

Hi everybody. Thank you so much for tuning in. It's been quite a week, actually it's been quite a year, hasn't it? Which makes today's special guest even more special. 16 years ago, Sandra and I and our kids were vacationing at a guest ranch, just outside the Northern entrance, to Yellowstone National Park and the ranch, the way it was set up, there was a big dining hall and everybody ate together family style. While we were there, we had several conversations with one of the serving staff and we were so impressed with her. I did something I've never done before, and I have never done since. I asked her if she would be interested in working for us back in Atlanta. She said sure. So I got her contact information. When I got back home, I asked the Director of our Children's Environments to reach out and to begin the interview process.

Long story short, we hired her. And today you get the opportunity to meet her. You will understand immediately why we were so impressed with Sarah. Sarah Anderson grew up in a very politically connected and politically involved family. I'll let her tell you more about that in just a minute. She worked for us for two

years. Currently, she works for Orange, creating content for high school students and leaders all over the country. During the season that she worked with us, she met her future husband, Rodney Anderson. Sarah and Rodney have two sons, Asher and Pace. Rodney currently actually serves on our staff as the Founder and Director of Canopy.

But my reason for introducing you to Sarah on this particular weekend, is she recently authored a book entitled, "The Space Between Us," and the subtitle says it all. "How Jesus teaches us to live together when politics and religion pull us apart". How appropriate? But before I introduce you to Sarah, there's something I need you to keep in mind. I wanted to show this interview as soon after the election as possible, which means we recorded this interview the week before the election. So while we're discussing her book, we have no idea who won. In fact, we have no idea if anyone has won yet. So if you'll please extend us a little bit of grace if we say anything that seems out of kilter with current political reality. Now here's my conversation, with Sarah Anderson. Everybody's curious. Tell us about

your family, where you grew up and how your family became so entwined with all things political.

– Yeah, so I was born and raised in Northern Virginia, just outside Washington DC. Both of my parents moved to DC just after graduating college. They met there in the '70s, working for the Republican National Committee. We call them a political fairytale. So they got married, and my mom ended up working for a Congresswoman from Massachusetts until my younger brother was born. My dad volunteered for the Reagan campaign. When Reagan was elected, worked as Under Secretary of Education and then Chief Domestic Policy Advisor to the President. We were just involved in all things political during my dad's working for Reagan. We got to actually meet the President at one point, which is kind of this running joke in my family that we went to school, my mom checked us out early and we had a bag of clothes that we were supposed to change into.

– How old were you?

– I was eight,

– Eight.

– at the time. So I had my fancy clothes, changing in the car, pull up to the White House and realize I forgot my dress shoes. In our official White House portrait with Ronald Reagan, everyone's looking their best, and I have on white high tops in hot pink lace. So didn't go so well.

– It's perfect.

– Yes. That was just kind of my experience growing up. We were just involved in all things political and patriotic, and we loved it. It was kind of just the air that we breathed as a family.

– And then in 1999, correct? Something happened that sort of elevated all of that.

– Yeah. In April, 1999, the day actually after Columbine happened, my dad publicly announced that he was running for president himself. So he threw his hat into the political arena for the Republican nomination, and he spent the next year just kind of campaigning. We were able to join him on a lot of those things, doing things like the Iowa State Fair, and the Iowa Straw Poll, and all kinds of just campaigning events, just thrust us into the political spotlight in a way that we hadn't been before.

– Like big time?

– Big time.

– Yeah. And I would say...

– All the family?

– Yes, everybody and my sister had just graduated from college with a political science degree, so she was working on the campaign. My brother was in middle school and thought this

was the coolest thing ever. Loved it. I was probably the only one in the family that had some more reservations. I think part of that was being a senior in high school and wanting it to be all about me at that point. But also there was a tension in DC that, yeah, everybody knows that from observing DC, that it's a very tribal town. Right? You've got the Republicans and Democrats, and there's a lot of animosity between the two. It's right wrong, good bad, very team oriented. But the thing about the primary season that really stuck out to me was that the conflict was inhouse. It was Republicans against other Republicans. It took people that you would normally see as teammates, people that you'd normally be linking arms with and turn them into adversaries, over minor differences...

