

David Brubaker Final

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SPEAKERS

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David Brubaker 00:00

I'm personally convinced that the route out of polarization is not through avoiding conflict, because we've tried that, and it doesn't work. It actually just goes underground and gets worse. But there are examples and I've seen them in organizations, congregations, governors, have people who are very clear about their own beliefs about who they are and what they believe. And yet they're equally open to hearing other's perspectives and they don't diminish or demean them. They they honor the humanity of all those that they interact with treating everyone with whom they interact with the dignity they deserve as human beings. That doesn't mean we respect their opinions, but I can still regard their humanity I can still respect the fact, my own theology, that they are children of God, even if I profoundly disagree with their opinions on a particular topic.



Duncan Autrey 01:00

Hello, everyone. My name is Duncan Autrey, and you are listening to Fractal Friends, the podcast where we explore our self similarity across our diversity. You all have a role to play in the whole, and the purpose of the shows interview people with interesting perspectives on the world and see what it is that we can learn from one another. In this episode, I talk with David Brubaker. David is a dean at the School of Social Sciences and professions at Eastern Mennonite University. He's a professor of sociology, and author of a new book called When the Center Does Not Hold: Leading in an Age of Polarization. In this conversation, we talked about polarization. We talked about how polarization is what

happens when conflict reaches its highest levels. When conflict escalates, certain things start to happen. People stop caring about content and information and the conflict starts to turn personal. When this happens, people start to believe that who wins or loses the conflict will have a profound cosmic consequences. They start to believe the only solution will be separation from their enemy, or the complete elimination of them. We talk about the causes of polarization, which David distills down to a combination of inequality, a threat to identity, and a stated of grievance that people can rally around. We recognize in this conversation that all of those elements are exacerbated by personal and generational trauma. The sources of our divisions really run deep. And we talk about the strategies for living and leading in times of polarization. The upshot here is, honor your dignity, and honor the dignity of others, speak your truth, and then work to stay connected. And finally, we talk about how the only way to transform polarization is to de-escalate the conflict. And given lessons from history, it's not pretty to imagine what happens if we don't do that. David suggests and I agree that we might need to take a collective timeout, so that we can all have a cooldown period. Polarization is a big theme in the season of Fractal Friends. And the perspective that David brings in this conversation is grounded, practical and inspiring. Thank you for listening to Fractal Friends. If you enjoy the show, please subscribe to the podcast wherever you're listening to it and give it a review, and share it with your friends. And come visit [Fractalfriends.us](https://fractalfriends.us). To get more information about David and the things that we discussed in this episode. This episode's website has a lot of really good resources about trauma healing, and how to communicate across differences. I also encourage you to check out the archive of dozens of Fractal Friends.us episodes which are now organized by category I'm excited to say that it's now possible for you to support Fractal Friends you can make a donation to PayPal or you can become a patron of Fractal Friends through Patreon where you can subscribe to make a contribution for each episode. A small hint here, the patrons of Fractal Friends, get goodies sent to them for me. You can find buttons to make contributions on the episode page, and at [Fractalfriends.us](https://fractalfriends.us). And one last thing before we get started, I am professionally dedicated to helping the world improve its capacity to communicate across our differences. at my company Spoke & Wheel. We work with teams, organizations and groups to help them transform their relationships with conflict and with each other. If you know any teams or groups that need support in order to be happily and effectively working together towards their life with premium purpose, please send them my way we offer free initial calls at our site, [Spokeandwheel.co](https://spokeandwheel.co). Again that is [Spokeandwheel.co](https://spokeandwheel.co). And now on to the show. This episode was recorded in July of 2020. Please enjoy this conversation with David Brubaker. David, thank you so much for being on Fractal Friends. We met at the ACR, the Association for Conflict Resolution conference in Tucson last year. And you've recently written a book called *When the Center Does Not Hold: Leading in Polarization*. Your experience and background, as I understand is working with polarization often in spiritual, religious communities. But obviously, this theme applies very much to the political

landscape in the United States and actually, the world right now. But I wonder if you'd be willing to just tell us a little bit about your background, where you are and how you kind of got into this world?

D

David Brubaker 05:42

Yes, thank you, Duncan. It's an honor to be able to speak with you and really appreciate what you're doing with Fractal Friends. So I currently serve as the Dean of the School of Social Sciences and professions at Eastern Mennonite University. It's located in Harrisonburg, Virginia, in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. But more than 30 years ago, I began working with Mennonite Conciliation Service in 1986, and became involved in the conflict transformation field at that point, doing a lot of interpersonal mediation, also working with congregations. And over the years since then I have continued to consult with a wide variety of organizations, but probably 80% of my clients have been faith based organizations and congregations. Probably the first time that I encountered a polarized congregation was in 1991. About five years after I started this work, I was based in Pennsylvania, and worked with a congregation where there had been an allegation of sexual misconduct against the lead pastor, a colleague and I were co consulting with the case. And we soon realized that the allegations and the denial of the allegations by the pastor had polarized the congregation About a third believe the complainant about a third believe the accused. And about a third were in the middle group that I came to call concerned and confused. But it clearly had created two very distinct camps within that congregation. And we discovered that our normal tools of structuring dialogue were not very effective in this polarized situation. So that really started my quest to understand how do we deal with polarized systems, not just with normal conflict



Duncan Autrey 07:33

I kind of want to pick up this theme of of Mennonites John Paul Lederach as a hero of mine and can you explain a little bit about who the Mennonites are and why they're doing piecework all the time? I mean, I remember Eastern Mennonite University, being one of the only universities I know of that was first to really offer a conflict transformation program. Could you help me out with that background there? Sure. So John Paul Lederach was a co founder of what now called the Center for Justice and peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University. As you obviously know, John Paul was a leader in the conflict transformation field throughout the 1890s and into the current era. And that program began in 1994. And has continued to the presence now offering a master's in conflict transformation as well as a master's in restorative justice. Given Howard Zehr's there's significant work in that area. I would say Mennonites have a particular commitment to peace because we were part of what's sometimes called the radical revolution in

reformation accurately in Europe in the 16th century, that Mennonites were among the groups that were insisting that there should not be infant baptism, simply meaning that people should be allowed to make an adult decision about what faith if any, they chose to follow and that therefore we're known as the Anabaptist which literally means rebaptized, yours, that is now accepted in most western democracies, that there should be freedom of religion, but at the time, that was a fairly radical stance. So that's why they were considered to be part of the radical reformation. When they came to America, many came seeking religious freedom as well as economic opportunity. And many came to Pennsylvania because William Penn, the Quaker founder of the colony of Pennsylvania, at the time, was very open to religious freedom. And that's why you'll find the epicenter of Mennonite settlements from Europe, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. That's fascinating. I was in the Peace Corps in Paraguay. And there's this one part of the country where it's pretty uninhabitable but a huge population of German Mennonites were actually the first people to successfully populate that area and they came to Paraguay, because it's one of the few countries where there was not compulsory military service. And, it's very interesting, there's like a little German speaking corner of Paraguay there because of that historical piece. Thank you for that. And so today we're going to talk about polarization a bit. And obviously, you know, I appreciate even this comment that you said that, like, just the regular ways of dealing with conflict, kind of fall apart there. And, and my guess is that that's, like, once something has gotten deeply polarized enough, just the ability to even engage in conversation with each other gets undermined. But is that it? Or what? How can you explain to me a little bit about what happened in polarization, it gets so difficult.

