew kombucha. Yeah. What else should I say? Mike, you know me well.

Mike Petrow: I know that listeners might not know that I've gotten Corey lost on several hikes and he's always been a really good sport about it, and New Mexico's a great place to get lost in. So I would say yeah, Corey's a very good and very hysterical friend to have in your intimate circle.

Corey Wayne: Thank you, Mike.

Brian McLaren: You two are mentioning New Mexico. Can I tell you just a quick thing I don't think I've ever told either of you before. In the early nineties, I went through one of the rougher patches of my life. One of my children was going, my son Trevor, was going through three and a half years of chemotherapy. I was at midlife. My life and work as a pastor was going

through its probably roughest patch. And I had this period of time where I just dreamed that I could leave everything and move to New Mexico and my picture was to be riding a horse back in the mountains of New Mexico. Never had any guess I'd be connected with the CAC in New Mexico or with either of you or that I'd get to spend a lot of time there. So yeah, New Mexico is a special place.

Corey Wayne: You know what's strange about that? When I was a kid, I would always come out to the west. I was fortunate enough to know my great-great-grandparents and a lot of my family lived out here in the west and every summer we would come through the Southwest and drive through Albuquerque and I had relatives in Deming, New Mexico, and I too would've never imagined that one day this would be home.

Mike Petrow: Demings where they have the famous annual duck races, which I'm pretty excited about. They say that New Mexico claims its own, and I think that's true of the natural world in general, but there is something special about the landscape out here. It sort of gets in your heart and doesn't let you go.

Corey Wayne: Yeah. Well, I want to pivot to our conversation today. So Brian, we're interviewing you as a friend and for your work, and we've been producing this show since 2020 when we first made the season on biases and we've since pivoted from biases to Christianity, from Christianity to seven stories, learning about how the story we tell about the world shapes how we live our lives. And from those seven stories to nature. Over the last 13 episodes, we've explored nature through a variety of identities and perspectives. I'm wondering what sticks out to you as the host throughout each of those conversations as sort of a through line.

Brian McLaren: First, I hope it has come through to you both and to all of our listeners, how much I've enjoyed every single person I've had a chance to talk to and how different they've been and what different perspectives and gifts they bring on this subject. When we're facing what I call in my book, *Life After Doom*, the reality of overshoot that we're sucking out more than the earth, more resources than the earth can replenish and we're pumping out more waste products than the earth can detoxify.

When you live with that reality, it is very, very easy to be overwhelmed and to be sucked into a paralysis and maybe even a feeling of despondency and defeat. And yet when we stay in touch with the earth, the earth keeps replenishing us with new reasons to stay in the struggle, to stay in the fight, and to even find joy each day. So this feeling both of how much trouble we're in and yet how nature itself inspires us to stay engaged with all the best resources we can bring. That's the thing that I feel. I especially feel that after listening again to the last few episodes of this season.

Corey Wayne: Yeah, one of my favorite things as one of the producers, now we have two now, Dorothy joined us on season seven, so huge shout out to Dorothy. But one of my favorite things about the last two seasons is we've went all the way from your grandkids to somebody that's helping people explore climate grief and spiritual direction to theologians, mystics, you name it. So I just want to name that I appreciate the vast spectrum of perspectives that you captured because I think a topic such as this needs that.

Brian McLaren: And I have to say in terms of comments that I received from people in person and by

email and so on, yeah, my grandkids really were kind of heroes in the whole series.

Corey Wayne: Yeah, shout out to your kids as well. Your kids also joined us, we're not erasing them.

Brian McLaren: Yes, that's right.

Corey Wayne: Mike, anything that you want to share on this? I think you have a story about sea turtles.

Mike Petrow: Brian, I have to tell you there's a story that lives rent-free in my mind and it is emblematic for everything I appreciate about you as a teacher, as a friend, and what I think you bring to CAC as our dean, we take our work very seriously here at the Center for Action and Contemplation, and we work hard and there have been times where I have gotten a little bit stressed about the urgency of the work that we do here. And so one of my very best friends in Albuquerque is Kate. Kate from Albuquerque, one of my favorite people in the world. And Kate has had a reoccurring mantra for the last few years.

