

# S3E1 Brian McLaren

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## SPEAKERS

Ben Yosua-Davis, Peterson Toscano, Nicole Diroff, Anna Barron, Favianna Rodriguez, Brian McLaren

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Ben Yosua-Davis 00:02

You are listening to Climate Changed, a podcast about pursuing faith, life, and love in a climate-changed world, hosted by me, Ben Yosua Davis



Nicole Diroff 00:12

and me, Nicole Diroff. Climate Changed features guests who deepen the conversation while also stirring the waters.



Ben Yosua-Davis 00:20

The Climate Changed podcast is a project of The BTS Center. Thank you for joining us for this exciting episode. We're thrilled to have Brian McLaren with us.



Nicole Diroff 00:31

Brian is an influential author, speaker and activist known for his work on a new kind of Christianity. He'll share insights from his latest book and discuss how faith communities can play a vital role in addressing climate change. And as always, before we end the episode, we will provide you some meaningful next steps you can take inspired by our conversation. Here we are back for Season Three. Season Three. Really fun to be here with you. Ben, I can't believe it three seasons.



Ben Yosua-Davis 01:07

I know. Yeah, that's really exciting. People seem to keep wanting us to come back. And it was so exciting to lead off the season talking to someone like Brian, who is not just a really great thinker, but a deeply empathetic listener and communicator. It felt like a very genuine dialogue

between the two of us, which was just amazing. What are you excited about for this season Nicole?

N

Nicole Diroff 01:32

Well, I've dusted off my microphone and fancy headphones. I'm excited for our theme this season. We are exploring climate courage and the common good, both of those things, I have been thinking about a lot. What does courage look like in a climate-changed world, and how can we be engaging with one another in a way that builds the common good? So we get to talk to lots of cool people along those themes. Another thing I'll shout out is we have expanded our production team from the amazing Peterson Toscano, who's been with us for all three seasons, to include an intern this year. Anna Barron is our podcast production intern, and it has been so fun to have an expanded team, and really reflects the way The BTS Center does its work with lots and lots of collaborative leadership. What about you Ben?



Ben Yosua-Davis 02:32

I was gonna say I'm excited because we are now the best organized podcast ever. This, of course, doesn't matter to any of you who are listening, but for me, who lives in like, the heart of three children under eight, chaos, it really makes my heart go, pitter pat. I'm also really excited for the diversity of guests. We have people from a lot of different social locations, a lot of different religious traditions. Several times as I think about the conversations we're offering where I went, and I hope some of you who are listening might go, Oh, I didn't expect to hear that, or that's an insight I hadn't thought of. And I'm really looking forward to the places where we can share our surprise with the people who are listening.

N

Nicole Diroff 03:14

Agreed. As those of you who have listened in other seasons may know, in each episode of Climate Changed, we provide a space for us to clear our heads from the busyness of the day and center ourselves, so that we might best listen.



Ben Yosua-Davis 03:31

In a moment, you will hear the conversation I had with Brian McLaren, but first, we want to take a moment to center and ground ourselves. Favianna Rodriguez wrote the essay, "Harnessing Cultural Power." It appears in the anthology, All We Can Save. Favianna is an artist, activist and cultural organizer based in Oakland, California. She is widely recognized for her significant contributions and using art as a powerful tool for social change. Her work focuses on critical issues such as immigration, racial justice, gender equity and climate change. For our grounding today. Favianna Rodriguez will read from her essay "Harnessing Cultural Power."

F

Favianna Rodriguez 04:16

The Power of Culture lies in the power of story. Stories change people. Stories change and

activate people. And people have the power to change norms, cultural practices and systems. Stories are like individual stars. For thousands of years, humans used the stars to tell stories and to help make sense of their lives, to orient them on the planet. Stories work in the same way. When many stars coalesce around similar themes, they form a narrative constellation that can disrupt business as usual. They reveal patterns and help illuminate that which was once obscured. The powerful shine in one story can inspire other stories. We need more transformational stories so that we can connect the dots and shift narratives. The climate movement has largely left storytellers and culture out of its strategy toolbox. Now is the time to change that. In the social justice movement, I've observed that our work is often centered on what we are against. We are clear about what we don't want, the No, and that's understandable when our communities are constantly being attacked. Our movements become our first line of defense, but we cannot envision a future when we're stuck in fight or flight. We must also create a culture that is about our Yes, and this is where we can rely on artists. For example, artist Molly Crabapple, writer Naomi Klein and filmmaker Avi Lewis, collaborated with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to create a powerful, illustrative video about what the future could look like if we have the Green New Deal in the United States. This piece of art grounded in AOCs personal story went viral, and is one of the few pop culture pieces to date about the future that's possible with a Green New Deal. Imagine an outpouring of cultural content that shows us a future where political, economic and cultural power are justly distributed, and humans are in a regenerative relationship with nature. There must be room for creation that is captivating and irresistible. We can use our radical imagination to visualize and manifest another world, and we can make that world feel real through cultural products, like TV shows, films, comic books, images or songs. The stories we tell will determine whether our society declines and self destructs, or whether we can heal and thrive. Remember that every story is based on a particular perspective on the world. We must always consider how an author's point of view affects the myths that form our reality. The Nigerian novelist and poet Chinua Achebe got it right when he said: "Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." Let's ask ourselves, who is telling the story or creating the image? What values do they espouse? Whom do I see? Whom do I not see? What worldview is being communicated? How is nature treated? Who stands to gain from this way of seeing the world? Who do they blame for the problem? Who would benefit from the solutions they offer? As I stand in my power as an artist and climate justice leader, I now understand that it's time to write a new story. I can't heal my community or myself without healing the planet, and we can't save the planet without healing injustice. So the question is, Will you stand with me in harnessing culture for the betterment of Earth, to save life as we know it? With love and an unbound imagination. Favianna.