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David Brubaker 10:43

So polarization is an expression of conflict, but it's at the highest end of the conflict spectrum. So you and I are both members of the Association of Conflict Resolution. We imagine we both done a decent amount of mediation and other kinds of consulting processes, and the tools that we learn in mediation and principled negotiation, are very effective for, I would say 90% of the conflicts that we deal with. So encouraging people to be hard on issues and soft on people. And to have a clear BATNA, what's your best alternative to a negotiated agreement? And to be clear about the issues and encourage negotiation of the issues? Those tools all work very well, for level one, two, and three, conflict, as we get into this is on a five level scale. But as we get into level four, particularly high level four, conflict and level five conflict, the focus always shifts from what are the issues and how can we resolve them to who are the bad people and how can we destroy them? That's the nature of polarized thinking. And most conflicts never get there, either because they're resolved before they get to level four or five, or just as frequently because the party's split at level four. So before they can actually try to harm each other a couple

divorces, or a religious congregation splits, or sometimes a country experiences a split and forms two separate countries, as we've seen in Eastern Europe, for example. But if a conflict gets to a high level four, level five, we can describe it as polarized. And there's some very unique dynamics of a polarized conflict, which I'm happy to describe if that would be appropriate.



Duncan Autrey 12:34

Yeah, that'd be great. And I just want to just like capture that there's this this like five levels of conflict. That was one of the things I learned in your workshop that I appreciated a lot. So I'll make sure that for those who are interested in looking at this levels, they can find it in the show notes of this episode. Yeah, but go ahead and tell us what happens when we get there to the top of conflict scale?



David Brubaker 12:54

Well, and I should probably give credit to Speed Leas who is the senior consultant for the Alban Institute who developed these five levels of conflict some 40 years ago based on his own experience of working with multiple religious congregations, which is a fascinating place to learn about high level conflict. But as I mentioned in the book, there are five characteristics that are pretty consistent. In my experience with again, these 10% at most of conflict cases that get to level five. And the first is personal attacks. If you are a leader in a polarized system, or if you are a member of one of the two tribes that tend to emerge in polarized systems, there will be a lot of personal attacks, you will feel it personally as a leader, as well as if you're a member of either of those groups. And as I mentioned in the book, leaders become the consistent targets of personal attacks ranging from disparaging the leaders character and integrity to actual physical assaults. So there was a republican congressman in the 1850s Who was assaulted on the floor of the Congress by a Democratic opponent from the south. At that point, the Democratic Party was pro-slavery physically assaulted almost to the point of death. That's an extreme example of personal attack. Holy Ward, polarized individuals describe their conflicts in epic terms. So the language tends to shift from simply we disagree or we're in a conflict about something, to This is a fight for the future of the country fight between good and evil. That's fairly typical language. In level five conflict, particularly distorted information. Information is used not to inform debate but to vanquish opponents. And as we were talking earlier, it really doesn't matter what is being said in a polarized conflict. It only matters who is saying it. So I will trust it if it comes from Rush Limbaugh at one end of the spectrum or Rachel Maddow At the other end of the spectrum, but I won't trust it from any other source because I've now put my faith in a particular source of information, not in looking objectively at the information. Fourth relentless obsession, that polarized individuals

maintain an obsessive focus on the issues that concern them, and the individuals or groups they oppose. So it's very hard for a system to move on to other topics because of this obsession. And then finally, intractable negotiations. And that's how Speed Leas described level five. He simply said, it's an intractable conflict. Compromise becomes unthinkable because negotiating with the enemy is seen as reprehensible. So it's hard to have successful negotiation when you basically see your opponents as totally evil. So those are the five characteristics.



Duncan Autrey 15:51

It's interesting, like think about how these like they played together. So like once it becomes about the people, then that collapses the information. And then also like what you're even able to talk about. And something I noticed and when I was reading your book was that intractable negotiations become about everything, because you have to negotiate with these people. And so for example, the budget, like getting totally locked up in Congress a number of years ago, or every year at this point, you know, like, it's not, the budget is a relatively, I mean, I guess, has two fold issues. I think there's another part that's interesting is that there's this tendency for a bunch of issues to get bundled together. So whatever the issue could potentially be, you know, like, maybe I'm in, you know, the conflict, you know, like, the thing that got me to be on one side or the other was some sort of secular religious division or something. But once I do that, then I'm going to go ahead and join everyone who's on my side, I'm going to take all the issues and I noticed this when I speak with people in polarized tension or or I get myself into those kinds of conversations that we can go from one topic to the next topic to the next topic to the next topic, as Though all of them are somehow the same, even though we're not really talking about that,



David Brubaker 17:05

very well said. So in a polarized situation, it actually matters less what the issues are, and more who the people are that I choose to affiliate with. So I will have my reference group, and I will take their side, almost regardless of what the issue is, I'm not doing independent thinking. So an example would be in the recent pandemic. I remember talking to a friend in early April. And she said, I'm just so happy that our country is coming together to fight this pandemic, because that's at that point. That's how it seemed. And I said, I really hate saying this, but it's just a matter of time until the polarized divisions in our country take over this issue, because the polarized divisions at this point would be more important, sadly, then a global pandemic that we need to struggle against together. And within several weeks, that's exactly what happened. So we have the pro masking group in the

end masking group that simply reflects that any issue that comes into a polarized environment becomes entangled in that polarized environment.



Duncan Autrey 18:09

I remember hearing that there is research showing that people like will choose their party over their values, even at certain points, right that. And, you know, I've seen that happen where, you know, someone will take an issue about, like, a certain law, and they'll be on this side when it's in favor of them. And they'll be on that side when there's a favorite and it's like literally the same people. We've seen various levels of that happening in this last 10 years or something.



David Brubaker 18:34

The research that I saw was done in Israel and Palestine. And if they presented a proposal, even if it had been drafted by Israelis, but if they presented it as if it had been drafted by Palestinians, it was immediately rejected by the Israeli participants and vice versa. So again, doesn't matter particularly the substance of the issue, or the negotiation that we're involved in. It matters for More which tribe I consider myself to be part of.



Duncan Autrey 19:02

Yeah, that's really interesting. You know, as the Coronavirus hit, I remember having this like moment of hope that like here is actually like a crisis or some situation that that we can scapegoat people around. Right. And when we could maybe like the pangolin and and the bats maybe, you know, but if we don't have someone to scapegoat, then potentially, we can all start coming together as that person was saying. And it's been really interesting to see how that's it's become a focus point to have, you know, left right divisions about or, you know, across mean, left/right is just like a shorthand for that, because we're definitely like, it's more complex than that. So there's also a feature of polarization. And you mentioned a little bit when that first congregation that you worked with that a third will be on one side and a third will be on the other side. And then a third is usually kind of in the middle or taking this. I think that's really interesting because it's not necessarily going to be split down the middle. It's very rare that everyone takes one side or the other. This There's usually a substantial part of the population that's there. And one of the questions I have about that is it seems like okay, there's the middle. But then there's also the sort of the whole, you know, I think as a mediator, we think about like taking that third perspective sometimes right of like, I'm not trying to help you compromise here. Like, I'm really trying to get the both of you to get have the best

situation that kind of Omnipartial approach of, you know, kind of holding the, the whole unit. But I just wanted to like highlight that piece that, like when something's really polarized, it's usually just still about two thirds of the population.

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David Brubaker 20:34

That's certainly been my experience, because I've been called into several situations as a conflict consultant, where I was told going in we are split down the middle 50/50. But when we did surveys or even multiple individual interviews or focus groups, we discovered that there always is a group in the middle that has heard from both sides and they're keenly aware that there is polarization in their system, but it's not fair. 50 polarization because even though they feel pressured to do so they haven't yet chosen aside. Now that group gets much smaller over time. So the more polarized the environment, the smaller the middle. But in a normal system, you might have 10 to 20% on one end, 10 to 20% on the other end, but you're gonna have 60 to 80% in the middle, in a polarized system, you can have 30 to 40% on one end, and 30 to 40% on the other. And that leaves a pretty small group in the middle. And that's what we're talking about. It could be as small as a quarter or a third that truly hasn't taken aside in high level polarization.



