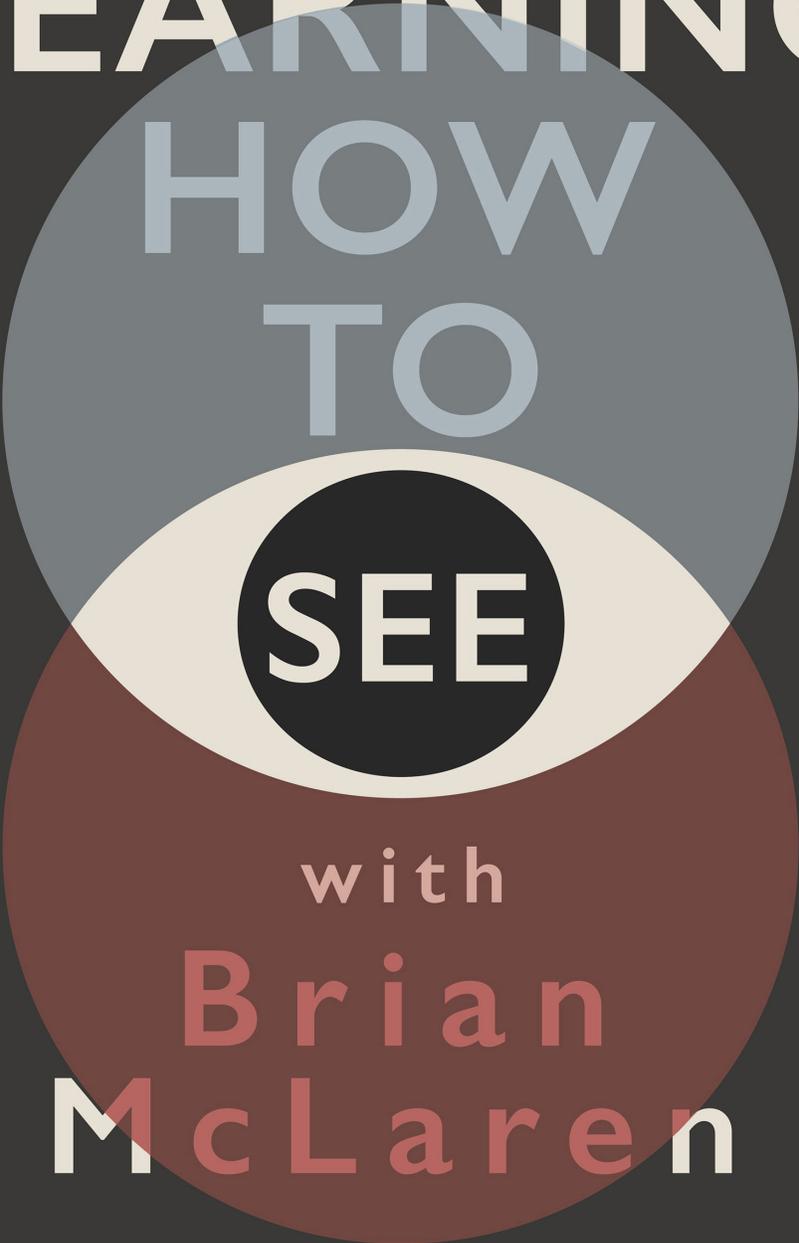


LEARNING

HOW  
TO

A stylized graphic of an eye is centered on the page. The eye is composed of a dark brown circular iris, a white sclera, and a black pupil. The word "SEE" is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters inside the black pupil. The eye graphic is overlaid on a light blue circular background that is partially obscured by a larger, semi-transparent dark brown circle at the bottom.

