

# Climate Changed\_ How Do You Lo...rld As It Is\_ with Ray Buckley

📅 Thu, Jun 29, 2023 4:37PM ⌚ 40:44

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, ray, relationship, conversation, privilege, father, share, love, community, podcast, trust, feel, climate, grief, story, places, world, learn, grounding, lakota

## SPEAKERS

Peterson Toscano, Ben Yosua-Davis, Nicole Diroff, Ray Buckley

---



00:00

You are listening to Climate Changed, a podcast about pursuing faith, life, and love in a climate-changed world. Hosted by me, Nicole Diroff and me, Ben Yosua-Davis. Climate Changed features guests who deepen the conversation while also stirring the waters.



Nicole Diroff 00:18

The Climate Changed podcast is a project of The BTS Center.



Ben Yosua-Davis 00:23

Welcome back, or welcome for the first time. Today you will hear a conversation I had with Ray Buckley, he brings with him years of experience as a storyteller and a teacher. With just a great deal of wisdom.



Nicole Diroff 00:36

You'll also hear the producer of our podcast, Peterson Toscano. He will lead us in a short grounding activity. And if you're driving or doing chores right now, don't worry, you won't have to close your eyes.



Ben Yosua-Davis 00:51

And as always, we will provide you with meaningful next steps.

N

Nicole Diroff 00:55

But first, I have a question for you, Ben. One of the themes in the conversation you have with Ray is around loving the world as it is. I just love that idea. And so I'm wondering if there's something that you love that perhaps others might deem unusual or typically a challenging thing to love.



Ben Yosua-Davis 01:21

So to call the first thing that comes to my mind is that I love tedium. I did not expect this but after a few years as a home renovator, there are times that you are just doing the same thing over and over and over again, not just for minutes or hours, but literally days, you discover that if you can pass through the Great Valley of Boredom, what comes out of the other side is silence and contemplation and daydreams. And all the things you can't access if you take a detour via your phone or via podcasts or something like that. So I've actually grown to really love tedium. What about you?

N

Nicole Diroff 01:58

Wow, I'm not with you on that one. But I will say I actually really love dandelions. And this feels very new for me because dandelions, especially the stocky version with the white stuff that goes everywhere. I feel like I was told that was messy. But I'm noticing some lawns with tons of yellow. And all I can think about is, the messages around our pollinators, and how much we need those yellow lawns for our pollinators to be fed, and happy. For those of you listening, I wonder what's something you love that others might think of as unusual? And if you're up for we would love to know what you're thinking about? Feel free to send us your answer by email. Our address is [podcast@theBTScenter.org](mailto:podcast@theBTScenter.org). That's [podcast@theBTScenter.org](mailto:podcast@theBTScenter.org).



Ben Yosua-Davis 03:02

And now, our grounding.

P

Peterson Toscano 03:04

I had all these grand plans of going out into nature to record this grounding. But the wildfires have driven me indoors for days. So I adapt. And that's what we do on a climate-changed world. Now I'm making certain assumptions about you. I assume you're a busy person, and you're concerned for the state of the world. Right now, as you listen to this podcast. It's very possible you are busy, maybe doing chores, getting ready for an important meeting, walking around your community dreaming or worrying or both. The reality is that you hold a lot of cares concerns and hopes in your heart. How much can one heart hold? And what about all the things our hearts hold that we can do very little to address or nothing at all. Since you are listening to this podcast, I imagine a multitude of issues and concerns stockpile up in your heart, a host of justice issues, local politics, family matters, an old friend who needs support, worryings and wonderings about the environment, upcoming elections, and then all of those messages from friends and loved ones who wants you to join their cause. It's a lot. Take a deep breath. You

cannot solve all the world's woes. I cannot fix everything. In order to be an effective change agent in the world, you cannot join every cause. I cannot sign up for every newsletter. You cannot say yes to every request for your time, money and attention. You can say no and still care. You can be clear about your role on this rapidly changing planet. You can care about many issues at one time. And you may need to figure out or decide what is yours to do. Ask yourself, what is mine to do? The answer may not come immediately. But keep asking, knowing that your contribution is meaningful. You can hold many concerns in your heart, and you can take the next meaningful, significant step. You are a busy person, you are concerned about the state of the world. There is a lot of room in your heart for love. Your heart can hold a lot and you can faithfully do your part.