Whenever I get stressed about work, Kate always says to me, "Hey Michael, how many sea turtles did your organization save today?" And I would always say, "to the best of my knowledge, I don't know that we've directly saved any sea turtles today." And she goes, "all right, don't take yourself so seriously." And so this has been a verbal game that we've played literally for years until one day I showed up in a team meeting with you and you got your phone out over Zoom and said, "Hey, can I show all of you what I was doing this morning?" And I'm just going to let you tell our listeners what you showed us on your phone.

Brian McLaren: Well, every summer between May and August, I volunteer about once a week with an organization called Rookery Bay. We monitor six miles of uninhabited beach, south of where I live on the Gulf of Mexico for sea turtle nests. And so we find the nests and then we cover them over with a little fencing to protect them from raccoons and coyotes and so on. And then when they hatch, we count all the hatched eggs and we do all kinds of other data collection. Every once in a while, some of the babies get trapped in the nest and we get to set them free. So I think the video that I showed that day was a rare occasion for us. We usually have loggerhead sea turtles, but there's a far rarer species here in the Gulf called the green sea turtle. And we had released a couple of beautiful little green sea turtle hatchlings that morning and I had a video of it. So it's always really fun when we get to set them free. So it was nice to fit into your friend Kate's little mantra there.

Mike Petrow: Oh man, it was so great. I remember we just were so enthralled when you showed us the video and I immediately texted Kate and was like, "My dean, save sea turtles, you lose." It was such a great moment. I so appreciate that. And Brian, I love the way that you've kicked us off and I think we're going to get into every one of the themes that you've already mentioned. But one of the things I'd love to ask you as a friend to start, you and I, amongst other things have gotten to work on the Essentials of Engaged Contemplation course, the living school course that we built here at the Center for Action Contemplation. And one of the things that comes up a lot in conversation in

that course is that for early Christian Contemplatives, nature was the first scripture.

And I know our good friends, Randy and Edith Woodley talk about how this is intrinsic to Native American spirituality. And I know you've talked to them recently. My question for you is how has that reality really manifested in your life, that nature is the first scripture. It feels to me like it was very true for you growing up. And is that a correct assumption to make?

Brian McLaren: Well, so let me be honest. Growing up, I was forced to go to church and in between Sundays I wasn't like a spiritual kid. If I was in trouble, I would pray. If I thought I was going to fail a test, I would pray. But I wasn't one of those inherently spiritual kids. But I did love nature. I mean, as an adult I look back and I think what I loved in nature was the beauty, the logic, the wisdom, the harmony, the interconnection. And now I understand all of those things as being exactly what you just said, a revelation of what we mean when we say the word God. So as a child that was there, but I would've identified the religious part of it as secondary because of the version of religion that I was brought up with.

As a lot of people were, it's complicated in my own childhood, but interestingly as a teenager, I had a very, very powerful experience in nature that then helped me in a certain sense reconnect those two worlds. If I could indulge the old preacher part of me. I was asked to preach at a church just a couple of weeks ago and I preached a sermon on a Psalm, Psalm 19, if folks want to read it, some folks might be familiar with it, but you can just look it up and read it. Psalm 19, I was taught the first half of the Psalm is about the revelation of God in nature. And the second half of the Psalm was about the revelation of God in scripture. The irony is there was no Bible when the Psalm was written. So in the sermon that I preached recently, what I basically said is the first half of the psalm is talking about the beauty of nature.