Duncan Autrey 21:41

Seems pretty close to where we are in the United States, at least right now. I am pretty sure there's that one number of the Trump's approval rating that's exactly that number. It's about a 35 to 40%. Right.

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David Brubaker 21:53

And about a third in what statisticians say is that polarization is simply the thickening of the ends and the collapse of the middle in a normal curve. So, in any healthy system, if you will, we do have a normal curve in a polarized system that reverses itself in the ends thinking.



Duncan Autrey 22:12

That's interesting. So the normal curve would be like kind of like a bell curve kind of thing where like, yeah, more or less people are even finding the group coming together. And it's the people are the outliers, smaller, smaller amounts at the edges, and that the extremes. So let's see, one thing I want to capture here also is the thing about polarization is it it's both very old. And it's like an international experience. Like this is we're, of course, we're in

the United States. And but I know, I mean, I could think of dozens of countries right now that are having very similar polarizing experiences. We're on similar issues as the United States. And so I don't want to just make it pretend like this is just us. But it's also interesting how it cuts across history. Can you tell me remind me like some of the times that we've been polarized in the in this country Sure, so the three most significant, although a true historian, which I'm not, I'm a sociologist, but a true historian would indicate multiple other occasions. The three most significant and I checked this with a professor of American history at my university, he agreed, where the American Revolution in the 1770s and even subsequent in the 1780s, when the loyalists or the Tories who wanted to remain loyal to to Britain, were in severe conflict with patriots, those who wanted independence from Britain so much, though, that about 80,000 of them of the loyalists fled the country during or after the Revolutionary War. Surprising number went to Canada. Fact I have some distant cousins Brubaker in Ontario, Canada, because that's where they went since it was still a British colony. And of course in the 1850s leading up to the Civil War, there wasn't it attempt to have a grand compromise, primarily focused on how to handle the states with that point at that time, the territories in the West, and which territories would be permitted to practice slavery, which would not be, but that compromise did not obviously settle the issue. And by 1861, we we had a shooting war. And then more recently, in just the last century, the 1960s, I think we're a very significant time of polarization. I was born in 1957. So growing up in the 1960s, remember the severe conflicts over the war in Vietnam, and even over the civil rights movement, with some strongly supporting it, and others strongly opposing it? And of course, the assassinations that took place in that decade of leading figures. So I think it's significant that those of us who are in the baby boom generation came of age during the 1960s and even into the 1970s with the continuation of the Vietnam War, and of course, Watergate, and there was polarization going on very early on for our generation. And now our generation, basically is running things. Not terribly well, obviously. But the fact that the baby boom generation are now the leaders of industry, religion, government, and that we have another significantly polarized time. I don't think it's totally coincidental. I think our generation was polarized almost from its inception. Mm hmm. Well, that makes a lot. Yeah, sense is just like being kind of like born into that polarization. And then we can feel the echoes of those, right. Like, in my own family, I know that like, my mom was a hippie because it was cool. In California, and my dad was a hawk from the south. And, you know, and, that's me and how I was created. And I'm the conflict transformation person. Oh, yeah. And, but was, you know, but I could really feel that like, I understood that tension from Early on, so we can feel the echoes of that. And it could just like see the adults that are either like we're the Hawks or the doves, you know, at some point, you know, we think about like the causes of polarization. Like we have this, like historical context, right? We have this, you know, this history and these things that are, like echoing forward. And then one of the great section of your blog is about trauma, and how trauma is the source of polarization.

And I also just want to say that you There's a wonderful formula of like, income inequality plus identity threat has articulated grievance equals polarization, right? Like, am I or my group feeling threatened? Like, is there actually some sort of inequality? And then like, Is there something I can complain about? Or is there something we can talk about? And we can think about in common qualities like this perpetuation of trauma. And I think that that's really interesting right now, especially as we look at some of the conflicts about race, but then also about statues and just how are we doing with our history that we're actually having to trauma is playing out like across the spectrum on this like not only do we have the trauma of just like historical racism, the ongoing residue and echoing out of slavery and Jim Crow and all of that But then we also have the trauma of the south of losing the Civil War. All of that's here in this mix where we have like traumatized groups interacting with each other, you know, is that that because a lot right there, but I know that being in Virginia, like you're really keyed into, like the history of the Civil War and slavery and how that's like echoing into our future, I wonder if you would be willing to talk about that a bit?

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David Brubaker 27:31

Well, It's not surprising to me that you mentioned a number of issues together because they're all intertwined, and we have to deal with them that way. So no groups have been more traumatized in American history than Native Americans and African Americans. So the the legacy of genocide of Native Americans, and the enslavement of African Americans is something for which our, our country must repent and I'm seeing some hopeful signs that We might at least be starting to be more honest about those legacies. So that's a huge legacy of trauma for those two significant groups. There are additional levels of trauma that take place at an individual level, whatever our life experience has been, and as you mentioned, for white Southerners, who just about every Southern family lost a loved one in the civil war in here in the Shenandoah Valley, General Sheridan went up and down the valley in 1864, burning every barn, destroying every mill, killing all of the livestock, and basically people starved after that. Now it was done to take away what really was the breadbasket of the Confederacy supporting Lee's army. So it certainly had a legitimate military objective, but created generations of trauma for white Southerners alongside the much more severe generational trauma for black southerners. So we can't deny that these things are there. And it seems we need more research on this. But it seems that trauma acts as a glue in our conflicts and embeds them and makes them more likely to escalate and become polarized. And that's why I asked two colleagues to write about that topic, one about the legacy of trauma, the other about resilience for leaders. But until we become honest with ourselves as individuals about what we've experienced as trauma, and until we become honest, as a country about the trauma that we have visited on significant populations in our own country, I don't think we'll ever be able to be completely

free of this. It trauma has become the glue that holds our polarization in place.



Duncan Autrey 29:49

Yeah. And I have a friend of mine that has like it's all trauma. I think. There's that little bundle of podcasts that we get into the history of racism and one of the things that We talk about a couple of them is, like the trauma that happened to Europeans from other Europeans like back 500, 1000 years ago, the, you know, the killing of witches and sacred backgrounds. And so those cultures were destroyed so long ago that we barely even remember it. And that that trauma of that was then brought to the United States and made it easy to be like, Okay, well look at this forest and these people here, well, we'll just get rid of them, because it's already was there and another colleague of mine talks about how it's like, we're just echoing now just this idea of just like, ownership of land or of people, you know, like, that isn't a natural thing for us to be doing but that's something that like that poison is sort of echoing out and I, there's something about, in addition to the obvious obvious, your horror of slavery that You know that the South was also like this vanquished party and I was at a workshop or mediators beyond borders conference and two gentlemen from East Timor, and he said this thing that really struck a chord, he's like, think the real trick is like, once you have defeated your enemy, and they're on their knees, and defeated, like, that is the point where you need to give them like so much compassion. And that's like something that we, we suck at it at war. I mean, it's just never, you know, like that would have helped us in Iraq that would have helped us in so many different places to like, vanquish an enemy and then have compassion for them. And it's hard. It's really hard. And especially when we can say in this in the Civil War, where this is like, it was about slavery as it were very, very, um, there was a just cause that was being fought there. And but what I want to just kind of point out and this is like an in the chapter By Carolyn Yoder about trauma, she talks about the STAR model, which I think seems like it's also connected to EMU, and strategies for trauma, awareness and resilience. And there's this cycles of violence and I'll get I'll put these in the show notes for this episode. But it's really interesting how there can be this dance where like the victim, there's a victim cycle and an aggressor cycle. But the difference between the victim and the aggressor is who's basically acting out and who's acting in. So like the victim is someone who's putting like who's the pain of reaction to trauma is happening to themselves, and then the aggressor cycles, it's happening to someone else. And that when we go instead of to revenge instead of justice, the victims become the aggressors and the aggressors become the victims. There's this dance that happens there. And they also have a chart which I ended up finding online about how do we get out of these cycles and what he talked about, you know, It's like, acknowledgement first, Like as you were saying and like, first we have to acknowledge what's happening here. Then there's mercy and then there's like justice, and then we can start figuring out how to rebuild things. And I wonder what other things that

you learned about you know, or that you thought were kind of essential to these, like cycles of trauma and cycles of violence that we have.