**Ben Yosua-Davis** 09:45

Thank you, Favianna, for sharing that with us. To hear Favianna read the entire essay and to learn more about her work, visit [climatechangedpodcast.org](https://climatechangedpodcast.org). We're excited to introduce our main guest today, someone who has been a guiding light in the realms of faith, activism and public theology.



**Nicole Diroff** 10:14

We're joined by Brian McLaren, an author, activist and public theologian. Brian is known for advocating a new kind of Christianity that is just generous and inclusive. He holds a vision of people of all faiths and cultures working together for the common good.



Ben Yosua-Davis 10:33

Before becoming a renowned voice in theology, Brian was a college English teacher and pastor. Now he is a core faculty member and the Dean of Faculty at the Center for Action and Contemplation. He also co hosts the podcast Learning How to See and is an Auburn Senior Fellow.



Nicole Diroff 10:49

In addition to all of that, Brian has written several influential books. His most recent works include Faith After Doubt, Do I Stay a Christian? And his newest release, Life After Doom: Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart.



Ben Yosua-Davis 11:06

Brian's voice and perspective are invaluable, especially as we navigate these challenging times. We're thrilled to have him with us today to discuss his insights on climate change and how we can find hope and take action in the face of environmental crises. I chatted with Brian and asked him to tell us about doom, hope, courage and of course, what does it mean to lead with peace, hope and love in the face of this profound uncertainty that we're encountering in this moment. We'll share the conversation with you, then Nicole and I will talk about our reactions and responses to it. Many of us have grown up with the assumption that everything will turn out all right in the end, yes, I think in some ways, we often feel like we are on the set of a superhero movie where everything seems really perilous. You can have comfort, because you know, at the end of this, someone's gonna swoop in and save the day, and it will all be fine. One of the things that I noticed in your book is that you begin by suggesting that we can no longer make this assumption.



Brian McLaren 12:13

Yes, there is something in a lot of us that just gets used to succeeding and coming out on top. That's especially true for white people, and it's especially true for white Christians. And the reasons for that are not all positive. People might think, yes, our faith gives us a great, you know, proclivity towards success, but actually, our faith gave us some permissions to do some pretty horrible things over the last 500 years. In a certain sense, white people have gotten used to coming out on top and having things turn out in their favor, for a very long time. Those of us who are used to success and winning and everything turning out well, what we need to do is look at the rest of the world and realize that for an awful lot of people, things have not turned out okay.



Ben Yosua-Davis 13:03

I wonder, for our listeners who might not yet be familiar with your book or your work, if you could just briefly kind of lay out for us what you share about this in Life After Doom.

**B****Brian McLaren 13:14**

Yes, so the doom in the book is not the end of the world, the doom is the feeling many of us feel now and have been feeling some time. I'm looking at doom as an experience, a feeling that the institutions we've trusted to get us this far do not seem capable to get us where we need to go, the coping strategies that have worked for us to get where we are now don't seem to work going forward. When you have this feeling that that you don't see a way to get where we need to go, that creates a crisis for your hope. I have a friend who's a clinical psychologist, a research psychologist, and one of the things he studies is hope. And he just says, look, hope is one of the most important psychological characteristics for mental health. But he describes hope is, hope is when you see a way to reach your goal and you have the will to get there. It's way making and will making. You know, willpower and way power we could say. Hope goes through a crisis when you have a goal you'd like to achieve, but you don't see the way to get there. A lot of people have never exercised their hope in that way. It becomes a self reinforcing habit, because what we tend to do is lower our goals to what we can see, to ways we can see. And there are certain times when that's not enough, to lower your goal to what looks easy. In the book, what I try to do is to say we are in a complex situation, and the feeling of doom is unavoidable for those of us with our eyes open. Maybe one of the main contributions of the book is I try to explain what people are often calling our multi crisis, or poly crisis, and then I try to offer four scenarios of how things might turn out for us. I don't think we can know for certain how things will turn out for us. One way to put it very simply is to say we know we have a problem in how we live with the planet. Climate change is a super obvious and urgent expression of that, but there are so many expressions of it, the loss of topsoil, the acidification of oceans, the melting of ice, the depletion of fish stocks, the huge replacement of wildlife by cows, pigs, chickens, you know, by domestic livestock. And so this first crisis is that we are not living with a planet in a way that is sustainable, and we're reaching cliffs that we're going to go over if we don't deal with that. Our political systems are not equipped to help us deal with a problem of this magnitude. Right at the time, we need our political systems to step in and help us make changes. Our political systems are more polarized than they've ever been, and there is this pull toward authoritarianism. And the authoritarians are people who, instead of using authority to help us face reality, they gain power by helping people deny reality and shift the blame. And so that's the second element. Third element is our economic system doesn't know how to stop doing what it's doing and what it's doing is destroying the planet, and our economic system keeps giving more money and power to a tiny group of super, super, super rich people who use that money to buy media and buy political influence to keep their interests first and foremost. Finally, right when we might hope that our religious communities would give us some sanity and wisdom, very often, they're either part of the problem, sucked into the vortex of polarization and so on, or they're actually aiding and abetting the worst elements of our situation. So when you put all those together, that's when you realize, gosh, just glibly saying everything will be fine does not feel like being upbeat. It feels like being in denial.