The heavens declare the glory of God. The earth declares God's handiwork, day to day, pours forth speech, but there are no words. So it's this paradox of a wordless wisdom that comes to us through the created world, and then it speaks of the law of the Lord, the testimonies of the Lord. And I think what's happening there is the psalmist is saying, when you experience the beauty and grandeur and harmony and patterns and wisdom of nature, you're getting insight into the wisdom and logic and precepts and moral framework of God, of the divine. And so rather than there being two books, there's really one book and it shows itself in nature. And then scripture, a Psalm like this is in a way trying to help us. It's pointing us to nature to try to see that wisdom in life, as we often say at the CAC, that we become students of life, our own individual life, but students of life, the life that we see in this beautiful earth.

Mike Petrow: John Chrysostom says that we should read scripture as a friend talking to a friend. And that's the way I feel when I'm out in the natural world anymore. Does that resonate? I know Brian, I know with your love of birding and everything else, is there an intimacy and a friendship in that aspect of your life?

Brian McLaren: So right above me right now in the room is a roof, and on that roof are solar panels that we installed some years ago. And every night we have a little herd

of iguanas. They're an invasive species here in Florida, but they're well established now, including about a four and a half or five foot long iguana that we have, nicknamed T-Rex, big male, bright orange color. He's just quite a individual. He's gotten used to me, I've gotten used to him. And whenever I see him I say, "Hey, T-Rex, how are you doing?" And I'd talk to him and I'd get his attention. And of course if I were to get too close, he would whack me with his tail. But we have a respectful relationship and the same with a gopher tortoise that has dug its burrow outside my front sidewalk, similarly with some burrowing owls that live in the neighborhood.

And there is a red shouldered hawk that comes and sits on my fence sometimes and stares at me, and they learn that you're not a threat, that you're not there to hurt them or destroy them or kill them or hurt their babies or whatever. And then there's a respectful relationship. They're not tame in the sense that I don't own them. They have their own space that I have to respect. And to me, this kind of respecting of space is a part of friendship. We have a term for people who don't respect boundaries. We call them narcissists. They're always impeding and crossing boundaries to take advantage of us. And we humans tend to have a narcissistic relationship with our fellow creatures, but there's a respectful friendship, I think. It creates a kind of reverence and respect and enjoyment.

Mike Petrow: Sometimes in life, especially when I'm tired, I struggle with boundaries. Boundaries are not always my strong suit in the sense of boundaries to protect myself. And a friend of mine from here in New Mexico recently had said to me, spending time in the desert is a master class in boundary setting because desert plants and desert animals, they're beautiful and you can get actually shockingly close to them, but they're also really good at setting boundaries. A rattlesnake is really good at setting boundaries. A cactus is really good at setting boundaries. And so I appreciate that sort of balance of respect and friendship, which is something I don't know that we've really held onto in the moment we find ourselves in and the culture that we find ourselves in.

Brian McLaren: I think this is one of our real struggles with the natural world. We are so used to being in control of things that when we see the natural world demand respect, we think it's being hostile, but this is part of our job as human beings to learn appropriate respect after centuries and centuries of domination. It's a little bit like people with privilege, white privilege, male privilege, the privilege of the rich. They're so used to acting in domineering ways that when you ask them to show proper respect, they feel they're being deprived of something. But this is something we need and it's our challenge right now. To return to that respect.

Mike Petrow: It makes me think of the Apostle Paul talking about the earth groaning.

Brian McLaren: Yes.

Mike Petrow: And the sort of notion of the earth itself, both grieving but also maybe expressing a little bit of anger and a demand for respect. That's a powerful way to think about it.

Brian McLaren: I mean, really this is where if we were to describe ourselves as walking as friends upon the earth, friends with our fellow creatures, and if we have been bullies and selfish, and of course the other partners in the friendship have to put up their boundaries, right? And we're

at a place now where we're trying to learn respect. Of course we're speaking these words not long after an election, and one of the big debates that's going on in our political world is are we humans in charge? Are we dominators? Are we dictators over the earth or are we actually going to try to be restored to a friendly relationship? I love you mentioning that passage in Paul's writing in Romans, "All creation groans for the revelation of the children of God." I think a good way to understand that is we are not acting like children of God. We're acting like little tin gods ourselves, little egotistical, narcissistic, immature, dictators ourselves. The call is that creation is waiting for us to grow up and start acting less immaturity and selfishly.