David Brubaker 33:18

Yes STAR is indeed a program of emu. And Carolyn was the founding director. So I was pleased to have her write this chapter. And some people in response to trauma, primarily acting in which in an extreme case could be suicide, some in response to trauma act out, which in an extreme case could be homicide, but it continues the cycles of violence. And so I'm glad you found what we sometimes call the snail model that shows how to escape from either of those two cycles. And it's not an easy escape. It is the hard path of choosing to honestly confront what has happened, and to avoid what we tend to call in trauma response that sometimes comes naturally to folks creating either a victim narrative, chosen traumas that we're identifying with, or what we sometimes called chosen glories. And that really is what led to all of the statue building in the south. In my opinion, it came out of a traumatized white Southern population, wanting to idolize its glories what they saw as its glories, in terms of the generals who they had seen as heroes. And in a healthy society, we don't have a need to dwell on our chosen traumas and our chosen glories. But when we're seeing that happen, it's telling us that we haven't yet resolved that trauma. So even for white Southerners, as I was saying earlier, the spate of statue building wasn't only an expression of white supremacy which I do see it as. it was also an expression of chosen glories, which tells us that their trauma has not yet been addressed.



Duncan Autrey 35:08

Mm hmm. Wow. Just like I'm really interested in my personal life, just I can really feel like that moment of, but just for everyone like that, the cycle between like shame and ego, you know, or the cycle between shame and pride, you know, like, and there's like that. It's like they like they'll balance each other out if they are. If one is untrue, then the untrue mirror will happen as well. Right? So if it's like, I feel really bad about something, then I'm going to like really focus on what I feel really good about. But if I'm like really focused on what I feel good about, then I'll like check myself, you know, and it's hard. Because like, as, you know, as the wheel turns, it's easy to get on the other side of that and it's like, hard to actually find that just like that center, you know, or the, the spiral. I just want to also highlight I just I had recently heard a podcast by Resmaa Menakem, I think is the author of My Grandmother's Hands. And yeah, yeah. And, you know, make sure there's links for that. And it's really amazing work there. But he says the trauma of races in our bodies, and that's going to need to be recognized before transformation. So there's also this way that it's actually built in. I mean, we have epigenetics, we just like we are actually, you know,

me. I remember hearing him talk where he was saying that, if someone who's been traumatized by violence, he specifically talks about, like, darker skinned people that like, they're constantly actually like checking out their space, like, Am I gonna be safe here? Am I gonna be safe here, I'm not gonna be trapped. And that just like that, that's just built into this experience. And that you actually are gonna have to find that in your body and address it.

D

David Brubaker 36:48

Well, on the point I remember talking to a friend several years ago when there was a video of an African American man stopped by the police who then turned and ran and the police shot him in the back and he died. The friend said, why would you run from the police? And my response was, why would he not run from the police given not only the epigenetic transfer of trauma, but his own lived experience. So we have to recognize when trauma is at play in a lot of these interactions and the police themselves, I think, often acting out of an unhealed trauma core.



Duncan Autrey 37:22

Okay, so about polarization runs deep. We've established that okay, and it's dangerous, and it can become intractable. What do we do? how do we lead in polarization? My favorite part is just this piece about just like embrace your humanity. like be human.

D

David Brubaker 37:39

yeah, I am personally convinced that the root out of polarization do not live through avoiding conflict because we've tried that and it doesn't work. It actually just goes underground and gets worse, but engaging conflict particularly when it's small. So if we can engage conflict at the more manageable levels, those levels one two and Three. level one where dialogue is very effective level two, where negotiation is very effective level three, we're having a third party mediator is very effective, the vast majority of our conflicts never need to get to level four and five. If they do get to level four and five, then there is a certain kinds of leadership that's required. And it certainly is not the kind of leadership that throws gasoline on the fire, as we've seen in several countries around the world, including our own. That kind of leadership makes everything worse. It's polarizing leadership. But there are examples and I've seen them in organizations, congregations, governors, of people who are very clear about their own beliefs, about who they are and what they believe. And yet they're equally open to hearing others perspectives and they don't diminish or demean them. They they honor the humanity of all those that they

interact with. And so here's where Donna Hicks work on dignity, I think is really important for leaders. She wrote an initial book on dignity and the second one leading with dignity, which I especially recommend. Donna Hicks H I C K S. And she talks about the importance of leaders treating everyone with whom they interact with the dignity they deserve as human beings. That doesn't mean we respect their opinions. There are times when I find it impossible to respect those who have opinions that seem to be based on conspiracy theories, for example, but I can still regard their humanity. I can still respect the fact my own theology, that they are children of God, that they are here to the invention of the Divine and that I want to respect the light of the Divine that's in each one of them, even if I profoundly disagree with their opinions on a particular topic.



Duncan Autrey 39:50

When I talk about effective listening this model of Acknowledge, Reflect and be Curious, right, A R C. and acknowledgment is kinda empathy. But empathy can be tricky. Because it seems like I have to have the same experience as you to have empathy. It's not necessarily true, but that's a story. And what I will point out is like acknowledging, just acknowledge the person's human experience. And so when I'm working with someone who I, like, totally disagree with, I can at least look and say, like, wow, I see that you're really scared about this, or I see that you're really freaked out or like this is, you know, are you really excited right now? or? Yeah, and, and I see you care about this a lot. And I can at least acknowledge that there's a person in front of me, it's a human having an experience, and I can at least recognize that emotional thing, even though I'm like, wow, this is bonkers. You know, like, like, not really listening to what I'm not agreeing with your words. So that acknowledgement can be really powerful. Yeah, I mean, just remembering that inherent human dignity and I love how you say in the thing where it's also about, like, recognizing your own dignity, we have to be in touch with our own voice and, you know, and that you said that there with that leadership where it's like, you have to be clear about your own opinion, being a leadership in polarization doesn't necessarily mean you'll be neutral about it or not have an opinion or avoid stating your opinion. It's about saying, This is what I believe. And from here, I'm still willing to talk to the other folks.



David Brubaker 41:15

That's it. In fact, the leaders that fear the worst in polarized systems, and I've seen this play out time and time again, are those who remain steadfastly neutral, because then they are despised by both sides. They are seen as weak and unprincipled by both. And it actually leaders fare better when they're able to say, this is who I am. This is where I stand. This would be Martin Luther King's response, for example. And yet I choose to love those who disagree with me, that's the combination that is actually most effective in a

polarized situation.