– Within the party?

– within the party. That just kind of rubbed me the wrong way and it really showed me how easily we other, one another, that we recreate these divisions that separate us out from one another. I think that that experience really

bothered me. I didn't want to move back to DC after that kind of...

– Oh really?

– set me away.

– Well, you probably saw people who were your parents' considered friends,

– Yeah.

– and suddenly they're not speaking to each other...

– Yes, yes.

– or they're going the other way.

– No political endorsement was part of it, but there is also the sense that, if you weren't going to politically endorse someone that you

also had to distance yourself relationally. That was just a very lonely time. You're overexposed on the public front, but then you feel incredibly lonely behind the scenes.

– Wow. Did that affect you personally in terms of your own friendships or was this mainly parents?

– I experienced it through my parents. It didn't really affect my friendships as much. For me, I started my college career during that time. So I went to college with my dad running. The weirdest thing for me, was seeing people wear Bauer for President t-shirts at my college campus and not knowing who they were. That was strange on that regard. But the more painful part was probably experienced more from my parents.

– Yeah. So did you wear the Bauer for President t-shirt?

– No.

– You didn't?

– I was actively opposed to participating at that point, mostly because I wanted to find my own way at college. So yeah, they would take caravans to DC from my college and attend rallies. And I was like, "Blessings". I will not go.

– Been there done that.

– Yeah, not a part of it.

– This is such an important part of your story and leads to why you wrote the book. Because the division, when the average person like me thinks about the division in terms of political division, we see it, again party to party. What you saw as an insider was something insidious maybe, too strong of a term, but again, suddenly friendships are no longer friendships. And what was comfortable is suddenly uncomfortable. I would guess you tell me, even in the aftermath, just a newsflash, your father did not,

– That's right.

– He did not win,

– George W. John Kerry Edwards.

– You didn't miss anything, in American history. After the fact, do people come back together or is it a little leftover?

– I think there's a sense that the convention is supposed to make everybody circle back around again.

– That's what it looks like.

– You found your person and now we just rally the troops.

– We forget all those nasty things that we're said about my father?

– We're supposed to. Right.

– Right.

– I did not get over that as easily. I think that's part of the political game, that you play, that you're supposed to be able to say these things and recover and everybody move forward, for the best thing for the party. But personally, it didn't feel right to me.

– These are people. Don't forget that. So all of that experience eventually led you to write this book and it's not a fun fact, it's just a fact fact. You had a hard time finding a publisher. That's part of this journey and it's actually kind of the theme of the book. So tell a little bit about the story of trying to get this fabulous book published.

– Yeah. Well, there are a couple of things that led to the writing of it, as happens, I think in a lot of families. As kids grow up, they don't always necessarily land on the same page

with their family anymore politically. We experienced that a little bit in my family but as we got older we were kind of diverging in some of our views, and where a lot of families have the option of just saying you know what, politics and religion are too contentious. We're just not gonna talk about it when we're together. Literally everyone in my family makes a living off of politics and religion. So we could not afford not talk about it.

– What else are we gonna talk about?

– Right this is it. This is all we know.

– If you talk about work your back into politics.

– That's right. So we had to figure out a way, not just around these topics, but through them in a healthy way. And so I wanted to write, to share, how we start to navigate this. But the point wasn't so much the sides that we landed on, it was more about how to honor the beliefs that we hold, but also honor the relationships

with the people who don't hold those beliefs. So yeah, I had a hard time finding publisher. I had an agent that was pitching it to different people and different publishers, and the overwhelming feedback was it was not conservative enough for conservatives, and it wasn't liberal enough for liberals. That's disappointing on multiple levels if you're trying to get a book published. But to me, it really sent the message that people were assuming that we only wanted to stay in our lane, that we did not want to be challenged in how we thought. That we wanted to be told that what we believe is right and that the people on the other side are wrong. I wanted to present a different way. That there was a way to honor the relationships between each other, that there are people who are willing to step out of their lane, and get uncomfortable, that there might be something for them to learn, that they're okay with being challenged, and that they're not okay with relationships that are feeling damaged in light of the political conversation.

