

## **SESSION ONE // Toward the Other with Brian McLaren**

### **Watch Film**

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/toward-the-other>

### **Going Deeper**

McLaren suggests that “we build identity (whatever our religion) by enforcing hostility toward other; in other words, I learn who I am by who I am against. I learn who I am by who is against me.”

Take a few moments of quiet time. Allow yourself to remember your Christian faith journey. Take time to look into the faces of those who’ve come and gone, feel embraces, recall awakening moments. What has primarily shaped your faith identity? Do you find any “acts of hostility” on your path? Any, “us-not-them” exclusions? What about acts of radical “love and welcome”? Finally, if you are up for it, journal about how you have come to believe and become who you are with special attention to times you experienced radical love and welcome.

#### *The Historic Challenge:*

McLaren asks, “Why in the name of Christ [have we done] horribly un-Christlike things, [why] we did anti-Christ things in the name of Christ?” We have to learn to be genuine about the casualties Christianity has caused. Have you considered or wrestled with what’s been done in the name of Christ, and what continues to be done? It was particularly shocking for me to hear him call these things “anti-Christ things”—my heart hurt. Where do you stand on issues of justice? How do you choose to resist anti-Christ actions in the world?

#### *The Doctrinal Challenge:*

Consider the examples of doctrines McLaren reviews (creation, original sin, election) that he believes can and have been used destructively versus being used as a “tool for healing”. How are you inspired to use doctrines being used as weapons of hostility as tools of healing? How can you be part of bringing sacred healing back into your sanctuary? What are some conversations to be had that come to mind specifically about the use of doctrine your faith community?

#### *The Liturgical Challenge:*

McLaren suggests we rethink the way our liturgical practices (he mentions baptism and the eucharist) can reinforce an identity of hostility or can “build in us a deeper

sense of solidarity and hospitality”? Who would you reach out to in your community to begin that conversation?

*The Missional Challenge:*

McClaren asks, “Can we now come together in even bigger ways as Christians working together with Muslims and Jews and Hindus and Buddhists and atheists and allow ourselves to see how the Holy Spirit can work through us together for the common good of all?”

What is your next right step towards cultivating love and hospitality in your life and community?

How do we promote respect, build bridges, and extend dignity all while knowing “there is a cost for being a peacemaker”?

## **Reflection**

*Can we find a way of holding Christian identity that sends us towards the other with love and hospitality rather than with fear and hostility?—Brian McLaren*

For a few years I worked at a church as an Admin. It was a transitory time for the church from one lead pastor to another. The new lead began to implement values he believed were foundational to growing deeper in Christian faith, one being a process for membership that led to the signing of a membership covenant with the church. One of the reasons the leadership felt this was an important statement, was because they wanted membership to matter. They believed becoming a member at church should have more gravity than, say, a club membership. It was an attempt at making membership sacred. It horribly backfired, however.

Within a year, the church body had dropped half its weight, at two years it was skin and bones. Founding members left, revolted by the document that they felt kept outsiders from feeling a sense of belonging to God. They believed even one-time attenders should know they were part of the body of Christ, that they belonged there if nowhere else. Conversations drifted from teaching to organizational survival. Church friends with thirty years of invested time together parted ways. It was a hard, sad time.

This is just a minuscule example of how easily churches get derailed from the business of loving people well and being a welcoming and healing experience. You guys, we have done a lot of wrong things. It really struck me when McLaren

expressed how the church has done anti-Christ things in the name of Christ. We have taken stands for things that matter not to the Kingdom. How do we navigate these Challenges that are put before us? How do we become people of radical love and welcome?

It will take an “us” mentality.

When a bomb drops on the other side of the world, it’s launched by us and lands on us. When a people group is shunned or targeted because of hate, bigotry, or bias, we are involved. Whether we stand or sit it out, when anyone suffers, we all suffer.

Here are a few things I am choosing to commit to as part of the solution at any given time:

To do an honest assessment of my heart and motives.

To learn and accept the truth of Christian history, and not pretend it is without blemish.

To make amends, with love, where applicable.

To stay connected, to my best ability, and not withdraw (which feels like saving myself).

To be willing to see where any problem starts in me, where I have hate or bias or lies that need to be brought forward for God’s healing.

I sometimes utterly fail at Love, of course I do. We all do. I hope the greater Love intelligence catches up to the degree of my failures, though, and nudges me back towards the God that never gives up on me.

May we continue to mature in Love. May we ask the hard questions and follow Christ to the answer. The place to stand. The place to sit. The place of Love, above and beyond. Love, regardless.