**Ben Yosua-Davis 17:32**

I remember the first time I encountered this analysis. It was actually through Margaret Wheatley's, *Who Do We Choose to Be?* She was a guest last season. I remember as I was reading her analysis, which is not that dissimilar to what you just described, having to get up multiple times and go for a walk in the woods and get my heart rate down. I'm wondering, as you share this story with people for the first time, you may be sharing it, in fact, with listeners

right now, for the first time. Yeah, what do you experience are people's most common reactions, emotions, what they feel in their bodies, and what might you offer as a way for them to be able to sit with what you're offering, which is maybe it won't all turn out "all right" in the end?

B

Brian McLaren 18:11

Ben, before I do that, I mean, when you described having to get up and take a walk, that's exactly what I had to do. I wonder, could you just talk a little bit more about that? Because I'd love to hear you know a little more about your own emotional and biological response to that.



Ben Yosua-Davis 18:30

What I remember when when reading that, for me, it all was right in the pit of my stomach. It felt like the bottom of my stomach was dropping out the way that happens when you hear really bad, surprising news, a relative or a dear friend dies. This is a lot I can't sit here marinating this stew of feelings that I'm having right now.

B

Brian McLaren 18:51

As you know, I'm sure psychologists tell us that taking a walk is really one of the best things that a person can do when when those feelings come upon us, literally being outdoors means that we're looking to the left and the right, and that activates our brains in ways that help bring calm, as opposed to just having our eyes focused on one point where we are sort of brought into an inner vortex of fear. Nature itself has mysterious ways of helping us. So as I mentioned, with my religious background, we sort of had this idea that the worse things got, the better it was for us, because God had planned to destroy the world. This might sound crazy to some people, but there are hundreds of millions of people who believe this, that God has already got the timetable set for when God will destroy the world. So we should be happy that the world's getting closer to destruction, because that just proves that our theology is right, that we understand God's plans for the future correctly. It's horrible that people could say, I'm happy that terrible things are about to happen, because it will prove my group right. I didn't buy that. Now that this book is out there, a friend of mine called me the other day and said, How are you doing? He said, I'm sure this was not easy to process and write, and I'm sure there's some stress and saying things that some folks aren't ready for and I said, The strange thing is, I feel this kind of relief and this strange kind of joy. It feels inherently rewarding to try to tell the truth. It feels a relief to say, I want to want to know the worst of it, let me face it, and that rings true with you.



Ben Yosua-Davis 20:40

That was my experience. That's experience of the leaders that I've I've worked with, which was not my anticipation. I thought when people began to get in contact with this reality, I expected that fear and anxiety were going to be the dominant reactions, and certainly a lot of people experience them. But what I was shocked by is I remember working with a group of people, and we were framing this engagement with a climate crisis as a spiritual crisis, and one that's

complex and has deep roots and is not that a problem to be solved is actually, perhaps not even the right way to frame it. And then we send people into breakout groups to discuss their reactions, emotionally and bodily to what they heard. And the most common reaction was relief. They're like, Oh my goodness. Someone said it, it's out loud. I don't feel like I'm crazy anymore. I feel the sense of like there's this burden of like, why can't we save the world that I can, I can set down. Actually the experience, I think, for me, and it sounds like for you, and certainly many of the people that I've worked with, is it actually frees up all this energy to begin dealing with reality, because you don't have to keep it at bay anymore.

B

Brian McLaren 21:44

And we have no idea what kind of imagination will be unleashed when we're in permission giving spaces to try to face a very different reality than any of us would have wished for, because there really is energy that goes to keeping things at bay. One of the things that's happened to me is I feel like I've been given the Bible back in a new way, because my introduction to the Bible was by people who were beneficiaries of this destructive economic system, and they interpreted the Bible. They worked very hard to make sure that we emphasize certain verses and avoided other verses entirely, and that we were given spins and interpretations of things that would make us good, productive members of this society, without ever questioning it, or at least without questioning it too deeply. And in that light, it's made me think about passages that have been deeply problematic to me in the Gospels. We call them apocalyptic passages. We thought they were about Jesus talking about the end of the world, but now I've become convinced these are passages where Jesus is looking around, and I know this is in nobody's creed about Jesus, but that Jesus was actually smart and he looked around at people around him, and he said, if we keep going the way we're going, we're going to end up in a in a revolution, a violent revolution against the Romans. I know what the Romans can do. I'm no idiot. And if we revolt against the Romans, they will crush us. They'll tear our temple down, they will destroy us and crucify us and kill us by the thousands. Those weren't Jesus talking about the end of the space time universe. Those were Jesus trying to warn people about how bad things could get if they didn't change their value system and change their vision and so on. In that light, there's this one passage he says, things are going to get bad, and then things are going to get worse, and then things are even going to get worse. This is only the beginning of the birth pangs. For all the times I've ever read or heard that verse, I never noticed the word birth pangs. It's not these are the death throes that lead to our complete and utter annihilation. Rather, if the better world that we desire has a chance of being born, it requires the downfall of this current system for something to be born. This amount of disruption has to happen that verse sort of unleashed in me this realization that there is so much human power keeping things the way they are that it's going to take disruption for something better to happen. In that sense, understand that the disruption is unavoidable and it's not our fault. It's necessary.



Ben Yosua-Davis 24:39

That strikes me as such a different message than the common creeds I often hear in climate communication, and I think, don't think these concerns are illegitimate, but often there's this focus on you can't tell people that it's going to be bad. You can't tell people that they're going to have to make sacrifices. You just have to focus on possibilities and successes and look at the solar panels and look at the policy. Right, yes, but I'm hearing you say something actually quite different.