Ben Yosua-Davis 05:53

Thanks, Peterson, for that grounding. I'm thrilled to share my conversation with Ray Buckley today. Ray is a teacher, storyteller, author, and poet of Lakota, Tlingit, and Scots descent who lives in Alaska with his brother Rick. I met Ray many years ago and was just amazed at his ability to share often hard wisdom to the stories that come from his tradition. And this particular conversation that I've had with Ray, which is part of ongoing conversations that I've had with him from time to time over the years was an honest and a vulnerable one, one where I grew even more appreciative of his graciousness and his wisdom, especially in his ability to travel through heart rendingly difficult situations to more life giving places. So enjoy, and I pray that you will find this conversation to be as much a blessing to you as it was for me. Ray, thank you so much for taking some time to talk with me. What identities are important to you that our listeners should know about?



Ray Buckley 06:56

My father was native Alaskan native and Native American Tlingit and Lakota, my mother's Scottish. Growing up, my mom would take us to Highland festivals. My grandmother, who I'd never met was a kilt maker. My mom would make kilts for us and my father would go with us. He had long hair with a braid down the middle of his back. When we go to Highland festivals, we used to joke that my, my father looked like an Indian in drag. He would wear his kilt and just wander around and talk and visit with people. Both of those heritages not really from heritage standpoint. But the people that I loved and knew were those people. That deep heritage of my grandparents and my father, the importance of, of the land, the importance of being involved in the earth and living as a member of creation, and the Celtic heritage, which came from my mom. After the death of my wife and son, many years ago, my brother came to live with me. Rick had lived with my mom and dad, and he has some cognitive disabilities, not that you would know it because he's extremely wise. Grasping and understanding the world around him is something that he does very well. As the Irish would say, Rick is certainly at this point in my life, my anam cara, my soul friend, and God has used Rick to shape my life and change my life into areas that are, are more important than the way I think that that I used to view life and the function of work recalls me to live simply, to enjoy the immediate things around me, and to laugh continually. He teases me continually. Those shaping patterns those identities of people are, I think the identities of my life.



Ben Yosua-Davis 09:16

Talking to folks who are like me, who have grown up in places of privilege and dominance, we are currently at a place where we don't know what forces we want to have shape us because this is really a moment, especially looking at the climate crisis, where we no longer feel like we're in control of our own future, our own destinies. What does it look like to love the world as it is?

R

Ray Buckley 09:41

We would say that for a person to be a human being, which is the word both in Tlingit and Lakota, those words mean human being. For us to be a human being means that we live in a correct balance of relationship. With the Creator God, the people around us, those people who walk who are human beings, but also in all of creation. In the language, it's not saying somebody who is a mouse, we would say, nearly translated, the person who is a mouse, the person who is an elk, the person which is a tree, we address creation, all of creation, from an understanding of personhood, which also fits very well with Celtic traditions and other forms around the world. You know, you have stepped outside of a relationship, when you push yourself forward, in my behavior, with my brother or in the people I encounter, if I am pushing myself forward, then I do not stand in good relationship. I am a human being when I stand in good relationship with the Creator, the world around me, all that is created an understanding that I hold relationship. Go back in my grandfather's history, when people were buffalo hunters, millions and millions and millions of buffalo were killed until they were down to 300. So an entire way of life that I have never known or my father, my grandfather was a child, then, but it disappeared. It disappeared because there was no balance. Someone asserted themselves into the world. Because as Native people would say, they cease to be a human being. They exploited something around them until they nearly destroyed it. The spiritual lesson from there becomes that although my grandfather's people didn't cause that destruction, they experienced that destruction. The people almost went extinct from it, the animal was gone, the culture was gone. Not all of the culture, but the words, that specific part of it for a long time. We need to say whether one is a religious person or a spiritual person, but the choice to live within a world and to live maintaining that world is a spiritual choice of non assertion of power over another, so that the other can continue. Been a couple of times over the last few years, we've had gatherings of elder people, including Maoris and native Hawaiians and others come together to mourn the loss of species that have gone and some that are likely to be gone within five or six years, to honour them with singing. We know that there are some which we can reverse. But we know that the state of the physical world is that many will be lost, to say goodbye to that relationship from the concept of helping being keepers of the world. And watching that mourning, that actually physical and spiritual mourning that comes from elders who are seeing the world change. By the same token, that implies commitment to the world that exists now, the maintenance of my relationships with fellow human beings, trees, water, Earth, knowing that how I treat those things will depend on how others survive. Letting my mourning guide me, so that my hate behavior is for also the living world around me. And to maintain that life in the middle of a changing world.