Duncan Autrey 41:46

Mm hmm. Yeah, it's interesting, I think, you know, so just really want to pull out the advice of engaging in conflict when it's still small. You know, As a mediator I talk about, actually, it's really interesting. This really fits in To the five levels here, I talked with this imperceptible line between it's no big deal, and it's hopeless. And that people will, you know, want to talk to people about a conflict or having it as like, wow, you know, here's some ideas about help with this, you know, I'd love to get a mediator to help you with that. And I acknowledge no big deal. We got it. I'll just go and talk to them a little more. And then, a couple months later, how's that going? It's like, well, we broke up the organization and we, you know, don't ever want to talk to each other again. And it was like, well, when did you cross the line, and then say, in our work as like conflict resolution or transformation, folks, engagement or whatever management is to expand that line, so that we can say, Look, your situation is a big deal, and it's not hopeless. You really are dealing with a fundamental issue here. And you can handle it you can figure out a way to do this. So it's a little bit like expanding that level three level, you know, like, before you cross into the holy war, make sure that you pay attention as it escalates. Hey, Fractal Friends. I'm going to jump in here with a quick important message I don't know if you've noticed the democracy is struggling these days. There's pretty much a global consensus that things are not working out very well. And in the United States, things have become particularly contentious lately. The divisions and tensions are not just happening across the political divide. There are also deep conflicts that are happening amongst people who are trying to work for the same cause. It does not have to be this way. Sure, it can be expected for people to disagree about important political issues. But being held back by painful and divisive conflict is totally optional. And in my opinion, we should not put up with this division anymore. The skills and tools to communicate across our differences and turn a diversity of opinions into an engine of learning and growth are not only available, they are effective and they are teachable. As an extension of my work at Spoke & Wheel. I am also part of a project of mediators beyond borders International that we call the DPACE Initiative. DPACE stands for democracy, politics and conflict engagement. We work with political groups, social change movements and communities that are struggling with social issues, and we help them engage with conflict more effectively. We offer skill building and direct support like facilitation and mediation. We have also created a conflict literacy framework with tons of information about how you can navigate conflict with both skill and grace. You can find information about the DPACE initiative, and the conflict literacy framework at [Dpaceinitiative.org](https://dpaceinitiative.org). That's d p a c e initiative dot ORG.



David Brubaker 44:58

But what's interesting though, is just like



Duncan Autrey 45:00

Now that we're past them, Listen some of our political discussions like we're past the level, we're in the upper levels of conflict. Now, this idea of just like speak your truth, but then maintain the connection. Like that's helpful. That's it. That's, I think, helpful for individuals for anyone, right? I mean, any scale that's helpful.



David Brubaker 45:20

And this was the basic principle of family systems theory that was pioneered by Marie Bowen and others, applied to faith based organizations by Rabbi Friedman. And what it really says the core principle is self differentiation. And it basically says self define. Let people know who you are. Get clear in your own mind about who you are and what you believe and stay connected. So I'm just paraphrasing what you said earlier. Self define and stay connected is the best stance for a leader in almost any situation. Because if a leader fails to self define again, they will be perceived as unprincipled and weak and However, if they self define and refuse to listen to those with a different perspective, or worse yet demonize them, then they become hated by anyone else that doesn't share their perspective. So it's self defining and staying connected and maintaining that respect for the basic human dignity of other human beings. Mm hmm. By the way, your comment earlier about how can we respect the different life journeys that people have been on reminds me of a time that I went to Philadelphia, this is probably 33 years ago, went to the Good Shepherd Mediation Center for mediation training, and I don't remember the name of the trainer. I remember he was Quaker, but he said something that has stuck with me for 33 years. And it was whenever you're in dialogue with someone and you're having trouble understanding their position, and you profoundly disagree with it. I use this question, quote, can you help me understand what it was in your life experience that led you to take the position you now hold on? That's an extremely useful question. And I've used it in a number of one on one conversations as well as in mediation. Can you help me understand what it was in your experience that led you to take the position, you now, hold? and I've heard some incredibly heart wrenching stories in response to that where people start crying. And then it makes sense to me, even though I'm at a very different place, perhaps because of my own life experience. But they've revealed something of their experience that led them to take that unusual from my perspective position.



Duncan Autrey 47:35

I am familiar with that question as well. I've learned about it through Essential Partners, which used to be the Public Conversations Project, and I recently heard one of my colleagues Ken Cloke talk about that. And it's a powerful question again, for those who didn't catch it. You know, the question is, and you can use variations of it, but you can just have a conversation, each person tell a story from their life experience to explain how they got to Feel what they feel about whatever the issue is. And that can be a powerful question and like a circle process where everyone gets a chance to answer it. And Ken Cloke said this thing, if you have a group people, you could ask a question about who's the tallest person here? And there's only one right answer to that question. And then you could have, what is your height? And then there's multiple answers correct answers to that question. Each person can say that. But then you could ask each person in the group, tell me what it feels like to be the height that you are. And then now you've stepped into a qualitative thing where there's infinite correct answers that are undebatable. And it's similar to this idea of like, yeah, it's like, what does this mean to you? Why is this important to you? And all of this is about kind of getting down to those underlying needs to Yeah. its positions, interests, needs. And when we get to human needs, we discover that there's not only an infinite variety of answers, but they're all compatible. Exactly. Yeah, I'll definitely put like I'm always linking to lists of human needs and universal human needs and some individual information there. So there's this piece then. So like about communicating across the difference, I really appreciated the chapter by Everett. Is that your son, by the way? Yes. Yeah, he did a great job with that chapter Yeah, about communication across polarized things. And a part that I appreciated. And I remember this from there's a TED talk that I saw by this guy named Rob Willer, about how to fix our broken conversations. But the idea is that like, remember that if you're talking across the political spectrum, you're dealing with different value bases, and to communicate with a person based on their values, not your values. And so, in this TED Talk, he talks about how like the left has like fairness, equality, care, compassion, these are the core things, while the right is focused on loyalty, patriotism, respect for authority, purity. So if you want to talk about the environment, talk about like what's good for our country. How can we keep the land pure? Like, what is the right rule of law? Like how can we be proud of the place where we are, that's going to get people to be excited about the environment rather than saying some conversation about environmental justice for example, and, and that the right could potentially speak to the left by talking about like, Hey, you know, like the here's what we think is fair and caring and, you know, compassionate, you've summarized very well the importance of framing. And Jonathan Haight talks about that as well in terms of the different values that connect with different ends of the spectrum. Everett also addresses the importance of the messenger and makes the observation I think he's spot on that our current polarization around climate change would not be so intense had AI

Gore partnered with a conservative on the Oscar winning 2006 documentary, An Inconvenient Truth. And so again, in any polarized environment, it's far less important what is being said than who is saying it. So if we could have had a bipartisan presentation of the need to address climate change back in the 90s and 2000s, we might be at a different place than we are now. Oh, that's really interesting because we get to that level of polarization that people come on and destroy the messenger, but they can actually hear the message from someone who they can respect. And that's just a really useful thing to think about. I think there's like something about living and polarization also, that seems like it's important to recognize like this importance of recognizing our interdependence. And this is actually why it's so painful. Just like remember that the reason why it's important to like, establish that connection with someone is because you are connected to them. Seems like you've heard since you wrote your book, you've heard a lot of people asking him talking about like, personal experiences with polarization, and what are some of the things that you're talking to those people about?