 B

Brian McLaren 25:04

In the research for my book, there was one quote that I came across from the brilliant Nigerian philosopher Bayo Akomolafe. It just raised a question. And I have to say, when I read that question, it sent a shiver up my spine. He said, What if our response to the problem is a part of the problem? What if our response to the problem perpetuates and intensifies the problem? We've all seen angry parent whose child is having a meltdown and the parent starts to yell at the child? Well, there's a problem. The child's having a meltdown, but if you yell at a child having a meltdown, it will not make the meltdown better, right? So your response to the problem guarantees the problem is going to get worse. So we face this set of problems that if we minimize the depth of our need for change, we will respond to the problem in a way that could make the problem worse. 200 300 years down the road, we could solve the problem now and feel like great winners to make three or four generations down the road have to face something that makes our current problem seem tame, right? But I guess the other thing I should say, in response to your question, is that people are right when they say we have to be careful about being too negative, because if we scare people too much, they'll shut us down, and they'll be more susceptible to the lies, the enticing, seductive lies of authoritarians and con artists, and there are plenty of them out out there ready to tell them seductive and enticing lies and comforting lies. That's, I suppose, the risk I'm taking in this book. I'm saying I think there comes a point where some people have to be willing to face their fear, because the wisdom we need to get through this is only wisdom that can come to people who face their fear.



Ben Yosua-Davis 27:05

What does it mean to be honest and also empowering so we don't end up with either having to keep turning up the intensity of our rose colored glasses on the one hand, or making people feel so horrible that they just all want to hide in a dark closet and wait for the apocalypse to come on the other end.

 B

Brian McLaren 27:23

Yes. Well, first of all, I, having been a pastor for 24 years, I know how hard this is, and I wouldn't, I would be a liar if I said, Oh, this is an easy problem to solve. This would, to me, be a great book title that nobody would ever buy. It would be called Leading by Anxiety, and this is would be where a pastor might say, I need to be honest with you all, there's some things I'm really, really concerned about in the world that relate to our congregation. I'm really concerned about them, but I don't feel free to talk about them, because I don't think you, a lot of us would be ready for them. And if you ever want to ask me in private about those things, I'll be glad to tell you, but I just want you to know there are a lot of things I don't think you're ready to handle. What that will do is it'll tell some people, wow, our pastor is a deep person, and our pastor is thinking about things I'm not thinking about, and our pastor is honest, and I don't think I'm ready for it, so I'm not going to go talk to him, but other people would say, I want to share this burden with our pastor, and I want to know what's on his or her mind. It's something that I don't think most people get taught in seminary, leading by anxiety and putting curiosity in the equation, not just clarity.







Ben Yosua-Davis 28:42

It strikes me as you share that, that that actually there's mutuality, there's invitation. You don't have to come with answers or a strategy, but invite people into shared space. So I'm wondering like, what does it mean to seek the common good when so much of what we would value as the common good, like the health of our shared home, this earth feels like it's very genuinely out of our control.

B

Brian McLaren 29:08

The first thing I would say is that for those of us who have the Bible as a resource, we can go back and rediscover the Bible as an ecological library and teaching us wisdom. It will allow us to stop reading the Bible, making a major genre category mistake, treating it as if it's supposed to be a memo from God that drops out of heaven, and instead of understanding it as a beautiful and dangerous gift from our ancestors, beautiful because it asks really important questions that we need to have asked dangerous because it's very easy for us to abuse and we have a long history of abusing it. So the first thing I'd say is we could actually start using the Bible as the indigenous ecological literature that it was intended to be. And one of the things I hope this book will be helpful to Christian leaders and other spiritual leaders for is that it will help. It will give them, kind of some tools, and in a couple of chapters that really focus on this. Without even doing that, we can be having conversations among ourselves. I think this is part of what you are about at BTS Center of helping people imagine leadership in a climate-changed world like here's a way to say it. What virtues are people going to need in the next 10 years? In the next 20 years, if we were to start saying what are those virtues, we could start highlighting and prioritizing the teaching of those virtues because people expect us to teach virtues that's part of our an expected part of our job. We can teach those virtues if they don't even if they aren't even willing to believe the realities that we're in a climate-changed world, right? One last thing that's related to virtues that I think is under appreciated in religious settings. I've I've come to believe more and more that religion is about the formation of desire. Religion fails when it only tries to tamp down negative desire, instead of fanning and stimulating and encouraging and glorifying needed and good desires. Thinking about what desires people need right now, that's a big deal, and we can talk about the desire to do good for the earth and the desire to do good for our neighbor. We can fan the flame of that desire without people having to understand our diagnosis about our current civilization,



Ben Yosua-Davis 31:45

If I may, just indulge in a brief moment of fanboy confession, when I first got a chance to read an advanced copy of your book, it was a PDF on my phone. I read half of it sitting on the couch after the kids went to bed. This little tiny screen cheering out loud at multiple, multiple sections, because you named the reality that I had been holding quietly, that my colleagues have sometimes held with me, about the convictions about what our religious roots, and in our case, like what are our Christian roots have to offer us, what it means to lead well in this moment, about the dispositions we need, the virtues, and having someone just named that out loud who is not one of us was enormously validating. Part of what you know, seeking the common good in a moment like this does is we can invite people to the extent to which they're possible to come into this shared reality and then say, if we accept that this is the reality, what does it what does it mean to live a meaningful life? The word hope sometimes drives me crazy in climate conversations. People say we mustn't give up hope, and then they cite technology

and policy solutions. But for me, when I look at the Christian tradition, hope is not about outcome. Yes, hope is about meaning, and hope starts with its roots in suffering. Yes, when I engage in that reorientation, it allows me to understand how the meaning that I hope to embody in my own life does not have to be dependent on outcome, on what happens in this community that I care about, that there could be a sense that if I carry myself in a certain way, in a way for me that embodies the life and teachings of Jesus, that is actually enough, and I do not need external things to happen to internally validate myself.