Ben Yosua-Davis 14:05

As you say this, I am brought back to the island where I make my home and I am recollecting a beach. For generations families have gone there. It's called the Hook. It's one of the key places to go for clamming. A lot of families have spent summer after summer day there. It's been

largely washed away in the last couple of years. They went down for the first time a couple months ago and was just shocked at how much had gone and how little was left. And I remember remarking to a couple of people I said, I think we need a funeral for this beach, or we're going to need one soon. When the community was talking about mitigation efforts, it really turned into a time of remembrance with people sharing how important that place was for them. Those of us who come from positions of privilege those who come from colonizing heritages have in this moment we are beginning to have this reckoning in the ways that what we thought was, in fact, normal or even humane was, in fact profoundly exploitative and destructive, including too many Native people.

R

Ray Buckley 15:13

I have been watching with, with interest, things that have been happening particularly in Florida and Texas and other places in our country, but not only in the United States and other parts of the world, the removal of stories that pertain to marginalized people overcoming obstacles are very story of Rosa Parks, for instance, that's not allowed in places anymore. Issues of slavery, in some places, freed slaves, and freed indentured servants, were given the change of clothes when they were freed. They were called putting on my freedom clothes, because the clothes they were given, indicated that they had a new change. What a wonderful story to talk about liberation. When we talk about privilege, I think in some ways, there is the privilege of being able to go into a restaurant and be served, there is a privilege of being able to drive down the road without being suspect. All of those privileges that many of us have experienced, just on the basis of how we look, it is important to acknowledge that in our country, poverty removes privilege. Where people have been poor, where people have suffered where they have struggled for rights, whether it's in coal mines, and Appalachia, or farmworkers and in all over the country, or whether it's just the working poor, in our country, there is a limit to where color privilege does not really pertain. And a lot of people who in the world have had economic privilege, but have lived successfully as human beings. But it's recognized in that case, it's recognizing that those people around you, those people all around the world, but certainly in your neighborhood, those people around you, when it dawns on you, that suddenly they can go into a library without people making sure they're not stealing a library book, or the stories of people enduring hardship that the wealthy imposed on them by class distinction, or race distinction, or wherever that we can no longer talk about that is both a spiritual warning and it ought to be an existential warning. Because once we start rewriting history, or removing history, we don't have the capacity to learn from it. And then it becomes an assault or something to fear when people become young adults.



Ben Yosua-Davis 18:04

I'm curious if you could share a story, maybe from your own life about a moment that you chose joy, or chose to pick something up from your story or your heritage or that from your community, and find a way to creatively engage it and transform it.

R

Ray Buckley 18:25

Sometimes we're not always aware of a choice. When the choice comes and sits in our living room, then we are compelled by our conscience, or education by our experience, we are compelled to action. There have been many times in my life, it would have been easy to have