– And again when you say that, everybody agrees that shouldn't happen. Then we finish a

conversation like that, and we all go back to our tribe, and engage in that conversation that's oftentimes not helpful. In the book, I want to read your book to you for a second, and let you comment on this 'cause all of it was so good. You challenge the reader to abandon a typical question that I think we all ask, sometimes out loud but certainly subconsciously. We've been asking, "How do I get other people to change their minds, to see as I do, to come to my side, and to be like me"? And every parent who's watching their kids, move in a different direction, religiously or politically, that's kind of the question. But what if instead we started asking, "How can we begin to close the space between us"? Which is the title of the book, "The Space Between Us". Then you said, "What if, instead of trying to make us the same, we got better at understanding and appreciating where we are different. What if we learned to practice compassion instead of judgment"? Which again, when you hear something like that, you think, yes absolutely. Why is this so hard? I mean on one hand it seems so simple, almost simplistic. Simple in the sense that, yeah, we should do that simplistic and oh, no, it's more complicated than that.

– Yeah.

– Just unpack that a little bit.

– It sounds a little Pollyanna, I realized that. But I think the problem with asking the question is why can't you change your mind? The problem with that is assuming we have the power to change somebody's mind, I think a lot of us have discovered we actually can't do that. That that's something that will lead to frustration every single time. So part of it's just a practical thing. We don't wanna ask that question and we don't want make that our motive because I don't think we have the power to do it. I think the other problem is, when we're asking the question why can't you be more like me? We're making the assumption that we're always right and the other person is always wrong. That creates a different posture in how we engage in conversation. Right? If I'm trying to convince you of something, I'm gonna be much more aggressive and much more arrogant in how I approach it.

– You'd probably overstate your case. Don't we all do that?

– That's right.

– I do.

– Right. But if I'm approaching as, how can I understand you? That puts me in the posture of humility and being a learner from your experiences and your ideas. I think also saying that, not every different idea from ours is bad or there's not necessarily in every political issue, a right and a wrong. That there's complications on both sides. I think we just need to be careful that we're not making the assumption that different equals bad when it comes to our political positions.

– That's a big idea.

– I think that, it should also be said there are bad ideas, and there are harmful ideas, and evil things that can be done. That's not discounting that. But I think we've gotten into

a habit of assuming that every different opinion from ours is wrong and we need to change.

– When I read that part of the book, the thing that struck me that I wrote my notes is, when I'm trying to do this, when I'm like, okay, I'm gonna get this right. Not gonna argue, I'm gonna lean in, I'm gonna try to be curious, I'm gonna be a student, not a critic like we talked about, I feel like I'm giving something up. Or I'm being asked or expected to give something up. And none of us want to give something up because if we're holding it, it's because, we're convinced it's true. What do you say to the person that's like, but I'm almost afraid, we would never acknowledge we're afraid, but there's some fear. I'm afraid that if I lean in that direction, I'm gonna lose something or give something up.

– Yeah. I think we might lose something but I think we're gaining relational equity and influence with somebody when we approach a conversation that way. I think it's changing our motives and our objective from wanting to make a point. You talk about this all the time.

Do we wanna make a point or do we wanna make a difference? So people can discover where we land on political issues very easily, but it's much harder for them to be convinced of our care for somebody and our compassion for them. So I would lean in the relational influence direction over the political stance.