B

Brian McLaren 33:30

Oh, so beautifully said. So beautifully said. One of the quotes in the book that really is continuing to help me is from Vaclav Havel, who bears the unique distinction of having been a president and a poet and playwright. I'm paraphrasing here, but he said, hope is not the conviction that things will turn out as we wish. Hope is the conviction that some things are worth doing no matter how they turn out. This is the issue we have to disentangle hope from outcomes. When people say hope, what they often mean is the will to live or the commitment to not give up because they know it will be tempting to give up.



Ben Yosua-Davis 34:15

One of the things I also wanted to share that I love about your book is how you include a dear reader letter at the end of every chapter, helping people process what you're sharing and their reactions to it. As we're finishing up today, you might be willing to share a dear listener message with those who are listening to this conversation today.

B

Brian McLaren 34:34

I'd be honored to. If all of this is new to you and you don't know what we're talking about, it's okay just give yourself permission to know what you know and to admit what you don't know, and to be curious about what you're curious about, and to be in a process of waking up to realities that other people have been awake to. I was surprised on the issue of climate change, to find out that people have known about climate change since before the Civil War, there have been people who knew things I didn't know for my whole life, and I'm just waking up to it now. That's okay. So the first thing I'd say it's okay if some of this is new to you. Second thing I'd say is, it's not your fault. We didn't create this problem. We inherited it. We didn't create the way of thinking that has caused so much trouble and will cause so much trouble. We inherited it. None of us know what's going to happen. None of us know that it's going to be a nightmare, what I call scenario four in the book, and none of us know if it's going to be a scenario one or two that have a little more light and hope to them. We don't know what's going to happen, but we can choose how we want to show up. That's what I hope and desire for all of us, is that we can be intentional in how we show up. And you know what that will make life better no matter what the outcomes are.



Ben Yosua-Davis 35:58

Thank you, Brian, so much for the wisdom you've offered us. Thank you for helping us wake up, and as you continue in that process, our prayers and our best wishes go with you as we all try

and as you continue in that process, our prayers and our best wishes go with you as we all try to figure out what it means to show up in moments like this one.

B

Brian McLaren 36:15

Thanks so much, Ben. What a pleasure to be with you.

N

Nicole Diroff 36:34

I just want to give a shout out to Brian a thank you for writing this book. It is really going to help us do our work at The BTS Center. There's a few places I want to dig deeper with you Ben, as we think about some of what Brian is raising for us. One of those places is eschatology, which is a fancy theology seminary type word that talks about an imagined End of Times is sometimes how it's introduced. Brian talks about his own upbringing and needing to really move beyond an understanding of end times with God's plan to destroy the world, imagining that has led to quite a bit of injustice in his reckoning. That was not the Christianity that I was raised in. Mine was probably inspired by a sense of Dr King's vision and words that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice, this sense that it will all be well. It will all be well in this time where we're looking at these different scenarios Brian's putting in front of us, trying to get honest about our reality. Do I need to give up the sense that it'll all be well in the same way that Brian needed to give up the idea that God's plan is to destroy the world? Maybe there's something different about the arc of the moral universe being long, and it'll all be fine for those of us who are already pretty fine, maybe that's where I end up on that.



Ben Yosua-Davis 38:29

This makes me think about a transformation that I've experienced since I think it was 2016 during the presidential election, Hillary Clinton versus Donald Trump, and I remember one of the lines that Hillary Clinton used with this line love Trump's hate, which was very clever, and also, as they think we learned, pretty limiting. And I remember seeing the day after the election the number of people who are experiencing existential crises because Donald Trump won for exactly the kind of the reason that you're you're talking about, like, doesn't the arc of the universe bend towards justice? It's not a long arc. It's supposed to be a short arc. And those of us who are in positions of privilege are supposed to kind of like, reach and grab that arc and drag it to the ground. And of course, we're capable of doing it in very quick order. Then you have these moments where you go, Oh, actually, that's not the way life works. Yeah, we know this personally, most of us experience tragedy and suffering in our lives, but also societally. You don't have to be even that devoted a student of history to know that things go sideways and very poorly all the time. If there is that arc, it can't be tied to optimism or power. That arc has to be like a really, really, really long arc that goes far beyond our lifetimes. For me, that's actually a little more, a little more hopeful, I think, back to like the book of Revelation, which Brian kind of talks about, it's like the most abused book of the Bible, perhaps. And it was this book of poetry written to people for whom things were really bad and they weren't getting better. And that was where the eschatology kind of came up, this vision of heaven and earth becoming one. But it was actually like routed through profound suffering and you can't control it, and you won't see the end of it.

N

Nicole Diroff 40:22

What you're saying is reminding me of a book of Psalms that I have loved, and it invites the reader to to pray the Psalms, to really treat the Psalms as prayers that were written to be addressed to the Divine, and invites us to reflect on the ways in which everything, expressed in the Psalms, which is so many different things, needs to be prayed by someone somewhere at some point. The divine can receive, indeed, longs to receive, all of that, whether it's deep grief or whether it's incredible joy, whether it's guilt or frustration or praise.