blamed others. The death of my wife and son were one where their lives were cut short by a driver under the influence. My father really forced that issue on me by coming and standing at my house with a with a book in which he written the man's name. And told me to pray in a sacred manner for that person. We understand the heart we understand the tragedy, we deeply feel the pain. The acuteness of the pain goes away but to never leave that absent place. But in that absent place can be replaced. Good memories and actions and a way of continuing the lives of those that were lost. My father forced a process of forgiveness on me and would keep me aware of what is happening by giving the newspaper clippings of the trial and other things. I could not pray for this person. But the words for other prayers came and finding he had a wife and son, I had lost mine. That was in the basic level of humanity. And it came the day that I could write beside his name and read the date and I could visit with him and his family. And there was at that moment, in the understanding, didn't come through reading a book or anything of that nature. That in this case, one would cause a significant tragedy, me and my family, that there was a way past this for both of us. That, for me was a lesson that I could engage grief on many different levels. I could hold grief, I could experience grief. I could live with people who were experiencing grief, put your arms around them, and find a way to preserve the history, but in our actions, move past hatred, that would only perpetuate grief. When that comes, you start looking for the avenues that enable you not to reconcile, but start looking for the avenues in which you can start building something new, past the hurt and the pain. It also means that they've been that there are times when you become more mature, that there are times you know that you have to walk into where there will be pain. And you may not see the end of the pain. You may not see it within your lifetime. But your understanding is yes, I need to walk into where the pain was, and I need to hold hands with people or I can't back away from them. But in all of these things that I'm doing, I'm choosing to create relationship that someone else can build on when my time is done. And there is joy. The Tlingit word for warrior means "one who stands between." It isn't one who goes out and fights. It's one who stands between. So there is a maturity, I think, as you know that you can and are able, you are able to step in front of somebody else, between them and danger. And whether that may be advocating for a book, whether it may be advocating for relationship, it may be advocating for keeping the Tongass rainforest from from being logged, in maybe feeding the homeless on the street or visiting the neighbor or a wealthy neighbor, you have the capacity to step between them, and what is happening to them. There you find joy that is not giddiness. But it is the capacity to be present with someone else in good and bad in life.



Ben Yosua-Davis 23:34

Thank you Ray, first, for the gift of that story, which feels like a sacred offering to me. And I thank you for the ways that you share what it looks like not to imagine that everything's just going to get put back together somehow. But that we there is a path that we can travel past the hurt, maybe through the hurt to a new future. And that part of the way we do that is by stepping into the midst of that mourning and that guilt and that grief, trusting that our ability to be in those places is in and of itself, enough.



Ray Buckley 24:24

I thank you for those words that you just offered. In a personal note, I'm very proud to know you. I'm very proud of you. And the work that you do. Thank you.

N

**Nicole Diroff 24:45**

Oh Ben, I'm very proud to know you and proud of you. I just think Ray is an amazing long term conversation partner for you and I'm so glad I had that chance to listen in to your conversation with him. One of the things that's pretty early in your conversation that I wanted to just pause and unpack, because Ray brings it up as a way to love the world, a way to love into the world, as it really is. And he talks about personhood. This is such a wise concept, as we have been learning from indigenous communities, about the alive and wise world that I feel like I have not been introduced to fully enough. As you know from some of my sharing on other episodes, Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass* is something that I turn to again and again, for understanding this alive and wise world. She has a chapter called *The Grammar of Animacy*. I love that phrase, *The Grammar of Animacy*. One of the things that she talks about is the way in which the English language is so full of nouns. Something like 80% of our words are nouns in the English language. But the Potawatomi language that she was learning is the opposite. 80% of their words are verbs. So she talks about a bay like we live in Maine, and there's Casco Bay, the bay is not a noun, it's a verb. So that bay is being a bay. And that river is being a river. Whenever I can shift my perception for a moment, and look at the water and say, that water is being water, it helps me to love in a different way to love something, not in a consumer way, the way that I love my blue pen, but in a way that invites relationship because what I'm loving has aliveness and wisdom itself.

**Ben Yosua-Davis 27:26**

This speaks to one of the pieces of Ray's conversation that really struck me which is so there's being a bay, there's also being a human, human being as a verb, this sense that it's not a fixed state, it is actually a verb, it is an activity, it is a process. One piece about kinship that he shared that I had not considered before was how kinship is also about what it means for us to be human beings or to cease being human beings. And so we need these relationships with the more than human community so that we in fact, can be human. When we step out of those relationships, there is a meaningful way in which we stop being human. Have you had that experience as well? Encountering I mean, I guess it could be another human being, but maybe a non human being that helps you be more human?