SEE

with

Brian

McLaren

- Brian: I was a young zealous, sincere Christian, probably 17 years old, and I was invited to this Bible study group that had been set up, especially for seekers and doubters. That's how they said it. And people came to this group who had asked questions or raised theological problems and doubts. And this older gentleman who was leading it would listen and he would restate their question and maybe he would ask them a question back and maybe he'd offer something.
- Brian: But as I listened, I became really, really disturbed because I grew up in church where we learned to quote a Bible verse to answer every question. And I kept knowing the verses that the leader should have been quoting and he wasn't quoting them. And I just thought, what's wrong with him? And so someone asks a question and he just starts asking questions back and listening empathetically. And I'm getting really bothered because it feels like God is losing. I want to rush in and save God. And so I raised my head and I start to quote a Bible verse or something. And the leader very gently says to me, "This is your first time here, isn't it?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Let me talk to you as soon as we're done." And then he just went on and just let the thing finish.
- Brian: So after the meeting is over, he pulls me aside and he says, "Listen, I didn't want to be rude to you, but this is a place where people are asking their questions. And if somebody just rushes in and tries to answer their question, that's not going to help them. They need space to think and they need a place where they can just raise their questions. So I hope you understand that's what I was trying to do." Well, I've got to tell you, I did not understand. But I understood that he might have understood something that I didn't understand. In other words, I felt like maybe he knows what he's doing. And I remember it being one of the first experiences in my life of thinking, there are people who see things that not only do I not see that I am not even capable of seeing that way or thinking that way.
- Brian: If you've ever climbed a mountain, you know that the higher you get, the farther you can see and the bigger your horizon. And it's not until you get to the very top of the mountain that you can see 360 degrees. It's just impossible if you're farther down on the mountain. And I think what happened that night in that study group is the leader of that group, he was up at the top and he could see what was going on in my mind and what was going on in the minds of the different people asking questions. I just wasn't ready for that. I was down at 200 feet, he was up at 6,000 feet. And all I could see is from my limited perspective, if someone asks a question, you're supposed to quote a Bible verse as the answer.
- Brian: And this episode of learning how to see, we're looking at two closely related biases, two glitches really in our seeing that keep us stuck at a certain altitude on the mountain, competency bias and consciousness bias. They bring to mind Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13, when I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now, we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part, then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope and love abide these three. And the greatest of these is love.
- Brian: Well, I think we live long enough and we realize how right Paul was that we all know in parts. And if we want to know more fully and to see more fully, we need to begin by admitting how little we know. And that's why we learn to humble ourselves and pray. We do

not see everything. So we do not know everything. We do not even know how much we do not know nor do we know how much of what we know is actually impartial, distorted, or false. That is why we seek to open our eyes to encounter the world of fresh in humility and in silent wonder to learn, to see.

Paul: Thanks, Brian. Through these previous episodes and up to this point, we've addressed five biases up to now. Brian, I'm wondering if we could pause and if you could just give us a one sentence summary of each of them before we continue on.

Brian: Sure. First, confirmation bias. We see things that fit in with what we already think. Second, complexity bias. We prefer a simple lie or half-truth to a complex, full truth. Complementarity bias, we easily accept truths from people who we like and treat us nicely and we struggle to accept any knowledge or information that comes to us from someone who we don't feel safe or comfortable or friendly with. And then contact bias, that if we don't have contact with people, we can't see what they see. And so we maintain our very limited perspective.

Paul: Thanks, Brian. In this episode, we're going to look at two more. We're going to begin with the competency bias. I'm not saying that right. Competency bias. We are incompetent at knowing how incompetent or competent we are. So we may see less or more than we think. Our brains prefer to think of ourselves as above average. So if we were to return to that mountain climbing metaphor, the competency bias is what happens when we think we're closer to the top of the mountain than we really are. We think we see everything in all directions, but really, our view is still very, very small. So team, when you hear these definitions, what are your first reactions? What comes to mind?

Gigi: I have to say what comes to mind to me is if that definition is fully complete, I'm speaking both from a woman's point of view and from a BIPOC person's point of view. I'm not sure how much that myself of being conditioned to think of myself as above average, how fully that actually is. I know it's there in some way, like say, in my own community, say, among other African-Americans, basically, I was tracked on the fast track for education in the smart kids classes, but at the same time, both as a woman and as a BIPOC person, especially once busing happened, there was just so many ways where I was being told and shown that I was below average and that too was also in my brain. So sometimes I think that there's actually more to this that there has more dimensions in that I may be more competent than I think I am sometimes because I've been socialized not to think of myself as competent. And there may also be expectations placed on me by my community that I may not be able to meet, but I've been socialized to give back in certain ways that maybe I am not able to give back. So I do think that there's more dimensions to this bias, especially if you're not in the dominant culture than what this definition brings.