Ben Yosua-Davis 41:10

Yeah. It can be very easy to think that the expressions of our faith, or indeed, like just our own emotional range as humans, the correct ones are in a pretty kind of limited range, and they don't involve things like anger or grief or profound rage like these are not things that are actually acceptable. Actually, maybe there are some ways we really need to grieve together. We're in a moment where, as we talk about at The BTS Center all the time, grief and lament become the necessary precondition for engaged activism. You don't have to keep holding your optimism tighter and tighter and tighter. It's actually okay to let it go and grieve and lament and let your feet touch ground again and then say, Okay, what do I do now?

N

Nicole Diroff 41:56

That's probably what leads to courage, is being honest and being in community with that honesty develops the sort of courage that we so deeply need in these times.



Ben Yosua-Davis 42:12

You know, this was not a light conversation that I had with Brian, though I think he engages it very compassionately and graciously. What was your experience as you've come into this, into contact with this reality and the way that I know we have a kind of, I think, in the same time, and being exposed to the same conversations and the same authors?

N

Nicole Diroff 42:35

it has helped me understand what anxiety and overwhelm is all about, has opened me up to a lot of the practices that people have developed over time in communities that have needed to live with anxiety and overwhelm more than my community, honestly has needed to. Becoming embodied in a variety of different ways, spending time in nature, and one that's been important for me has been the idea of trusting my future self. And so what does it look like to build trust in my ability to handle hard things and not to do that in a way that's individualistic and isolated. But what does it actually mean to have trust that my family, my neighborhood, my community, my nation, dare I say, might be able to handle hard things? I was struck in the conversation about the way privilege plays with all of this stuff. I think there really is a way in which those with privilege, and I count myself in there, have trouble understanding that our status quo is rooted in extraction and has been hurting people and planet for a long time. Yet I also

resonated with Brian mentioning that that something is broken here. I don't know how those dynamics work for you. Of awareness of a brokenness, while also just this challenge of but maybe today is kind of okay, because the extraction has actually kind of helped us.



Ben Yosua-Davis 44:31

I mean, I think this is something we that we've talked a lot about over these last three seasons, something that those of you who have listened to us over those three seasons know that I've wrestled with particularly as the father of young children. There is this place that I hold intention, both the beauty and enoughness of each day. The ways that life is beautiful, that I've experienced genuine community in the context of things that are also harmful. I remember experiencing profound community handing out water bottles on the street of the city and now like plastic water bottles, like plastic water bottles So also, at the same time, recognizing that I am embedded within these profoundly extractive, destructive systems that have really played an outsized role in bringing us as a as a species, and more than just as a species, but as a planetary community, to this moment. The thing that helps is the concept of grace. This is not something that actually, I get a chance to talk a lot about in a lot of Christian circles, where we're so focused on right living in this moment, but this idea that we are loved unconditionally by virtue of our existence, not by virtue of what we do. And this idea, therefore, that sometimes the goodness that bubbles up in our lives is disproportionate to the amount of effort or virtue involved. There's something there we can't control. I try to do my best, and I carry with grief all the ways that I'm not and the ways that we're not, I don't know, as you were talking to Cole and like, maybe I could have some trust that our nation can do hard things. And I thought, nope, I am. I can't, I can't get there. Um, there is also with that at the same time, also a sense of being held, of knowing that, you know my tradition, I would say, God loves me, God loves you, God loves us, and that means that there are powerful forces of goodness at work, even when we don't get everything right, and sometimes even when we screw things up horribly, like we have.



Nicole Diroff 46:54

I appreciate where you and Brian went in this conversation in terms of honoring scripture. I think I appreciated it, because I hear often this idea that we're still living in an old story, and it's just so hard because the new story has not been written yet. We can't see what that is yet which I resonate with. And then listening to the two of you, I'm like, wait a second, maybe that new story has been imagined for us, and it's actually turning back to some of our deep wisdom texts to unearth it. In the book *Life After Doom*, Brian gives an amazing pitch for understanding the Bible as a indigenous ecological text. I love this section. Partly he does this because he's wrestling with his relationship with the wisdom of our indigenous neighbors today, and not wanting to do another step of colonizing that wisdom while recognizing it. He also makes this move of saying we don't need to take someone else's it is actually deep within our own tradition. So he says the Bible is a beautiful and dangerous gift from our ancestors. And when I'm liturgist next, which means, you know, I might be the person at church to read the Scripture before the pastor preaches. Maybe I should just say that before I read the text, I'll say these words are beautiful and dangerous gifts from our ancestors, and then say, what, what, chapter and verse.





Ben Yosua-Davis 48:49

I love that, and I think both words are really good, because we exist in a culture that thinks of these things in binaries. And so I hear these very flattened conversations from my conservative friends and my progressive friends, where either the Bible is the perfect literal word of God do not do so much as criticize an indefinite article, or you're committing blasphemy on the one hand or on the other, that the Bible is just a miserable cesspool of imperialism and patriarchy and there's nothing good in it, and we've grown beyond it. One of the things that I really love about what's happening right now is we're realizing we are not smarter than our ancestors. We're not better than our ancestors. There are things where we've gotten a lot better, and one of them is our starting to grapple as a society with some of the profound oppressions, such as racism, such as sexism, that have been baked into the way we viewed the world. So there are some things we've gotten better, but there are a lot of ways we are not smarter than our ancestors, we are not wiser than our ancestors, especially our ancient ancestors. And one of the things I've really appreciated through the decolonizing work that so many folks are doing is we are finally able to listen to our indigenous siblings who have had these centuries, these millennia, of profound wisdom to offer us that has been dismissed as, quote, primitive. You know, we've grown beyond it that's actually really valuable and has something important to offer us in this moment. And this is where I love being then able to come back to the Bible, especially those of us who have read it, and so when we read it, we're not reading it. We kind of have our scripts, and we see what we think we should see on the pages, and begin to ask ourselves, How is this an indigenous text speaking back into this moment that we're in? What does it mean for us to be human in the context of catastrophe? What does it mean to be human in the context of uncertainty, and what does it mean to be human in the context of land, in a more than human community that surrounds us? And where is the divine in the midst of that?