– Yeah and I'm gonna to lose influence the moment I say there's a wall and you're wrong. Now this is super sensitive but you have a funny story connected to this so I'm gonna bring it up anyway. All of us, I mean, I'll acknowledge this, all of us, and you grew up with this, have a tendency to assume that if Jesus were walking the earth, well of course he would be a Democrat. Now, if Jesus was walking on flinder, of course He would be Republican. And we all want, for Christians especially, Jesus followers, and I understand this because I wanna be aligned with Jesus, but I wanna be aligned with my political party. You had an interesting kind of aha moment, I guess it was in college, the poster on the Bolton board tell us about that.

– Yeah. I went to a very small conservative Christian college, I would say probably 90 to 95% of everybody there was like me, White Evangelical Republican. So I was leaving a dorm on the other side of campus and saw a poster in the stairwell that was an advertisement for the Young Democrats Club. This was shocking to me. I did not know we had Democrats. I wanted like names of numbers, who were these people?

– On your campus?

– On our campus yes. I was surprised that was an actual thing, but then what was more surprising was what it said underneath the time and location for the meeting that said, Jesus loves Democrats too. And it was, tongue-in-cheek. I'm like that's funny, but He probably likes Republicans more. I mean, this is what's going through my head, this is when I so closely associated my faith and my politics. They were interchangeable to me. It kind of just created this crack in my worldview a little bit, that maybe Jesus didn't operate in the box that I put Him in. Maybe He was bigger than that. You talk about this all the time. It's just so dangerous when we assume that

Jesus is on our team. Because as soon as we think we've cornered the market on Jesus, that allows us to get away with a lot of bad treatment and bad behavior towards people on the other side.

– That's true for both sides.

– That's right. Yes, no matter what we're doing. The more I kind of just dug into that idea of maybe Jesus was bigger than what I thought, I discovered it in the gospels over and over again. He was constantly disrupting these ideas that people had of Him. I read a commentary on this one particular encounter He had in Luke. It tells the story of Jesus heading towards Jericho. There's a blind man on the side of the road who calls out to Him to be healed. And He heals them and it says, the crowd goes wild. Like they praise God, they're super excited because this wasn't just about this one man being healed, It was Jesus stepping in and doing something for the oppressed and for the marginalized and reaching out to people that the government and the religious systems had overlooked. So the crowd loves it. Like what's not to love? But then

immediately after that, it has Jesus going into Jericho. Again, there's crowds on the side of the street, but this time there's a man who's intentionally trying to not get Jesus's attention. And it's a tax collector named Zacchaeus and he's trying to stay away from Jesus and instead Jesus calls out to him and says, "I wanna have dinner at your house". This shook people because Zacchaeus is part of this oppressive government and systems. He's part of keeping the underdog down. He's part of creating the problems that these marginalized people are living in. He's working for the Roman government and Jesus invites himself over for dinner. And it says, I never noticed this before. But it says, "The crowd grumbled". It was like 2000 years ago, Jesus has been doing exactly what He's doing right now. He's disrupting the categories we've put Him in. He's doing things that make us feel uncomfortable with where we land. He's making us constantly question, are we following Him or are we following an idolized version of ourselves? Because it's really easy to believe that we are following Jesus and being conformed into His image. But if everything we're doing, we think Jesus supports then it's possible that we're conforming Him in power.

– It's very possible. And the other thing about that story, and I didn't think about this until you added your interesting insight, is that because Jesus pursued a relationship with Zacchaeus, what did Zacchaeus then do?

– Change his behavior.

– He became more generous. He became more like Jesus.

– Right.

– Because, and that's the invitation that's been extended to everyone. This what we talk about all the time when we're willing to be neutral enough. And if we're willing to respond to the invitation of Jesus, we always move in a better direction. We always move in the direction of others.

– Right.

– We gain the proper filter for our own personal politics. It's not about abandoning a party. I think that's one of the important things about this book. This isn't, hey, you're wrong, move in my direction. It's the opposite of that. The point is to move together. And as we say all the time, the problems are solved in the middle. Problems are never solved in the extreme. You can't solve a problem in the extreme because you're never gonna be close enough to how the other person's experiencing the problem.

– Right.

