

RENEWING OUR MINDS

Exploring Brain McLaren's

Why Don't They Get It: Overcoming Bias in Others (and Yourself)

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.
(Romans 12:2)

Class One - (May 26, 27) – Introduction; Enter Jesus; Confirmation Bias

Week Two (June 2,3) – Complexity Bias; Community Bias

Week Three (June 9, 10) – Complementarity Bias; Competency Bias; Consciousness Bias

Week Four (June 16,17) – Comfort Bias; Conservative/Liberal Bias

Week Five (June 23, 24) – Confidence Bias; Catastrophe Bias; Contact Bias

Week Six (June 30, July 1) – Cash Bias; Conspiracy Bias; Next Steps

Introduction

Brian McLaren's Journey

McLaren was "alarmed about the vitriol, distrust, and destructive mis-communication that were tearing people apart everywhere I turned ... in nations, in religious communities, in businesses, in non-profit organizations, in friendships, even in families." – and he sought to understand what was happening

He "realized that along the way, I had absorbed the old Enlightenment maxim, 'Reasonable men will agree.'" – which is not an accurate reflection of how people really function – we have different worldviews and therefore reason differently (George Lakoff)

McLaren discovered: "**People can't see what they can't see.** We all, yes, even me – and more shockingly, even you, have a whole set of assumptions and limitations, prejudices and likes, dislikes and triggers, fears and conflicts of interest, blind spots and obsessions that keep us from seeing what we could and would see if we didn't have them.

We are almost always unconscious of these internal obstacles to seeing and understanding, which makes it even harder for us to address them. We are, you might say, blind to what blinds us. **The name for these unconscious internal obstacles is bias.**

Bias makes us resist and reject messages we should accept and accept messages we should resist and reject. In short ... We can't see what we can't see because our biases get in the way."

McLaren identified **13 biases**, all of which begin with the letter "C."

Enter Jesus (Chapter 16)

Jesus' first sermon, "Repent, for the kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15, Matt 4:17) – "repent" is the Greek word, *metanoia*, 'change mind'

Jesus "obviously understood that all humans have a set of biases that make it hard for us to see the truth that could set us free"

- *Jesus said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31-32)*
- Jesus frequently restores sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf – e.g., Jesus heals the man blind from birth, explaining, "I am the light of the world" (John 9:5)
- Jesus explains speaking to the crowds in parables to his disciples: "With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: 'You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive.'" (Matthew 13:14)
- Jesus sends out the Twelve Apostles to proclaim the good news and heal people with the words: "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." (Matthew 10:16)
- Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount – "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye." (Matthew 7:1-5)

For instance, "more than six in 10 non-Christians and lapsed Christians (62%) say they would be open to talking about faith matters with someone who listens without judgment—the top quality they value – but only one-third (34%) sees this trait in the Christians they know personally." (Barna Survey, Feb 2019 – <https://www.barna.com/research/non-christians-faith-conversations/>)

Confirmation Bias (Chapter 1)

Confirmation Bias: “We judge new ideas based on the ease with which they fit in with and confirm the only standard we have: old ideas, old information, and trusted authorities. As a result, our framing story, belief system, or paradigm excludes whatever doesn't fit.”

“We all have filters, in other words. What do I already believe? Does this new idea or piece of information confirm what I already think? Does it fit in the frame I've already constructed? If so, I can accept it. If not, in all likelihood, I'm simply going to reject it as unreasonable and unbelievable, even though doing so is, well, unreasonable.”

“I do this, not to be ignorant, but to be efficient.”

Overcoming Confirmation Bias (Chapter 17)

In Responding to Confirmation Bias – “Jesus inspired and ‘abducted’ people through immersive or imaginative experiences – including parables and powerful metaphors, respectful conversations, encounters with ‘the other,’ field trips, and other forms of experiential learning.”

“The doorway out of confirmation bias is not aggressive argument. When you aggressively attack people's familiar ideas, they tend to respond defensively. They dig in their heels and become even more firmly attached to the very ideas that they need to be liberated from... The doorway out of confirmation bias is not argument but imagination and experience.”

Madeleine L'Engle ~ “We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.”

➤ Jesus told stories

~ parables – the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8), the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) ...

~ similes – the “kingdom of heaven is like” yeast, a mustard seed, treasure hidden in a field (Matthew 13; also Luke 8 & 13) ...

“Through these short ‘imaginative vacations’ to another world, Jesus helped people see from a new vantage point. He used imagination to punch a tiny hole in their walls of confirmation bias, and through that tiny hole, some new light could stream in and let them know of a bigger world beyond their walls.”

➤ Jesus took people places

~ Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 13:16-20; Mark 8:27-33) – Jesus reveals his identity in a city named for Caesar and Herodian King Philip

~ Samaria (John 4:1-42) – Jesus “had to go through Samaria” and speaks with the Woman at the Well, ‘astonishing’ his disciples

~ the Temple in Jerusalem – cleansing the Temple and confronting the religious authorities (Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-48, John 2:13-25)

“Through a new experience in a new setting, Jesus tried to break down the high walls of Confirmation Bias.”