D

David Brubaker 51:52

Well, what I often hear from people are complaints about the media, including social media, and I fully understand that those complaints are legitimate. They're not fully explanatory because the country has been polarizing since the late 1970s. And that was well before social media was on the scene, or even some of our current 24 hour so called news networks, like MSNBC and Fox. So I think we have to take a deeper dive into why is the country polarizing now or for that matter? Why did it polarize in the 1850s? Certainly before the media, at least, the current media was a factor. There were some sharply divided newspapers back then. So that's why I was looking seriously at both identity threat when I feel that that my identity is under siege in some way. And also economic stratification. So what's really changed over the last 50 years since 1970, has been the divide between the rich and the poor. It has grown dramatically in this country. And our polarization has pretty much correlated with a growing divide between the rich and the poor. And that also relates to identity threat. Because if my father had worked in the Buick plants, and I saw myself working in the Buick plants, and then there's no job for me, or I'm paid a fraction of what my father would have been in real wages, I can understand why people start getting desperate and looking for alternatives. And when someone articulates that this is why an articulated grievance is so important, and says either the Chinese and the immigrants are responsible for what you're experiencing. And I respond to that, or they're corporations and the billionaires are responsible for what you're experiencing. And I respond to that. That's when we start to see growing polarization around political spheres because the different parties articulating different reasons for this reality. Unfortunately, at least to this point, neither one has been able to effectively put forward and implement a solution to growing stratification. So it continues to happen

continues to divide the country, but people focus on symptoms rather than causes is my concern.



Duncan Autrey 54:23

Hmm.



David Brubaker 54:25

And certainly the media makes it worse. There's no question that social media and especially the 24 hour, so called news networks have worsened things.



Duncan Autrey 54:34

Yeah, it's interesting, because it's the source the problem and the actual. And what we're seeing the problem look like. So like, looking at the media is actually we're just seeing something that's manifesting, you know, or, I mean, I think that was something that was very clear for me in the last presidential election was that like, this is a symptom of something bigger, you know, like that, like this is already a division that's here. And now it's laid bare and this grievance was already available. What's interesting is that I'm noticing that we can ever see articulated grievance we can be polarized about the grievance. But it's interesting that we're not talking about a lot of solutions. You know, I think about this a lot having been, you know, like steeped in protest and activist culture a lot, I remember just kind of get to this place of like, we were like, anti everything. Like, why are we actually proposing here? Like, is there an end game that we're talking about? Like, why? What's that? What are we building towards? And that's important. I mean, it's important to understand what the challenge is and what the problem is, and something you want to get rid of? Well, it's where we tried to end this little book, because we have to have some way forward some sense of hope. But you might remember that I started it with a nested model that what's going on inside of me intra personally, what's going on between you and me interpersonally what's going on at the subsystems that were part of our communities or organizations, and what's going on at the macro system, our society, even the global system these days, all of those are interconnected. And so we need strategies. to address all four of those levels, so what can I do personally within myself? What can I do in my relationship with you and others? What can we do within our communities and organizations? And what can we do with it within our country as a whole? Until we address all four of those levels, I don't think there's going to be an exit, by the way, the way polarization ends is either there's a complete split, and party A and party B never talked to each other again, or there is a violent conflict, and then a split. You

know, those are the two paths that we've seen in our own history and the history of other countries, either a relatively non violent split or a violence exchange and then the split and if the polarization is not addressed and resolved prior to that. Do we have any new examples of the path where things come together? I mean, if we have the integration place like option?

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David Brubaker 56:55

Well, we have the example of Czechoslovakia which was a single country through the Cold War and then became the Czech Republic and Slovakia. And that was done nonviolently. And I think the two countries have an ongoing peaceful relationship. So it doesn't mean that there has to be a violent conflict by any means. But can there be reconciliation prior to a polarized split or violence? Yes, there can be, but it would require deescalation, and de escalation and normally only happens when there's leadership for deescalation. It requires what we often call a cooling off period in international conflict, or we might consider to be a separation in a troubled marriage, where the parties just cool down, just spend six months or a year or whatever it takes to deescalate the conflict. Otherwise, every time we're together, we just hurt each other even more. So quite frankly, our country needs a cooling off period right now. And it will require leadership To bring that about and not just leadership at the local community organization level, it will require national leadership that cools things down. That will be absolutely necessary if we're going to avoid the other two extremes I mentioned.



Duncan Autrey 58:15

Oh, man.

D

David Brubaker 58:17

Well, then again, when you have a leader whose instinct is to throw gasoline on the fire, a cooling off period is just impossible. So it would require a different kind of leadership going forward.



Duncan Autrey 58:28

Absolutely. And it's not just about trying to force everything back together again, either, because that's again, that that that leadership, that's not being principled, you know, like or not speaking, the kind of leadership where you're not speaking your truth. So just to like, summarize this, because it gets really important. We need to get the layers of

explanation down, right. So we're going from like, a level four or five, we need to get down to a place where we're back, not doing personal attacks, and we're actually talking about real issues, and we're concretely there, and that's a place where we can actually figure out how to work together. And then, you know, I want to capture again that this is it's a fractal. It's happening in all different levels here that we have, like this person with this internal experience, we have this interpersonal experience between people. We have that happening in our organizations and our communities, our states, our nation, and our world, too, I suppose. And if I'm in a fight with my girlfriend, you know, like if we get there, and I noticed that like, neocortex is come offline, I'm running on amygdala and I'm like, going at that, you know, and I'm ready to do a fight flight freeze thing. I know that like the what I want to do is say, hey, let's take a break. And then we're going to talk in a half hour, breathe into it and come back together, or, you know, if things got really rough. Maybe we need to take a week off or more time. So it's interesting to think about how that's something that would need to happen on a larger scale. And I just really love the speech, like the presidential speech or whatever the leader, whoever the leader could be at this point coming out and saying, Okay, everyone, let's all just take a pause here for a minute. And let's just get our ducks in order. And I mean, it's kind of seems like there's such a great opportunity right now that like we're all actually taking a pause and we're all locked in our houses that we actually could like actually take a chill out time.



David Brubaker 1:00:21

It's well said, if you're familiar with the research of the Gottman Institute, where they've studied hundreds of couples, and they can now predict with I think 80 or 90% accuracy, which couples will end up divorcing, which will not. And the key is contempt. If they sense contempt between the two individuals, which they define is fueled by long simmering negative thoughts about one's partner and rising in the form of an attack on someone's sense of self. It's far beyond criticism. It's contempt. And if you listen to our national discourse right now, there is so much contempt from the left and the right, that indicates that we're headed for divorce unless there is some kind of de escalation. And yes, that does require leaders who know how to escalate.



Duncan Autrey 1:01:07

Mm hmm. Yeah, I really appreciate this it towards the end of the book when we really get into the how do we like transform the conflict and you know, this like, one of the things we could do as individuals is refuse contempt, honor, dignity and like expand what our sense of the binary is. And this refusing contempt, like it's, it's like one thing to say I disagree with something, someone but to feel contempt for someone or to like, hate them or there's gotta be some wise quote about there about how like, you know, like contempt or

hatred, you know, is actually only harming you anyways, but it's actually harming the whole system.

D

David Brubaker 1:01:46

In my own theology. I take Jesus teachings very seriously, which summarized would be a love God, love your neighbor and love your enemies. And the first two aren't terribly challenging, but the third one really is and I think that's where we look to people like Gandhi and Martin Luther King who attempted to live out that teaching in practice. And it's costly. Because just because I'm trying to love my enemies doesn't mean they're gonna love me back.



Duncan Autrey 1:02:16

Yeah, and Lederach is really present for me right now, in his book, *The Moral Imagination*, you know, he talks about what the moral imagination isn't like. And one of the levels of that is to like, imagine yourself in a web of connections, that includes your enemies. And this is about that interdependence. It's love your enemies as if they were you or your own family, because they actually are.

D

David Brubaker 1:02:38

And, oh, that's the hard part.