N

**Nicole Diroff 28:22**

I love this question. And I've not really thought about this before in this way. The question itself really resonates for me because of the interfaith understanding work that I did for so long. A core concept of that work is that it is indeed in relationship with someone who is different from yourself that you get to know who you truly are. That most definitely happened for me in conversation with people who held identities that were very different from my own, I started to know myself better. But what makes me feel more human? What a great question.

**Ben Yosua-Davis 29:06**

As you know, my family recently spent an extended period of time on a farm with friends. It's a working farm. It's an intentional Christian community and a church and I just noticed how my whole sense of being I could kind of feel it begin to expand as I was in relationship, not with just

all these people who were coming and going all the time who were relating with, but in my relationship with the goats and the sheep and the plants we were working on and the chickens who are hilarious chickens are I've decided. Goats are hilarious. Chickens are also hilarious. Watching them interact is just incredible. But there was this sense of I was becoming more me and I can watch my children have that same experience. The other side to that experience, though, for me, and I think this is the painful part of awakening to this sense of kinship. It doesn't just open us up for joy. But it opens us up for sadness and grief as well. That's one of the things I love about Ray's wisdom is he's really, really honest about that. And how difficult this notion of kinship is, and the places that it often will bring us into these really vulnerable places of suffering, the story that he shared about the process of forgiving the drunk driver who killed his family, I remember my breath kind of catching as I was listening to him share that thinking: What incredible strength it takes to stay with that and stay with the kinship in a circumstance where there was just so much, there was so much pain.

N

Nicole Diroff 30:45

Yes, I can resonate with the sacredness of deep storytelling. That's so incredibly personal, and such gratitude, to Ray for being willing to share the heartache and the wisdom from sticking with it. I was especially struck by the role of his father in what he shared, the structure that his father invited him into. And then the ongoing companionship and consistent, I'll say, encouragement, it may not have always felt encouraging, it may have felt a little more like prodding. But in the end, being invited to stay with the pain and know that sometimes we need to relate to people on a longer timeline. Ray said something about staying with relationships in a way that you know, they will flow beyond your own mortality. Or working on diversity in my community, which at times, you want to have these short term successes, a lot of that work is about sticking with it, even if things don't change in the next day or week.



Ben Yosua-Davis 32:15

One of the best pieces of advice we're ever given about relating to the island where we live is people who said you can't go in and change systems. So and by systems, here, we're talking about patterns of ways people relate to one another and see the world. You can't change generation old systems in a few years by yourself, it just doesn't work that way. No one can do it. And there is a humility to engaging with something even as small as a year round community of 400 people where your work may never see fruition and your lifetime, it may take not just your children's but like your grandchildren's and their children's lifetimes to see some of these big systems change. And of course, climate is another great example of this. For myself, this certainly isn't going to be quote unquote, solved in my lifetime. This is something that maybe works on a geologic timescale. And so how do you find hope, and a willingness to engage and go through when the passage through this moment may take thousands of years?

N

Nicole Diroff 33:23

This is making me think about trust, and whether we trust ourselves and our future humans? Do we trust ourselves to hold grief? Do we trust ourselves to hold challenge and trauma. I've been talking with fellow parents about some of the worries that we hold for our children, as parents in these times, wondering about how much energy we put into that future worry or



concern. We've been having conversations about shifting the worry to a trust in future self, to know that if and when you encounter something challenging, that you trust yourself, you trust your village to respond. Ray was pointing to that, as he shared about the maturity to be able to step between to know that you can stand in grief.



Ben Yosua-Davis 34:33

You talk about trusting your village. One of the things that can carry our hope and our work and that ability to step between for generations is community. Matter of fact, I'm pretty sure we can't do it on our own. We've very literally can't do it on our own. This is why it's so important to have rooted communities of people who are going to say this is our place or this is our work or this is our context. We are choosing to stay in this place or this work in this context and not move. And we are going to do so in a way that has a generational vision, trusting that the generations after us can pick up the work when we're gone. That involves a level of trust and faith that many days, quite honestly right now, I don't have. Yeah, I'm aware that probably that lack of faith is not something that's wrong with reality. It's something that I have to work on within myself remembering that really, at least in my tradition, we talk about trust, and hope, as being the core constituents of love. And so if I want to get to love, to a certain extent, I must also learn how to trust because love does not control or dominate.