Brian: That's a really great point. And it's great that you bring up education as an example. Because one of the main sources for my understanding of this bias is a theory in education called the Dunning-Kruger hypothesis. And this is something that's been pretty thoroughly tested out. And in general, on average most people tend to think of themselves as above average whenever you ask them how they fit in and their knowledge of something, but that's in general. And in general, always hides the specifics and majorities in a sense outweigh the evidence from minority groups. So that's the perfect example to bring up. And in fact, what

the Dunning-Kruger hypothesis says Gigi, is that we are incompetent to assess our own incompetence or our own competence. And if you think about it, this makes sense because I have no way of knowing how much other people know.

Brian: And so some of us are prone to think, “I know a lot about this. I probably know more than most people.” So we give ourselves at above average, but others of us who may be really competent we know enough to know there’s way more to know than we know. So we’re the ones who are more likely to be humble and underestimate where we would come in the percentile rankings of how much we know. So it’s such a great example. And another example from our last episode of how the communities we’re part of can give us messages that we internalize and then they become part of our internal confirmation bias. Other people told me I was a bad student, there I am being a bad student. Other people told me whatever and we internalize those things. So such a great example to bring up. Thanks.

Paul: Yeah, I know for myself it was padded into my ego as a white straight man that I was way more competent than I am in many ways. And I also know that being someone who has delved in the deep end of biblical studies and spirituality, that I also think I’m competent in unknowing or in mystery than others are. And that has bit me in the ass so many times where I’ve been in like a book study with somewhere like... Or people will turn to me and be like, “Well, you have a couple of degrees let’s do pause to think.” And yet someone who has never studied at the supposed depth that I have will say the most wise, thoughtful, soulful thing. And I’m taking notes because I reminded once again that my socialization and my competence or how I think of my own competence is actually needs to take a seat or be humbled just a few notches to the reality of what’s going on around me.

Paul: And so those moments are so enlightening when I’m taken off my high horse. And also when I see others who my assumptions of their lack of knowledge are encompass in a certain area are just far beyond what I thought. And always I just marvel in those moments of what’s revealed not only of that person, but the gifting that they give to me in those situations.

Mike: It’s funny. I’m just going to springboard off that thinking about here sometimes we’ve said about the living school here, it’s a firm grounding and ambiguity. Because so much of it is about unknowing and learning what you don’t know. And it’s such a particular moment in time to think about that because I think we live in a culture that often confuses access to information with the understanding of information much less the integration of it. And we have access to a lot of information. And so it’s so quick to this is again where all these biases blend together. It’s so quick to quickly find some experts somewhere that I can find one bullet point sentence that confirms what I already think. And then I piggyback their expertise and feel that I own that. And I worry at times that we’re finding all these ways to kind of inflate our understanding of how much we know. And it’s this kind of paradoxical handicap, it’s this paradoxical and unexpected challenge in having access to so much information that we can never fully sift through.

Brian: I think this bias gets us into trouble when we in both ways the way that Gigi brought

up when we actually are capable of things that we don't think we're capable of. And when we think we're capable of things that we're not or we think we have a full understanding of things we're not. And the irony is that both of those errors invite us to have an opportunity to learn and to discover I really know more than I think I did, or I really am capable of more than I thought I was. Or wow! I still have a lot to learn.

Gigi: This is the bias I think that it's important to also talk about how it works in community, because that's also what I was talking about. There's the sort of social life competency bias that we have on certain groups. There are certain groups who have competency I think of Asians as a quote unquote, motto minority. There are certain groups that have certain competencies and so we only see them as being competent in that. And there are other groups who are just seen as incompetent in so many ways. So I think that it's also important to at least show the social and systemic way in which this bias is. It's always showing its head, but in these times it seems to be showing it's hidden in that way. And actually at this moment. So I decided was important to ask the flag that as well.

Brian: So important thank you.

Paul: Thanks Gigi. And I just think too it springs to mind of like how then it gets codified in policies and then just perpetuates and builds upon itself over time. And sometimes it's hard to question because it can be so baked in to our systems at large. So yes. Thanks, Gigi. Holding all of that I wonder if we can turn to our prayer to practice addressing the competency bias.

Paul: Wellspring of all self knowledge.

Mike: Give me humility so that I do not overestimate my competence.

Gigi: Save me both from excessive confidence and a lack of confidence.

Brian: Instead, please grant me proper confidence.