Mike Petrow: Well, and I think that's what I've so appreciated about your work and particularly Life After Doom is this call to if we are to be friends of nature, we need to be advocates for our friend.

Brian McLaren: Learning How To See. We'll be back in a moment. As you say that being advocates, and this is where contemplation and action are again, so deeply interwoven. If we're the kind of people like Jesus who sneak out sometimes before first light so that we can regroup ourselves in the natural world, and then we come back into human society and we come back as advocates for the natural world in whose presence we have been communing with God and now we come back into the natural world to our fellow humans, many of whom do not understand the way that we're abusing the earth. Oh my goodness. Suddenly now we have to bring all of the spiritual strength, wisdom, self-regulation. Skillful means that we possibly can now to be advocates and especially because we're in a five alarm fire of emergency and the dangers into which we're pushing our human earth relationship.

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh. Well, and this makes me think of Corey. I know earlier you and I were talking and you were sharing that Life After Doom is your favorite of Brian's books. I know you had some thoughts on that. I'd love to hear where you'd like to take the conversation.

Corey Wayne: This is going to be a random pivot, but Brian, have you seen the movie Barbie?

Brian McLaren: Yes, I have seen that movie.

Corey Wayne: Oh, as you all were talking about narcissism and being better companions to the earth, all I can think about as I'm sitting here listening to you talk is like that's mind-blowing. And also at the same time, I want to talk about our present state of the world and the crisis we find ourselves in. And I feel like a little bit like Barbie in the dancing scene when everybody's having a time and she's like, "does anybody ever think about dying?" And the whole just thing stops. So I wanted to pivot to where we find ourselves now at this state. Yeah, Life After Doom is by far my favorite work of yours.

I think I've told you that several times, and we don't want to make this an interview about your book because we've done enough of that, but we are recording this conversation at the end of November of 2024, Trump has been reelected back to the White House. Out of the many things we could talk about, there's the climate crisis that's unfolding all around us. Yesterday, Dorothy, our wonderful producer, shared with me this article from the New York Times talking about the pending changes that could come to environmental and climate policies under the next Trump administration. And then there's this sense of urgency with the Paris Climate Agreement, reducing global emissions in half by 2030, which comes right at the end of this next Trump presidency. As we talk about these concepts of doom, how has

this changed in your life as it relates to your work and as your own perspectives as being a friend to nature?

Brian McLaren: If you have a friend who has a terrible disease and the disease keeps getting worse and worse and worse, if you really are a loyal friend, you keep feeling pain and your sense of concern grows and grows and you want to stop the things that are causing so much harm to this being who you love. I mean, in a real sense, what has just happened in this election is horrible from many different standpoints, but the folly of our democratic choice in this year, I don't mean democratic in terms of party. I mean the democracy chose to continue the drill, baby drill mindset on top of many other things. It chose to empower billionaires. And what's one of the many stunning things of what's happened in the weeks since the election is that many, many of the people who've been chosen for cabinet positions are billionaires.

Billionaires by and large are people who have become. You can't become a billionaire by being a normal person. You either inherit a huge amount of wealth as many billionaires do. You're not a normal person when you inherit that much wealth or you organize your life to accumulate wealth at that extreme pace and rate, you're not a normal person and you're insulated not only from nature, you're also insulated from large numbers of people. And when you have billions of dollars, almost everybody who's around you is around you to try to get some of your largesse. So they don't want to bite the hand that feeds them. And so I mean, to be a billionaire, a lot of people envy billionaires. I'm thankful every moment, "oh, thank you, God, I'm not a billionaire or a millionaire or whatever." Just thank God that we don't have that amount of insulation from reality and that we haven't been sucked into this sick cult of accumulation any more than we have.