Duncan Autrey 1:02:40

Yeah. Especially when we have a hard time loving our own family sometimes, you know. But there is I mean, I think that's the piece though, is like actually getting into a relationship or like deepening relationship. Getting into connection with people is this key piece. Just the most recent a podcast interview that I recorded with Ashok Panikkar, he tells the story about this person had a very religious, you know, evangelical person, put a made a painting that was very controversial and then got into the Smithsonian. And then there was protests about it. And he met with him and it helped with some sort of mediation around it, but then he ended up like hanging out with him and having thick skin given to get with them and, and they had this just couldn't agree about anything. I was like nothing that they had a similar value structure about. But as humans, they totally were able to get along. And that was something that he was able to just like, find that piece of respect. And so I think that there is like, you know, as folks are trying to grapple with polarization, being in relationship like cultivating relationships, finding the dignity of

other people is like such a key piece here.



David Brubaker 1:03:51

I think you put your finger on the most key piece, at least for us as individuals, the starting point is to treat ourselves and others with the dignity that we all deserve.



Duncan Autrey 1:04:04

Yeah, you laid out sort of like three potential approaches on how we kind of like get out of this polarization. And in US politics and again, this totally could apply to any other country. One of them is like, we can change the political culture and structure, you know, multi party system or you know, you know, who knows we can get the the politicians could start being really nice to each other or something, you know, we could change our social religious culture so we can actually just like there's something about just the way we interact with each other. Or we can like actually be working on rebuilding civil society and like bringing things to like this local level and like actually doing the transformation in our communities that we can start doing and I really appreciated that because I I kind of came to that seems a good your thought was that rebuilding civil society might be the most accessible one.



David Brubaker 1:04:51

Yes, for most of us.



Duncan Autrey 1:04:52

Yeah. I have noticed that myself to that. It's like trying to figure out how to sort out national politics. is a massive undertaking. But what's a local issue or a local group? Or I mean, how can we add another something about working with your community And in your situation And talking across differences there seems so powerful. I just want to see like, what were some of your other like features of like things about transformation, like what are ways that we can maybe change the situation?



David Brubaker 1:05:24

Well, as we were saying earlier, at the individual level, the most important thing I can do is a commitment, make a commitment to respect the dignity of every human being, including myself, I think that would begin to shift a lot. At the local level. The most

important thing that I can do is to commit to work with others of my neighbors in projects and programs and initiatives that are meaningful to other members of our community. And I've done that in three communities. Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Casa Grande, Arizona, and out here in Harrisonburg, Virginia, but the story I would share is from here in Harrisonburg and I mentioned the book, a group called Faith in Action that pulled together 24 congregations including our local mosque and our local synagogue and our local Unitarian Universalist congregation, as well as 21 other Christian Organ... congregations, pulled them together to work as a collective on issues that were important to our community. We're a community of about 50,000, 2 universities here in town. And the first that they focused on five, six years ago was immigration, and Harrisonburg became a welcoming America city, a city that's openly welcoming to immigrants and refugees. And the second that they focused on was criminal justice reform. And the city in the county collaborated after encouragement from Faith in Action to hire a community justice planner to move things in a more restorative direction was punitive. And currently, what we're prioritizing is affordable housing. There's a focus on creating a Housing Trust Fund so that we could support low income renters who aren't eligible for section eight, but also don't have the income to afford rental rates here, and perhaps even homeownership. So I've seen over the last five, six years, this faith based organization, very interfaith, but faith based organization bring about real change in three significant areas, immigration, criminal justice reform, and now hopefully, affordable housing. That gives me hope, when I despair at what I see happening in Washington, DC, I can focus on my own community and actually be quite hopeful about the future.



Duncan Autrey 1:07:41

I just like the part of that, where it's like, I actually have a living example in my life that this could work, you know, so that, you know, like, there's just that anchor, you know, and it's interesting that like, I've been noticing the question I want to ask that kind of percolate popped up a couple times in this obviously like a lot of your background is working with congregations, and you're a man of faith, and I, there's interesting that there's like a certain advantage to having a faith based structure around you that, you know, like, one I noticed that, first of all, there's God which can carry some of the weight, not just all on your shoulders, then there's some story of unity, right? I mean, that's like, you know, like, there's a, you can get to the story of we're all one through science very easily, but it's not very common story. It's not a thread that people follow very often, but the sense that we're like, we're all one and obviously religion has plenty of division. sorta causes plenty of division in this world, but that there's this also this like, you know, it brings in certain morals or ethical values or even just this idea of service and and Jesus is, you know, saying like you love God, love your neighbor, love your enemy. And like you have that anchor there and some curious if you have thoughts for folks that have more secular background,

because I do notice That one of our challenges is that we don't really have a we're less than last having like a moral structure that we can all rally around. You know, it's it's, it's just curious if you have any, like reflections on for folks that maybe don't have a faith community that to connect with?



David Brubaker 1:09:18

Well, it's a great question. I want to first respond to those who do have a faith community and then answer the second part of your question. Thank you. So Robert Putnam when he wrote Bowling Alone in 2000, which was about the decline of social capital. really insightful comment early on the book. He says congregations religious congregations of every stripe, are the greatest repository of social capital in the country. So there's no other place that gathers as many people on a weekly basis as do religious congregations. So I've been part of faith based organizing in three different communities, because there's no better way to organize people if they're part of a congregation, They're part of a community and they tend not always, but tend to care about that community. And so we can organize people, we can organize money. This is why the Southern Christian Leadership Conference under Martin Luther King was so important. It was the organizing base for the civil rights movement. So we can't discount the value of religious congregations again, I've worked with Hindu ashrams, I've worked with synagogues. I've worked with a range of Christian congregations. To me, the faith base itself is less important than the fact that people are part of a faith community because that becomes a natural place to organize. Secondly, for those who do not profess a faith or do not belong to a religious community, every human being that I've ever met, has a spirituality that they hold on to and they're part of other significant communities. So what are those communities and how do we organize in that sphere as well? If the goal is to do positive things, for our broader community and for our country, we draw on wells of spirituality and religion, and we draw on faith communities and other communities. Yeah, that may not be a satisfactory answer, but it's the one I have.



Duncan Autrey 1:11:13

Well, I have the advantage. I'm part of the community in the Bay Area called Thrive East Bay. And it's basically like a secular, faith based community. It's basically like, like, we don't have any religion or anything like that. But we are very, very consciously using the model of church and temple and to create a space where people can come together, build a community, its purpose driven community and the values are thriving lives. Love in action, systemic change and community. So the community building one and it's really amazing. It fills this this gap for folks that you know, have maybe left the church for some

reason Another, but still want that kind of community or people who are still very much on their own religious spiritual path and just want to be engaged, you know, with a, you know, an organization that's doing community building and change. And actually what's really interesting is, you know, it's only been in the East Bay until now, but it's accessible online now because that's how we're doing things. So make sure there's links for Thrive East Bay here and the and the things and the nodes. But I do like, I like your point, though, that everyone has, you know, some kind of spirituality even an atheist has, you know, like, or someone in science has its own kind of spirituality. And personally, I find like many paths to God, you know, it's like, oh, man, I could just like I've just been in a 13 and a half billion year old universe, that's all that we don't really know where it came from. That's expanding into nothingness, you know, and so that's, that'll put me in awe any moment, or just being part of this living planet. Just it's a lot And but I think that whatever your spaces, whether it's like sports or you know, music or drama or whatever your thing is, like there's space there to be working as a community and trying to be of service and making and being aware of how you're participating in the bigger story.