Nicole Diroff 35:46

I also so appreciate the way in which Ray talks about his brother, teaching him laughter. I don't know if we got to hear a Ray belly laugh in this conversation with you. But I've been with you and him in a couple other spaces and know that he just has this beautiful laugh. It reminded me of experiences of Desmond Tutu, I had the opportunity to be in the same space as he was, as part of the World Council of Churches. There's something about authentic, delighted laughter. It needs to be part of this. I've been wondering if it comes from a willingness to be completely surprised. It's kind of allowing each moment to unfold in a way that we don't have predetermined expectations. Instead, we're able to delight and laugh.



Ben Yosua-Davis 36:57

Yeah, and I think that's where the trust comes in, where trust becomes the root of the joy. My daughter teaches me this all the time. This morning, I'm sitting at the side porch of our house looking out over her field. And she decides that the game she wants to play is pretty much I pick a spot at the far end of the field, and she runs to it while giggling, and she gets there. And then she waves her arms, and she runs back laughing the whole way. I mean, literally just run from point A to point B, and then back again. And there is something about the delight she takes in this really simple activity. And that reminds me, at least in my best moments, about the delight that I can take in the everyday surprises that are a part of the world.



Nicole Diroff 37:40

Thank you. As we move towards the closing of this particular episode, I want to share a way in which you who are listening might take a next step from this conversation. One thing I'm thinking of in particular is if you might imagine a problematic relationship you're in, maybe

thinking of in particular, is, if you might imagine a problematic relationship you're in, maybe you don't have one, but I'm guessing most people do have someone come to mind when I say to think of a problematic relationship. I wonder what might happen if you put that relationship in the context of an expanded timeline. As Ray shared, he talked about the capacity to be present with someone else through the good and bad of life, which sounds a little like wedding vows. Maybe we need to approach more relationships in our life with that kind of commitment to really think long term about how this relationship has impacts that are beyond what we can know in the moment and sticking with it through the good and the bad.



Ben Yosua-Davis 38:56

So when I think about the next step that you all who are listening can take, I think about what it looks like to roll up our sleeves and get involved in our communities. For example, as a direct result of helping us with this podcast last season, our producer, the wonderful Peterson Toscano became a Red Cross volunteer. And this points out that there are a lot of issues that are related to climate that don't have climate in the name. So maybe there is a climate action team in your community as there is in mine that you can get involved in but if not, you can look to join groups that are involved with conservation or gardening, housing, emergency pet shelters, just to name a few. Actually, supporting the Red Cross financially or becoming a Red Cross volunteer is a practical way to engage in your local community while also doing significant climate work. You learn about disaster preparedness take part in training programs to teach young people about preparing for extreme weather, be part of a blood drive and much more. You can visit [redcross.org](https://www.redcross.org) to learn about the many services and opportunities the Red Cross provides. That's [redcross.org](https://www.redcross.org).



Nicole Diroff 40:02

Thank you so much for joining us today for this episode of Climate Changed.



Ben Yosua-Davis 40:07

We would love to hear your thoughts and responses to our conversation. We would also welcome any suggestions you have for this show.



Nicole Diroff 40:14

Feel free to email us at [podcast@thebtscenter.org](mailto:podcast@thebtscenter.org). That's [podcast@thebtscenter.org](mailto:podcast@thebtscenter.org).



Ben Yosua-Davis 40:22

Our podcast is produced by Peterson Toscano and is a project of The BTS Center in beautiful Portland, Maine.



Nicole Diroff 40:29

Learn more about The BTS Center's many programs and resources by visiting [tehbtscenter.org](http://tehbtscenter.org)  
That's thebtscenter.org. Peace friends be well.