And the three of us are all privileged in many, many ways, and we don't want to minimize that, but it could even be worse. And what we've decided to do is hitch our wagon to the values and vision and perspective of billionaires. Again, it's a choice that our culture made. I'm not surprised we have centuries of addiction to wealth, but it's another step of our societies toward collapse. And the sad thing about our current situation is we will not survive living out of sync with the natural world forever. And so the stupider we are, the more quickly we are driving toward a cliff and we can just keep hoping and working and speaking in whatever ways we can to try to help our society wake up to that reality.

Mike Petrow: What you're sharing makes me think of the desert fathers and mothers. I've been thinking about them a lot lately. This sort of desert elders who lived in the third, fourth and fifth century. What we know from history is that Christianity had gone from this sort of punk rock, minority, illegal religion that was feeding orphans and taking care of widows and reaching out to those in need and had become the religion of the Empire.

And so as politicians were capitalizing on the popularity of Christianity to stay in power, it suddenly became the religion of ladder climbing in the Empire. And we had these early Christian contemplatives who looked around and they didn't even recognize their religion anymore. They were like, this is not the religion of Jesus. So they kind of said, "I'm out." And they opted out of mainstream culture. They're on the exact opposite of the spectrum that you're describing for the billionaires where they were like, we're not here for this game. And they headed out into the desert in the wilderness and they headed out in the desert in wilderness, not just to run away but to run towards God, and that's where they found God.

And in that time there were politicians and peasants who went out to seek them for wisdom. But I kind of wonder if the heading out into the desert is the equivalent of us saying, I'm going to move to Canada, like I'm out. I'm going to get out of here. I'm going to get out of the United States. What I'm wondering is in following their example, but not leaving to go live in a cave, how can we turn back to the wilderness for some of the wisdom, I think that's being lost in mainstream religion, but also not abandon ship and sort of stay in the fight, for lack of a better way to say it. And I hate to use fight language, but it sure feels appropriate at the moment.

Brian McLaren: Yeah, yeah. Well, something I'd want to say first of all is there are many different responses that people have to an emergency situation. And I don't think there's only one right one in many cases, there are many valid responses. And I should say there are people who are saying, doing what the desert sages did in the early centuries of the Christian faith. There are many people who are saying, "I want to go buy some land out in the country." And I understand that and I'm not criticizing that, but here's the reality. A difference between our situation and the desert fathers and mothers is there is nowhere to escape. There is nowhere to escape that will not be affected by climate change. And then by the cascading effects of climate change like mass migration, there are no number of walls that can be put up that will stop mass migration.

When people are starving, they become more and more desperate. When people's children are starving, they become even more desperate. And then what will happen is there will be right wing reactions to all of those problems. And guess what? Some people are going to pick up more and more weapons. There are any number of books and documentaries about what happens when one idiot somewhere presses a button and decides to be the first one to send nuclear weapons. And there are cascading effects that go from there. So when we realize the danger that we're in, one of the things we have to realize is there is no escape. We are in this together just as we can't escape the limits of the earth, we also can't escape our connection to other people, including people who don't believe that climate change is real, including Christians who believe, "oh yeah, it's God's will that we destroy the earth."

Then Jesus comes back and raptures us all to heaven, right? There's all theologies that fit in perfectly with this. There are theologies, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, that are very, very happy to imagine nuclear weapons as long as it's our side using them and not the other guys, not realizing how this becomes a suicide game very, very quickly. So all that's to say we are connected and holding that sense of connectedness, the inability of escape means that we then have to say, I can't escape ultimately. So how do I want to be present and what message do I want to speak and live in a situation where there is nowhere to run?

Corey Wayne: Mike, I think you were the host of the event with Brian in the spring around your book, *Life After Doom*, and what struck me about that event was we pulled the audience of what state of a fight, flight, freeze, and Brian, you introduced flock as a... And I think overwhelmingly the audience was in a freeze state. And you mentioned Doom being this pre-traumatic stress disorder, so to speak. But what do you say to the listeners that are listening in on this conversation? I would imagine that if we were to pull the listeners right now on their iPhones or Androids, whatever, they're listening on, what state they find themselves in, I bet you I could imagine just from conversations and things I see online that freeze is going to still be that overwhelming response. Maybe some others have kicked up a little bit post

election. But anyway, what do you say to the people listening to this conversation?