Paul: To see myself, my abilities and my limitations.

Gigi: With a clear eye and sound mind.

Brian: Learning how to see will continue in a moment.

Gigi: Our second bias for today is consciousness bias. This bias, this conscious bias, means basically a person's level of consciousness makes seeing some things possible and others impossible. Our brains see from a location or a level of maturity. Brian, your newest book provides one framework for talking about levels of consciousness and maturity. Could you briefly outline that four-stage model that you refer to?

Brian: Sure. And I think we all know that any model of human development can be abused, and every model of human development simplifies, and there are some that are very, very simple. One of this best is one of the simplest, which Father Richard uses, first half of life, second half of life. And then many people are familiar with integral theory

and Piaget and James Fowler and Lawrence Kohlberg and so many great theorists, Nicole [Aslie 00:17:16] and many others. But here's a simple framework.

Brian: Simplicity is where we all start as children, and this is the stage of dualism where we put things into the categories of right or wrong, us or them, in or out, friend or enemy, safe or dangerous, and so on. And then some of us stay there our whole lives. Some of us move into complexity where now we start seeing those shades of gray, and we start seeing that there are many different ways to look at things. And we now try to master all of that complexity. You could say this is the stage of pragmatism because we think we can do it. We think we can figure out the complexity and master it all.

Brian: Many of us stay there our whole lives, but some people then go into perplexity, and perplexity is where we become suspicious about what we learned in simplicity and in complexity. And we go back and, in a sense, try to deconstruct it, and we see the inadequacies of it. And we might say this is the stage of skepticism and relativism. And then many of us, that's where we get, and we don't think there's anywhere else we could go.

Brian: And then I think more and more people are exploring a fourth stage that I call harmony where we, in a sense, harmonize those first three stages. We think of them like rings on a tree where the innermost ring is simplicity. That's the backbone where we learned right and wrong. But we didn't stop there. We added the ring of complexity, the pragmatism, to grapple with the complexities of life. And we didn't stop there. We then embraced that and perplexity, where we learned how to think critically and ask questions and look at issues of systemic injustice. And really to look at biases is a very stage three thing to do.

Brian: And then harmony allows us to not just judge or put down people for being where they are, but it allows us to have empathy and love and then to try to be a healing and unifying presence.

Brian: So that little system, that little model, might be helpful to people to take this bias and say, "If you're at the stage of simplicity, there are certain things that come naturally to you. It's what you're learning to do. But some of those later operations, you're not ready for them yet. It's not that you're being a bad person. It's just that you haven't learned them, anymore than for a person who's learning algebra and doesn't yet know trigonometry or calculus. They're not bad. In fact, they can't even learn calculus until they learn their algebra."

Brian: So that's the idea of stages. And there is this repeated contrast in the Bible between the wise and the foolish, and of special note are those who are wise in their own eyes, as Proverbs 3:7 says. Or in Philippians 2, Paul says, "Do not be wise in your own opinion." And so I think that's maybe the most important takeaway from any kind of model of stage theory or stages of consciousness is to say, "Don't think that you see and know everything."

Brian: And in fact, I think we could say that if you are at a more advanced level, you might be forgetting some things that people at earlier levels are specialists in, and you need them around to remind you of those things that you might be forgetting. I guess a way to say the same thing or a similar thing, a Buddhist teaching, is to say the opposite of being wise in your own eyes is to have the beginner's mind. So that whatever stage we're in, we maintain this idea I have a lot to learn. I'm a beginner. Anyone can be my teacher. And that helps us, I

think, to not be wise in our own eyes.

Mike: This is interesting. Perhaps this is why Jesus spoke in parables, right? So simple. So deep. To invite people into that beginner's mind. My favorite early Christian mystic said that a really good sacred text or a really good sacred teaching scandalizes you. It has to. It has to scandalize your sense of certainty to crack you open so that you can learn. And the minute you think you have it, you don't. It's always a little bit of a riddle.

Brian: That's great. I remember I was taught in school there's inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning, but what you're describing is abductive reasoning. It abducts you. It cracks you open. It grabs you out of your normal categories and says, "Hold it. I don't know what's going on here," and puts you in that humble beginner's mind.