– You write a little bit in one chapter about conflict. I pulled this out of the book. "It's when we avoid conflict, and handle it poorly, that conflict becomes the enemy". You make the point that conflict is not really the enemy, conflict is something that can have a good result if we approach conflict correctly. Talk a little bit about that.

– Yeah. I think conflict makes a lot of us uncomfortable. I think that's how we ended up

getting here. We have conflict around politics and religion, and it made us so uncomfortable that we stopped talking about it. Civil discourse is like a muscle. It atrophies as if it's not in use. I think we've avoided conflict...

– Like I need you to say that again. That's pretty amazing.

– Civil discourse is like a muscle and it atrophies if it's not in use.

– We need to engage in civil discourse.

– Yes. To keep practicing, to keep using that part of our art.

– Can I make one more comment? This is such a big idea to me in the book. It's civil discourse. Some of us, and I'm on this side. Some of us have a hard time being civil. Others of you have a hard time engaging in the discourse right?

– That's right.

– But it's both. I can't use my personality or my convictions to push a person away, but at the same time if, for folks who are not comfortable in those conversations, they have to step in and force themselves to engage because it is the way forward. I interrupted you but that's such an important point.

– Yeah. I think the conflict is a good thing in multiple reasons. But I think part of it is, we're not gonna end up in the best ideas, if there isn't somebody pushing against the ideas that we bring to the table. That conflict actually leads to sharper thinking, more critical thinking. We need somebody to point out our blind spots, to point out the things that we haven't necessarily thought through when it comes to ideas we're bringing to the table. It's helped on a very practical sense. But also, this is what the founders had in mind for us when they decided we should be a democracy. A democracy is nothing if not a lot of different ideas. We want to embrace that.

They believed that this could go sideways, but they thought it was worth it. It was worth creating a country where people could bring all of the ideas together. I'm more concerned if we are wanting to get everybody to land on the same page. I don't think we really wanna live in a government or a country that has everybody towing the same political line. Conflicts to me tells me that, everybody feels comfortable enough to bring their best individuality selves to the table, to share their ideas. They feel safe enough to do it. They're not afraid to throw everything out there and to have a conversation around it. It doesn't always feel good but if our goal is to create the best possible country, then it's gonna involve some back and forth and some tension.

– So with that as a backdrop, let me see if I can ask this question in a coherent way. There are a lot of talk right now about how there's no unity, we're so divided, we're so divided, we're so divided. But being divided is healthy in the sense of what you just said. Because if there's no division of ideas, and there's no divi... And again, getting along and being kind, that's one thing. We've seen even within

a political context, men and women who are on opposite sides of the political argument over an issue, or just in general, who then are able to go have dinner together and have their families come spend time together. But when it gets to the point to where there's not the relationship, there's just a conflict of ideas, things go South.

– Right.

– So there needs to be tension. To eradicate the tension, basically means we probably have a dictatorship and we're just afraid to say anything. So the tension is healthy. The conflict is healthy. If to the point of your book, we're able to be civil in our discourse and elevate the value of relationship, over our potentially flawed worldview, and our potentially flawed ideas. Correct?

– That's exactly right.

– In the book, another, I love this distinction. You make a distinction between

peace keeping, and this kind of goes to the conflict idea. Peacekeeping and peacemaking.

– Yeah.

– Talk a little bit about that.

– I think we tend to think of peace as just the absence of conflict. That definitely is more like peacekeeping than peacemaking. This idea really became clear to me when Rodney and I were able to take a trip to Rome. When you go into the city, you see in one part of the city, there's this Arch to Augustinian Peace. It was built to commemorate this time in the Roman Empire where they were flourishing economically, they had the largest land mass, their population was huge and was a time of relative peace. And so they built this Arch to celebrate that. Then you go to another part of the city and you see the Arch of Titus. This was built by an Emperor for his brother Titus and his military victories. Carved into the side of the Arch are images of the Roman Army pillaging the temple in Jerusalem and removing the valuables and the stone. Stone that I think