Nicole Diroff 50:50

I also love living into the danger part and the way in which the Bible as an indigenous ecological text, is threatening to the powers that be in a way that God loves. Brian said this thing about imagining religion as entity that shapes desires. I loved thinking about that, that religion is something that shapes our yearnings, shapes our longings. I actually was listening recently to a former episode where you had a conversation with Veronice Miles, and she was defining hope as our internal longings and yearnings for justice, for wholeness. I agree. Our ancestors had things to say that are still so relevant in terms of that level of wisdom and it and it would shake things up. It'd be pretty radical to actually go for what's being described.



Ben Yosua-Davis 51:57

Yeah. So I have a curious question for for you, Nicole, one of the things that I identified as part of my conversation about Brian is we're talking about all this stuff. We're two white men. That certainly informs the way we're seeing this current moment and understanding what it means to be human in this moment, and I think primarily about the things probably that we missed because of our social location. I'm curious for you, as a white woman, what it was like in terms of listening to that conversation, but also, what do you feel like you notice that as part of your identity, that perhaps folks like me might not notice or not notice as easily.



Nicole Diroff 52:40

First, I would say that I think I'm still on a learning journey with the question that you asked, and thank you for asking it. I spend a good amount of time with white men who are self aware that they're white men. That's helpful. But for sure, privilege is multifaceted, as is systemic oppression. This idea of intersectionality. I'm aware that I have many, many privileges, and I'm aware that I move through the world as a female, and I was raised as a female, and I was taught as a female, my book group, which is comprised of my besties from college, which was now a while ago. So these are friends of mine for a long time. We right now are reading a book called The Women by Kristin Hannah, and it is an amazing novel about nurses who served in Vietnam. In the book, there's this moment that just felt so powerful to me. The main character, who is a nurse, is receiving a letter from her mother, who's writing her from America. And the mother says, "I imagine it would feel wonderful to be good at something that mattered. That is something that too many of the women of my generation didn't consider." I mean, and this is not that long ago. It just, it just strikes me how recently all of this is. So you know, a nurse serving in Vietnam, and her mom, who grew up maybe in the 40s or 50s, was in a position because of her gender, being good at something that mattered wasn't even in their imagination. I feel so privileged that the world has shifted in a way that for me, I get to do work that I think matters. I feel the blessing of that and reading that note, but it makes me think about some of my seminary professors were the first women ordained in their traditions, which means that they were taught probably exclusively by men and raised in communities with only male leadership demonstrated. And there are certainly plenty of religious spaces where, as a female, I would not be invited into leadership. So it's this tricky thing of you know, I can say to you pretty quickly, oh, I hold a lot of privilege, and I would have the same exact conversation as you and Brian. And then also, when you start unpacking, it's like, oh, this is complicated, and points to the ways in which people may understand this time and what's needed in this time really differently based on their own lived experience, with uncertainty, with feeling like they have something to offer that's not being noticed, and so many other things probably.



Ben Yosua-Davis 55:40

I really appreciate you sharing that and sharing it really honestly. And I wonder what are the other quote, careers or habits of thought or mind or values that our privileged, addictive culture has suppressed that are going to need to come up. And of course, the people who already hold those and practice those are those who we as a society have pushed to the margins. And I think there's going to be a very uncomfortable reorientation that's going to happen where those of us who are used to being the smartest, most privileged people in the room, those who teach others, are going to have to learn a lot of humility when it turns out that those people who we look down on either in scorn or in pity, actually proved to have a lot more resources to meet this moment than we do.

N

Nicole Diroff 56:30

Thank you. I just have given a lot of thought to the ways in which so many professions can be understood today as climate professions, we sort of think, Oh, I'm going into climate so I'm going to work on solar panels. But perhaps what we need the most is the artists. Yeah, so just imagining how many of us will be on the front lines of climate change and really in really in climate work.



Ben Yosua-Davis 57:04

Yeah, you know, being on the front lines is being a farmer. Being on the front lines is getting to know your neighbors. Being on the front lines is tending to your children. Renee Eisler, who's a very noted organizational thinker, talks about how the best way to transform society is to nurture young children, because those early years are the most formative years of someone's of someone's life. I also think about this with what does it mean to engage in spiritual practice in this moment?



Nicole Diroff 57:31

I don't know if I recommend this, but just to share for me, I have a pretty regular journaling practice. When I journal and I hit a point of, oh, this is out of my control, and I don't know what's gonna happen. And I just like, write the word prayer. So I'm like, journaling, journaling, journaling, and then all caps prayer. I don't know if that's backwards. I don't really start my journaling with like, dear God. I just like, go for it. And then I hit these points that I'm just like, Ooh, I just need to say prayer right now. This is a really, a really good invitation to reflect more on on what prayer means for us, individually and and even that invitation to go back to to Psalms, which are written prayers, and to know that someone needs you to be praying that prayer, even if it's not the language you need today.



Ben Yosua-Davis 58:28

I love that. So Nicole, I'm curious, are there other next steps that you would invite folks into? I actually think prayer for me is the perfect next step. I actually just want to pause and say to those who are listening, if you found this conversation at times anxiety producing or overwhelming, I hope once we finish here today, your next step can be to take 10 minutes notice and name what you're feeling, what questions you have, and perhaps if it's still feeling overwhelming as I expected, I maybe do as Nicole suggests, and just write prayer in all caps at the bottom, and let that lead you into a conversation with the divine and the way that you might in whatever way you might understand the divine.