D

David Brubaker 1:13:18

Yes. By the way, it's back to our conversation on basic human needs. Every human being has a need for meaning making, and to be part of some meaning making system or some community that's important to them. So of course, every religion is a human construct. And of course, the community you're part of is a human construct, but they're meeting fundamental human needs, and therefore we need to value the whole expression. In less they become fundamentalist and destructive, and then start claiming exclusive truth in ways that are harmful to others.



Duncan Autrey 1:13:51

Yeah, thank you. Well, David, there's a question that I ask all the guests on this podcast and it's given your life experience and lessons you've learned in your journey, what would be something that you would invite people to pay attention to in their own lives as they're trying to build a better life for themselves and others?

D

David Brubaker 1:14:10

Wow, I had immediate responses when you were asking about polarization, but this is one that would require a little more reflection. To paraphrase, what am I asking people to pay attention to in their own lives at this time? Is that correct?



Duncan Autrey 1:14:25

Yeah, I mean, something that's like, you know, been meaningful to you that like, hey, look at this, you know, or think about this.



David Brubaker 1:14:33


I think we're, I'm particularly challenged right now. And partly it was an experience just a couple days ago that brought it to mind is when I'm interacting with folks that have a completely different worldview than I do. This was someone who thought that vaccines were all harmful and that wearing a mask was destructive, and that the New World Order is trying to take over our life. And I just remember blinking several times and saying I disagree with you. But I didn't explore it. Even though I wish I would have said, Can you help me understand what it was in your own life that led you to take the perspective, you now have, I didn't unpack. And granted, it was more of a casual exchange. But I didn't unpack the reason why this individual held such a profoundly different worldview than than I do. And I realized how hard it is to practice my own teachings. Because I was just earlier talking with you about the value of doing so. And I didn't I was just stunned. And so I think I want to pay more attention in my own life to when I'm stunned by that and why am I stunned and how do I respond out of compassion, while articulating my own truth and that I did do I clearly disagreed. But I didn't give her an opportunity to help me understand Why she adopted such a distinct worldview? And I think we're gonna have to do more than Mm hmm.



Duncan Autrey 1:16:08

Yeah, I appreciate that. I mean, almost here, like two really powerful lessons in this like one is just, you know, remembering to, again, follow through with that next step of the speaker truth and then work on the connection, stay connected and right and then like, and that can be about like, let me learn more about this like that's the thing you have to talk about, like communication, just speaking and listening. You know, it's like it, we have to do both, you know, the speaker truth, then listen to see if you can help understand the other person's truth. But I think there's another powerful lesson there about. I recognize it in my own life, that the things that I teach, I don't always practice. And sometimes I think that maybe all of us are teaching things that we are actually just trying to teach ourselves. No. Yes. And now it could. It could be really easy to get down on yourself about that, right? Like I know that I like when I Talk about the importance of speaking your truth. And I sometimes hesitate to do that, or I don't always do the great listening when I want to, I could really get down on myself like, wow, I'm a real failure. I'm not really good at doing what I teach and all these things. But there's also just this lesson about just like, Okay, I'm

a human learning just like everyone else and give myself a break, get back on the horse, and he know,


 David Brubaker 1:17:22

well, and that's perhaps this conversation is helping me to do it. But that's why I think I'm coming back to I at least respected my dignity and her dignity in that exchange. I didn't denigrate her beliefs, I simply said, I disagree. So there was a piece of it that I held on to and then the piece of you help me understand why you hold those views. I chose not to go to Mm hmm. And so yeah, we continue to practice the teachings. And that means we don't do it perfectly.



Duncan Autrey 1:17:53

Yeah, and totally really Gosh, dignity is really going to be the key word of this episode. Like just you Yeah, sticking your honor in your own dignity and dignity the other person. Well, David, if people want to like find you or get your book, where should they look for these things?


 David Brubaker 1:18:14

So I teach, and also in administration at Eastern Mennonite University, and if anyone wants to email me, I'd be delighted to hear from them. That is David.Brubaker@emu (for Eastern Mennonite university).edu. I also in part of a consulting practice, actually two practices one called Cooperative by Design.com, and it's all one word CooperativebyDesign.com, and the other called Congregational Consulting.org. And again, one word, congregationalconsulting.org. And that would be a place to read more about what we do with congregations as well as with other organizations, and can be contacted through those websites as well.



Duncan Autrey 1:18:59

Wonderful David, this has been such a pleasure. This is like such a timely conversation. And it's a real joy to talk to you. Thank you.

 David Brubaker 1:19:07

Thank you, Duncan. And I would just say I'm deeply impressed with how carefully you read the book and how carefully you prepared questions and how thoughtful your own

reflections were. So it's a delight chatting with you. I'm glad we met last September in Tucson.



Duncan Autrey 1:19:21

Thank you. It's been a real pleasure. Thanks.



David Brubaker 1:19:24

All the best.



Duncan Autrey 1:19:27

Thank you again for listening to this episode of Fractal Friends with David Brubaker. You can find more content links and resources about this episode, as well as other episodes on [Fractalfriends.us](https://fractalfriends.us). Don't forget to sign up for the newsletter to get updates and learn more about my work as the chief transformation officer at Spoke & Wheel. Also, please consider donating to Fractal Friends with the small or large if you'd like contribution, or if you want, you can subscribe to be a patron. Look for the buttons at the website. You can find more information about David at cooperativebydesign.com, and congregationalconsulting.org, and you can learn more about my work at [Spokeandwheel.co](https://spokeandwheel.co). If you liked this episode, please take a moment to share it with someone and text it to a friend or post it on Facebook, put it on Instagram, send an email. I'm doing my part to amplify these voices and I would love to have your support in spreading the word. And as usual, I'll close this out with a song. The song I want to share with you is called "Birds of the Night" by Jen Myzel. It's from her brand new album, which has the same name. This song is song with two other amazing warrior women. Dina Erie, and Maria Xiomara Dorsey. I share the song with gratitude to Jen for letting me use it, and gratitude for the powerful medicine of her music. This song feeds beautifully into the theme of this episode, as it invites us to stop this madness in the name of freedom. Thank you for listening to Fractal Friends. And remember, we all have a role to play in the whole Have a nice day



Jen Myzel 1:21:02

People, We are breathing. Earth Her heart is beating So Stop in the name of Love , Stop this maddness in the name of freedom. Stop in the name of Truth Cause We're birds of the night. We're taking flight. We fly through the dawn cause we're moving on. cause we're moving on. We've got the wind at our back, cause it's a sacred act. We fly through the dawn cause we're moving on. We fly through the dawn cause we're moving on. cause

we're moving on.

- M** Maria Xiomara Dorsey 1:21:38
La sabiduria anciana de que la Pachamama esta Viva traceience el peso de la el peso de la vida cotidiana transforma el lodo que nos cubre en oro Liquido. This is an o se como por nustras plumas
- J** Jen Myzel 1:21:44
Storms been comin' in for a long long time I know you've seen it comin' but it somehow blows your mind Storms been comin' in for a long long time I know you've seen it comin' but it somehow blows your mind Patience Wade through the water Patience Sing through the storm
- M** Maria Xiomara Dorsey 1:23:30
gotas brillantes que atrapan los ojos mientras nos elevamos hacia el sol creando los vientos del Cambio con la fuerza de nuestra alas.
- J** Jen Myzel 1:23:41
People We are breathing. Earth Her heart is beating. So Stop In the name of love Stop this madness in the name of freedom Stop in the name of truth. Cause We're birds of the night. We're taking flight. We fly through the dawn cause We're moving on. We're moving on. We've got the wind at our back, This is a sacred act And we'll fly through the dawn 'Cause we're movin on Yeah we're movin' on Yeah we're movin', movin', movin' on..... Ayyy!