ended up being used in the Coliseum later in the building. But the irony in this is that, this Arch was commemorating an event that happened during the so-called Augustinian Peace. But if you'd asked the people living in Jerusalem at the time, they would have not considered it a time of peace. It would have been peace by a submission, and peace by domination of a lesser or less powerful group of people. That's peacekeeping it's when somebody is so powerful they can stamp out the opposition. Peacekeeping would also be just putting your head in the sand and pretending nothing's wrong, everything's fine. If we could all just get along, it'll be better. But peacemaking and what Jesus talks about in the beatitudes, He invites to be peacemakers because that makes us children of God. He talks about peace with this idea of wholeness. The Jewish word for peace Shalom, and it is wholeness. It's not an absence of conflict. It's the idea of bringing all the parts together to create something new. It's not necessarily one side winning out over the other. It's saying, what can we bring that's the best of both sides and create a better way forward.

– And historically, that is what has happened in the United States of America. Right?

– Yes.

– We retreat to our corners in a season like the one we've just come through. That happens every four years.

– Right.

– Right? Some would argue more extreme this time than before, maybe, maybe not. Our memories are pretty short. 200 plus years, this has been the way things are done. And I would imagine, you know, someone like your your mom and dad, actually your brother as well right now. And even your experience to have to have seen the tension up close and to see those examples of people who are then after you know, after it's over, they go have dinner together. They vacation together. They're able to separate these two. They feel, they sincerely believe what they believe but at the same time they're able to maintain that relationship.

That's the model that historically has been true of us as a nation. And hopefully that will continue to be true of us as a nation going forward. There's so many things in this book. It's a short book, but it is, you're a very rich writer. You use words so well. You challenge us to become people who are both curious and seek names over narratives. Seek names over narratives. That's another big idea. Talk a little bit about that.

– I think typically we learn history and get ideas around groups of people based on narratives. Because narratives tell the story with a single plot line. There's no hiccups, there's no bumps. It's just this is the way that it goes. But names complicates things. And that's good. I think we want to lean into the complications with people. So for us the best illustration I saw of this, was a couple of years ago, we went back to DC to visit my family. We took our boys to the museum of African American History and Culture. It's an amazing museum. And you walk in, ground level and then you take an elevator underground, and it kind of takes you on this journey. It's supposed to be set up to make you feel like

you're in the hull of a slave ship, that you're starting on the shores of Africa and you turn the corner, and you've arrived on the shores of America. You see this statue of Thomas Jefferson and his exhibit and surrounding Thomas Jefferson are these awards from the founding documents, the things that he wrote that really set a trajectory for the country and what he envisioned for us, very powerful. Behind him, you see this stack of bricks and on each brick is engraved a name of one of the 600 slaves he owns. It is this super powerful moment of we have a narrative for how we understand our history. It's all good or it's all bad. Then you have this picture of Thomas Jefferson, the genius, that he contributed to our country but also the incredibly flawed man that he was and what he participated in. My idea is just leaning into the particulars of a person's life, that when we start to understand that there's more to the names and more to the individuals, we're less likely to, like that the Russian author talks about, we're less likely about creating the line of good and evil, and my team versus that team. But the line of good and evil runs down the middle of us. That should give us pause. We should be a little bit more self-critical of ourselves and

a little bit more gracious when it comes to understanding others

– That framework allows us to appropriately honor the founding fathers, who to your point, and this just doesn't get enough airplay especially in the current political system. They were so brilliant and they were such risk takers, and obviously they each risked their own life to do what they did. But at the same time, they were flawed. Just like me. Potentially like you. I don't know, but certainly just like me. I hope I'm saying her name correctly, Chimamana Adichie.