Nicole Diroff 59:17

Okay, you'll turn my thing that I said maybe was not a recommendation into an invitation.



Ben Yosua-Davis 59:22

I absolutely believe moments like this would probably invite us to fall on our knees.



Nicole Diroff 59:29

Amen. Amen.







Ben Yosua-Davis 59:32

Anna Barron, one of our amazing producers, has additional possible next steps you can take. Thanks.



Anna Barron 59:39

Ben, part of my role for Climate Changed is producing the next step segment. Each episode, I will add a couple more next steps for you our listeners. There is no pressure to do any or all of these next steps. We just hope they can be a valuable resource for you. For this episode, I invite you to start a climate journal. This can look many different ways, but mostly it will be a place where you can write down any thoughts, feelings or steps you want to take related to living in a climate-changed world. Make or buy a journal that is personalized to you. Consider writing entries in a place where you are in or can see nature. I suggest setting aside 20 to 30 minutes weekly to add to this journal. You can also use the journal for drawings or to press leaves, and for your first entry, you might want to write about this episode. What is your main takeaway from Brian and Ben's conversation? How has this shifted your perspective? Throughout the season, feel free to send us a photo of your journal, and we might even feature it on our social media. Next, I invite you to tell one friend about this episode and about Brian's book, Life After Doom. Discuss with them why it might be important to read. If you do any of these action steps, please feel free to share them along with this episode on your social media so that some of your friends might be inspired to do the same. Once again, there is no pressure to do all or any of these next steps. We just want these to be a resource for you as you figure out ways to engage in this huge and overwhelming topic. Thanks Ben and Nicole for kicking off this season and for bringing me onto the team.



Nicole Diroff 1:01:31

Thank you Anna and thank you listeners, so much for joining us today for this episode of the Climate Changed podcast.



Ben Yosua-Davis 1:01:40

I want to thank Brian McLaren for his time and his wisdom. You can learn more about Brian on his website, [brianmclaren.net](http://brianmclaren.net)



Nicole Diroff 1:01:48

You'll find him on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and threads.



Ben Yosua-Davis 1:01:53

On The BTS Center website, we have show notes for this episode along with a full transcript. We also have a discussion guide for the episode visit [climatechangedpodcast.org](http://climatechangedpodcast.org),

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**Nicole Diroff 1:02:05**

In our next episode of the climate change podcast, I chat with Joelle Novey. She is the director at Interfaith Power and Light for Washington, DC, Maryland and Northern Virginia. Joelle will tell us about her work with local communities to engage in meaningful climate change conversations and actions. She also tells us about her Jewish faith and how it informs her climate work. Between now and then, Ben and I would love to hear from you. Please feel free to contact us to share your responses to this episode with Brian McLaren. What has it brought up for you? What are the next steps you are considering? Please call, text or email us. Leave us a voice message at 207-200-6986 that's 207-200-6986 plus one, if you're calling from outside the USA, you can also text that same number 207-200-6986.

**Ben Yosua-Davis 1:03:14**

If you prefer, you can also email us. Our email is [podcast@theBTScenter.org](mailto:podcast@theBTScenter.org). That's [podcast@theBTScenter.org](mailto:podcast@theBTScenter.org) Climate Changed podcast is produced by Peterson Toscano and Anna Barron. Our podcast is a project of The BTS Center in beautiful Portland, Maine.

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**Nicole Diroff 1:03:33**

Learn about the many resources we offer along with our in person and online programs. Visit our website [theBTScenter.org](http://theBTScenter.org). That's [theBTScenter.org](http://theBTScenter.org). Peace to you, podcast listeners.

P

**Peterson Toscano 1:04:05**

In a world where uncertainty looms large and the weight of climate chaos bears down on our daily lives, how do we find our way forward? How do we hold on to hope amidst the doom? This October, join us for two transformative opportunities with acclaimed author, speaker and activist Brian McLaren as we explore these vital questions together. First on Wednesday, October 30, from 7 to 8:30pm, Eastern, we invite you to Life After Doom: An Evening with Brian McLaren. In this intimate online event, Brian will delve into the wisdom of his latest book, Life After Doom: Wisdom and Courage for a World Falling Apart. With unflinching honesty and deep compassion, Brian will guide us through the complexities of our time, offering new ways to build resilient communities and find courage in the face of profound loss. Don't miss the chance to connect with Brian and a panel of thought leaders accompanied by soulful music for an evening of deep reflection and inspiration. Registration is just \$25 and the first 100 people to sign up will receive a complimentary copy of Life After Doom. Full and half scholarships are also available. But that's not all, beginning on October 15 and running through November 19, we're offering a five week online book study. It's also centered on Life After Doom. Every Tuesday from 4 to 5:15pm, Eastern you'll gather with a community of seekers and two skilled facilitators. Together, you'll explore the powerful insights of Brian's text. Together, we'll navigate the hard truths of our time and discover how to live into a future rooted in love, simplicity and community. Your \$50 registration fee includes a copy of Life After Doom for the first 100 participants, and scholarships are available. Whether you join us for the evening conversation the book study or both, you'll be stepping into a space of collective wisdom where

hope and resilience are nurtured even in the face of uncertainty. Visit [theBTSCenter.org](https://theBTSCenter.org) to register today. Let's come together to find strength, courage and community in these challenging times.