Gigi: That makes me wonder if, with all of these biases, because I think in many ways, all of these biases take you away from beginner's mind, from seeing things with new eyes. And I come back to this. I think it was Shunryu Suzuki who says not knowing is most intimate. And so I wonder about the relationship between seeing things anew and intimacy and just how difficult that is in our culture and how these biases keep us separate from each other and separate from not just those who are different from us, but even separate from those who are even in our community. I don't have any answers, but it's just a wondering about having addressed these biases in some way, because we will always have them, but there are ways in which they don't have us, I guess.

Brian: Great way to say it.

Gigi: And so I wonder what that does to intimacy when we're able to have these biases serve us more than us being slaves to those biases.

Brian: Gigi, that quote that you read before, would that be apropos here?

Gigi: Sure. I actually have it right here. Give me one second. It's from Gary Zukav's *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, and he's quoting a teacher named Al Chungliang Huang. And this is the quote. "When I say that every lesson is the first lesson, it does not mean that we forget what we already know. It means that what we are doing is always new because we are always doing it for the first time."

Brian: Oh, that's so great to capture that sense that we all drift out of. We go into autopilot and we think... I think as you were saying before, Gigi, we're in a conversation, we think, "Oh, I know what they're going to say," so we save some energy by not actually listening, but oh, what a beautiful challenge to us to keep in that posture of humility and openness.

Paul: That's so true. I think about that too, with when you see folks who have an easy confidence in where they're at, whether it's a 20 year old who knows they're a 20 year old and is eager to learn from that place of being a 20 year old... they're not trying to impress upon others that they have the wisdom of an 85 year old monk.

Brian: Yes.

Paul: But they can just own their spot in life with that sense of beginner's mind, and then I think

in my mind, I imagine those folks are the same people when I meet an 80 year old wise elder, they have that exact same energy of bringing that beginner's mind, that fresh present moment in that same way that that 20 year old does. And I think that's what I hope to aspire to in these kind of conversations is, can I not pretend or project of who I want to be down the road, but can I just fully own where I am right now and laugh the limitations of that, enjoy the riches of that, but not try to surpass or undermine it, just enjoy it? Because this is my only chance to be a 40 year old in this moment with my level of experience.

Brian: That's-

Paul: Does that make sense? What I'm getting at with that?

Brian: Perfect. So much sense.

Gigi: It makes me think of the importance of curiosity as another practice for getting out of that competency bias, coming with beginner's mind, being curious, that even if you think... or even if I think I'm competent, can I allow myself to be always learning and to be in a place of curiosity of, "Okay, maybe I am, maybe I'm not competent, but what else do I need to know?"

Mike: Here's the prayer we'll be using to address consciousness bias.

Mike: Voice who beckons me toward growth...

Paul: Help me see what I am mature enough to see right now...

Gigi: And not only that, help me to know now how little I can know...

Brian: Until I grow more mature.

Mike: Grant me curiosity and awe...

Paul: So that I may honor the bottomless, limitless wonder...

Gigi: And the beauty, glory, and mystery...

Brian: That permeates this world.

Brian: Friends, today we've explored two of the most personal biases, the ones that require some deep self knowledge and deep work to appreciate where we are, and yet, know that we have miles to go before we sleep. Competency bias reminds us that we're probably not as far up the mountain as we think we are, or we might be farther up the mountain than we think we are.

Brian: Consciousness bias reminds us that wherever we are, we can only see what is seeable from that altitude or location. Having a beginner's mind, seeing that this is the first time we've ever done this part of life before, helps us to deal wisely with these biases, and invites us to pray like this. Again, we invite you to feel and affirm your desire to grow in your maturity so that your ability to see grows wider and deeper, not narrower and shallower with age.

Mike: Source of wonder, help us see with wonder.

Gigi: Depth of mystery, help us find a light and truth so profound that they surpass all knowing.

Paul: Fountain of compassion, help us see with compassion.

Mike: Renderer of justice, help us see with justice.

Gigi: Revealer of truth, help us see what is real.

Paul: Holy wisdom whose presence fills our ever expanding universe, help our horizons ever to expand.

Brian: Light of glory, help us to see with humility and awe. Amen.

Brian: Amen.

Mike: Amen. (silence)

Brian: Thanks so much for joining us in this important time of prayer. If you'd like to engage with these prayers or intentions even more, they're available on a sister podcast called Practices for Learning How to See. You'll find the link in the show notes.