– I think so. I don't know that I could

– Chimamanda Adichie, we'll just go with that, has this this powerful Ted talk and you quote her. I would like to read the quote and let you comment on it. You quote her saying, and this goes to what we were just talking about, "When a single story is told, about a certain group over and over and over," when the same story, just the one story is told over and over and over about the same group, "That

characterization becomes them". So when you hear about this group, you've heard one story, it's associated with their name and in your mind, that's all there is to them. "Anytime a person is reduced to a simple storyline, we need to pay attention. Something is probably missing". This is such a powerful idea because we get our news and our history, and our memories and bits and pieces, and with a single name, as a single narrative, and that's all there is to that. Tell us why that is so dangerous especially within this context.

– Yeah, well, I probably experienced that a little bit, a much smaller degree than I think a lot of people have.

– You certainly did.

– When my dad ran for president, there was this sense that people thought they knew about him, and they thought they knew about us based off of one soundbite or learning where he stood on one particular issue. I just remember feeling so frustrated that they thought they understood the totality of him based on his foreign policy

but they didn't know that he would take the red eye home every Friday to watch my brother's basketball game Saturday morning. Or that he has terrible taste in scifi movies. But that was what made him, my dad. That's what made him a human. And I think the problem when it comes to the current political culture and you know, the figureheads on the screen, the talking heads, is that we think we have an idea of what they're actually like or we think we've understood the totality of them, but there's so much more to them, that they are husbands and wives. They go home to families. There's a way they like their coffee in the morning, that there are things that make them individuals that we can't lose sight of.

– There is way more of that actually than this simplistic one line. And this is what honestly drives me crazy about the political season on both sides. When it's reduced to name-calling and mis-characterization, or even characterization based on a policy or based on a speech, being having experienced a little tiny bit of that in my life, in a way more, you realize how foolish that is. I don't know, just it's just foolish. But it's a reality. But it

just seems like maturity, a part of maturity is to acknowledge that and say, you know what, I'm not gonna write this person off because of a speech, because of a word, because of a view, even their political persuasion. I'm not gonna be that small, because it really makes a person small to do that. And we know once we stop to think about it, wait, there's far more to every single person on this planet, then what they do, or what they said in a particular moment. One other thing I wanna touch on before we begin to wrap this up, I'll just read what I wrote. I found your challenge to do an inventory on beliefs and inventory on convictions and opinions really helpful. What does it mean to do an inventory of our convictions and our beliefs? Because, as a Christian, that sounds a little threatening like what, I'm supposed to evaluate my convictions? I mean, the reason they're convictions is because somewhere in the past, I've already evaluated. So what are you talking about?

– I think it's helpful that currently we're finding that every Hill is a Hill to die on, on every issue politically. And when every Hill is

a Hill to die on, none of them are right. We begin to become like white noise, static background. Nobody pays attention, we just sound like we're angry.

– Everything can't be most important.

– No. So the idea of deciding what your beliefs, convictions, and opinions are is deciding what are the things that are most worth your emotional energy and your involvement in dialogue. So beliefs are the things that they really are identity shaping. You feel so strongly about them. You can't imagine thinking differently about anything. If you change them, it really would change who you are in a way. Convictions are things you do feel strongly about, but you understand there are people who see things differently, even if you don't see it that way. You get that people have landed at different place. Opinions are the things that we either don't know very much about a topic, or we know some but we just don't care all that much about it. And just deciding what are the things that we want to have a conversation about. In some ways, beliefs could be the things that we wanna talk

about with people. But if we know we were talking with someone who will never change their mind, then maybe that's a conversation we shouldn't get involved in because there's too much emotionally on the line for us. It could be that talking about an opinion is the best inroads to having a conversation with someone you disagree with, because you can go into it saying, convince me of your opinion. I don't really have strong feelings.

– I have an opinion, but it's not an educated opinion. It's just an opinion

– Tell me what you think.

– Sometimes those can be on-ramps to those deeper issues.

– That's right.

– Well, that's pretty powerful. So as I mentioned upfront, we're having this discussion before the election, just a few days before the election. So currently, as people watch this

half the nation is angry, fearful, frustrated. The other half, they're celebrating. So based on what you write in your book, if you're sitting across the table from either side, what's your advice as it relates to the space between us?