Brian McLaren: Let me start by saying something about those different responses. Fight, flight, freeze, flock, fawn is another where people look for a leader that they trust, who they want to submit themselves to, seeking that that leader will solve all their problems. So there are all these responses and there might be times where any one of these responses makes more sense than the others, but one of the things I like about that list of responses is that there's no one of them that is the only right answer all the time.

And that phrase, the term fawn evokes, you maybe have both experienced this. I know I've experienced it probably four or five times in my life where I'm walking through the forest and I come upon a baby fawn and literally my foot is six inches away from the baby fawn and it is curled up on the forest floor and its instincts are do not move, trust it's camouflage. And sometimes the wisdom for us is I don't know what to do. I don't know where to go. I don't see a way of escape. And so sometimes freezing as a fawn does, freezing in place is the smartest thing to do until it becomes clear what we should do. But we tend to be herd creatures and flocking sometimes when we're all find ourselves freezing, it becomes smart for us to say, "Hey, let's get together and talk about what's going on."

Or when we see others fawning, looking for an authoritarian leader who says, I alone can fix this, and people are drawn to that, they're drawn to confidence. It's a psychological reality among human beings. We are drawn to confidence, especially when we feel insecure. At times like this I think one of the things we can do is acknowledge that we don't know what to do and then get together with some other people, flock together and say, none of us know what to do and let's be together and let's look at our options and let's stay in touch and let's help one another self-regulate in a difficult time. When I'm tempted to despair or to panic, one of the smartest things I can do is find some other people and say, let's all of us try to self-regulate together and one another's presence will help us maintain some sanity and maturity and self-regulation.

Mike Petrow: I remember when you said that in that virtual gathering, and I for a split second, I misheard you and it landed so well when I thought you said, we are heard creatures, and I thought you meant heard with the ears, and it sort of landed in my soul as we are heard creatures and as such, we need to be heard creatures. And so the gift of sharing our overwhelm or our despair or even our grief in seeking hope by just listening to each other and letting our stories and the reality, the moment that we find ourselves in be carried communally, right as Dr. Barbara Holmes of Blessed memory had taught us in Crisis Contemplation to support each other in the midst of that is so profound. I'm really, really grateful for that insight Brian.

Brian McLaren: Mike, as you mentioned Dr. B, several of us have mentioned the passage in her book and in some of her talks where she recalls an experience of being in an African-American church where an old spiritualist song where the only lyrics are, oh Jesus. And in a sense, the musical experience is a shared chant and a shared groan where people together, Jesus as the face of God who empathizes with our sorrows and fears and pains and sicknesses and terror, he empathizes with our grief. So we feel this is a safe place for us to groan and to groan, I don't know what to do.

To groan, what a mess we're in. To groan, it's going to get worse before it gets better. And

to be able to do that in the presence of God and in the presence of God manifested in one another is one of the ways that I think we hold on and we avoid panic reactions or vengeful reactions or other kind of reactions that will create more trouble. We just stay in a holding zone with one another until the way forward becomes clear. You both know I've been working on a novel or a series of novels, and one of the little phrases that becomes a catchphrase among people in my novel is, "survive another day", Which is a way of saying, we aren't going to fix this today. We're not going to fix it tomorrow. We're not going to fix it next year. Let's survive another day till the way through becomes clear.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Corey Wayne: We're coming up on time, Brian, so I want to keep the rest of our conversation brief. I imagine there's so many trail heads here that we could take and sit with us for hours, but you are by far one of my favorite people to talk to in difficult moments. You have just a brilliant and grounded way of handling these situations. I want to end in a practical note, whatever time have left, talking about hope, courage, resilience for our listeners just to leave them with something as we close out these two seasons of nature, where are you finding hope today? How are you cultivating hope in your own life?

Brian McLaren: Well, as you know from reading the book, I think hope is complicated. There's a kind of hope that's an absolute necessity for survival. It's the will to survive. But there's another kind of hope that sometimes is our way of not facing reality by just looking for something to make us feel good enough that we can return to our previously scheduled autopilot or complacency or whatever. But what's helping me is to realize that hope has its limits and even faith has its limits. But that passage in the New Testament, 1st Corinthians 13 where Paul says, "There are three really great lasting qualities, faith, hope, and love." These are three things that mature people center themselves on. When we're children, we're focused on many other things. Knowledge, information, wealth, power. As we mature, we've realized faith, hope and love are really three central things. And the greatest of these is love.

And what helps me and what keeps that will to survive going in me more than anything else, is to realize what I love and to center on what I love and to celebrate what I love and to love what I love and to be grateful for what I love and to be shaped by what I love. And so we all have a thousand frustrations with organized religion, but one of the reasons I can't give up on organized religion is that at its best, organized religion points us to what is worth loving and invites us to keep centering on what we should desire and love and care about most. And that's what I think draws me into friendships like with you two and draws me into circles like the folk who come together at the Center for Action and Contemplation. I want to be around people who are consciously deciding what's lovable, what's worth loving, and what draws us more deeply into love.

Corey Wayne: That's good. Why don't we ask you, Mike, what gives you hope? How do you cultivate hope in your own life?

Mike Petrow: Oh man, I really appreciate that. I'm still thinking about God, Brian. I'm going to think about that for months, that the greatest of these is love and that love might be the only inexhaustible thing. I've been thinking a lot about, well, so you have me thinking Origin says, "to love God and to love good things is one and the same." And I think that falling

in love with beauty might be what inspires us to really do the work. But Corey, I think a lot about, so you all know I love Origin. To the best of my knowledge, Origin was the first Christian theologian to sort of break the spiritual life into three seasons, and he equated it with Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. We don't have time to get into this, but the middle part, which is what we also think about is the journey of descent or the dark night of the soul, the difficult times.

For whatever reason, Origin connected that with the importance of science and nature. And it seemed like he was saying, when the ground is pulled from under our feet, we need to reground in the natural world. And its wisdom, or I think about every single religious system that I'm aware of puts a value on humility. And I think humility is one of the most poorly translated words in the English language because humility comes from hummus, which is earth, right? So we translate it is to be low, but really I think it's to be grounded. And so what I've been trying to do, Corey and Brian, I know you'll appreciate this, is when I can't get my mind to find hope. I just get out in the desert.

And it's sort of like what you were saying at the top. There's something there that fills me back up. And it's not a commodification of nature. Nature's not there to make me feel better, but there is something about its endurance that is reassuring and in its own way alarming because the natural world's in danger right now. But yeah, I think hope is complicated for me as well. And I've been just trying as best as I can to sort of let the coyotes and the cactuses put that back in for me. What's it like for you, Corey? I'm curious.

Corey Wayne: I was going to say something similar. For me, I have this new term that I just recently coined called Desert Bathing, and I'll get in my car and just drive two hours out of the city and there's a spot I go to and just sit in the desert. There's nobody out there. And I just listened to the silence. I've never journaled in my life until this year, and I've realized the only way to get myself out of resentment and grief is just to write it, stream of consciousness until I reach a point of hope. As you all were talking, and Brian, you and I have reflected on this before, but when I was doing my undergrad, I had this class in positive psychology and I learned about this technique of learned hopefulness.

This comes from like Dan Tomasulo and Martin Seligman, who they both did different works in pioneering this field of positive psychology, which is essentially a way to get people beyond their baseline. And so I just have been really reflecting on these practices of learned hopefulness, focusing on the things that you can do to change your perspective, to celebrate small progress that's being made and to try to find the good in the world because there still is good in the world even when it's colored by doom. But I can really only get there by desert bathing usually, especially since the election, it takes some solitude and my cat. But yeah.

Brian McLaren: I mentioned earlier a tough time I went through in my years as a pastor when I just went through a very rough stretch. I remember talking to another pastor during that time and I asked him, how does he sustain? How does he keep at it? And I remember he lived near the ocean and he said, "I go out to the beach and I sit on the beach for many hours." And he said, "I watched the waves come in and go out, and I watched the tide come in and go out." And he said, "the rhythm of wave after wave after wave coming in and going out, and then those waves being part of the larger tide that comes in and goes out."

And he said, “and by the end of the day, the day is going out. And I reminded the days come and night comes and the rhythm”, he said it resituated himself out of his own little thoughts where his own little thoughts were, “I’m in a mess. I’ve got a problem. This person’s mad at me. I’ve got to solve this, that we’re behind in this payment. And just the rush of anxious thoughts that just keep us going like hamster in a hamster wheel, it put me in a different rhythm”, he said, “and it reminds me of these larger rhythms.”

And sometimes I’ve lately, especially recalling Dr. B and her talking about the ancestors and this realization that there are larger timeframes than my own lifespan and that my own lifespan is just one little wave in a much larger tide. And that tide is just one tide in a much larger process. So getting those larger timeframes and time spans and then feeling, okay, my job is to shine my light in this little time that I have and to do what good I can. And for each of us thinking about being friends of the earth in this way, there are not 8 billion people who are waking up thinking about being friends of the earth, but there’s not only three people either.

There are thousands and millions. And I think that number grows every day. And I think it will keep growing in the years to come as people wake up, as the earth demands respect and gives us harsh realities that remind us that we’re being narcissists here and we’ve got to respect, we’ve got to uphold our part of the deal of this friendship, respect the boundaries of this human earth relationship, and more and more people are going to be one over to being friends of the earth. I wish they were all caught up to me, but I’m so far behind other people and I came along rather late to this myself. So that sense of getting out in the desert, getting out for me, or it might be at the beach or it might be in a forest, but getting these larger timeframes, that would be a good thing for all of us.

Corey Wayne: Yeah. My only other thing was going to ask you, is there any kind of practical bit that you would leave the listeners with as they’re?

Brian McLaren: All of this just makes me want to thank all of the people who have listened to just this episode or several episodes or maybe are going to go back and listen to all the episodes in this series and to use this series and these conversations as ways of helping all of ourselves become better friends to this earth that we’re part of. This earth that’s been so generous to us. This is a conversion process where we’re being converted from a social system and an economic system that makes us see the earth as something to exploit, as well as very often seeing other people as something to exploit or ignore to being respectful friends in a new kind of relationship, ultimately a relationship of love. This year, I’ve been immersing myself in the writings of Father Thomas Berry, a brilliant Catholic thinker. And as we know from an earlier episode in this series, he didn’t like to call himself a theologian, but he liked to call himself a geologist because he didn’t want to separate God from the earth.

And of course, he was building on the work of Teilhard de Chardin, and he was trying to extend Teilhard’s work even more deeply. And as I’ve been thinking about both of them and their contributions, I feel like every once in a while I get it. I understand that gravity is a very elemental form of love where things are attracted to each other, where electric charge, positive and negative being attracted to each other. There is a form of, that’s one of the constituents in this universe that leads to love and hunger and thirst. There are elemental

drives that represent love in a certain sense, and it keeps coming together in more and more rich and deep ways.

Until I think about you two as friends whom I love, and I think I experience your love for me, and we think about other people in our lives we love and parents and children and cousins and lovers and all the rest. And suddenly every once in a while, I feel that's what this whole thing is about. And I believe it, and I know it on a deep level, and sometimes I really feel it on an intense level too. And if this series and this episode can contribute to that for people, that's a good thing.

Corey Wayne: Right on.

Mike Petrow: Well, thanks Brian for having us.

Corey Wayne: Well, thank you all for listening to this conversation with Brian McLaren as a friend to both Mike and I and to nature, and thank you for tuning in to these last two seasons of Learning How To See.