– I think I would start by saying, to stay curious with people who are different from you. To just be open to the idea that maybe there's something more for us to learn and to potentially even change our minds about when it comes to the positions that we hold. I think of this Ted talk where this woman asks the audience what does it feel like to be wrong? And people are throwing out answers like, it's embarrassing or humiliating. And she said no, that's what it feels like when you discover you're wrong. Being wrong without knowing it, it feels like being right. And I think...

– Wow that's a big idea. That's in the book. Say that again. This is huge.

– Being wrong feels a lot like being right, before you know you're wrong. I think it's

possible that there are ideas we're holding onto that maybe we need to change our minds about, and maybe not everything. But at least be open to the possibility of continuing to learn, and to be curious with people who think differently than us. The second thing I would say is to keep engaging with people. Don't give up on the face-to-face communication. We are living in a culture where it's really easy to live in these self isolated echo chambers and without even really trying very hard we can only surround ourselves with people just like us, with the news network that we watch, with the clicks on the articles that we read...

– Follow the people that agree with us.

– That's right. It is easy to stay in our lane and to not have actual relationships with people who think differently. But we know from studies that sustained eye contact with people triggers empathetic responses. We wanna continue to have face to face interactions with people who are different from us. The last thing I would say is to not give up on each other. There's too much on the line for us to continue to veer away from one another. I'm a

mom. I have an eight year old and a 10 year old, and I want them to grow up in a world, observing a healthy way to be with people, that is not reliant on sameness. I want them to know that we don't have to just tolerate our differences that we can celebrate them, that we can come around them, and maybe even be introduced to an image of God in somebody that we would never encountered otherwise unless we got uncomfortable. So I want this for my kids. I think we need this for the generation behind us.

– That is a perfect segue into something else I pulled out of the book. You write, "We can love without agreement," to your point. "We can honor without harmony, and we can respect without conformity". The reason I pulled those three statements out for me, is because as a Christian, as a Jesus follower, how can I not do this? Because this is exactly what God through Christ did for us. He loved us, even though there was disagreement while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He honored us without harmony. He honored us by sending His son into this world and He respected us by valuing us without conformity. We are nothing

like him. So as difficult as it is, as a Christian, as Christ followers, we really lose our excuse not to at least lean in this direction. Right after the 2016 election, something really interesting happened for you. You realized, "Oh, we're about to have Thanksgiving". And because all of your family is involved as you said earlier, in politics and religion, your family, your immediate and extended family wasn't going to be able to gather without talking about politics and religion, and this is right after the election. So as you prepared for that celebration, you wrote a prayer for you, that you ended up inviting your entire family to pray. So tell us a little bit about the prayer, and then I've asked Sarah to close our time together by simply reading this prayer over us.

– I think I was probably naive and assuming that after election day things might go back to normal in 2016 and then it was evident that that was not going to happen. Just from being on social media and paying attention to different sides of where people were voting or where they had landed on, I just noticed that there was a lot of angst going into a holiday

where we were all gonna be around our extended family. I just wrote our prayer for myself to kind of keep in mind and shared it with my husband. When we had Thanksgiving together, we always pray together as a big family. And Rodney said, "I think I'm gonna read your prayer with everybody".

– They had not...

– They had not read it.

– ...read it? So this was just for you and Rodney. Rodney decide to share it with your family. So then what happened?

– We all gathered in his parents' kitchen and held hands and prayed this prayer together. It was a recentering for us. We don't have a whole lot in common all the time. We have a lot in common, but not everything all the time. It just reminded us of the most important things.

– Wao. I would love for you to close our conversation by just reading it straight out of

the back of the book, over us and for us. I told Sarah earlier, I was planning to read it, but it is so powerful. I'm not sure I could get through it. So Sarah.

– It's called a liturgy for the space between us. For family near and peaceable, Lord we give thanks. For family far and conflicted, Lord we give thanks. For the ones easy to love, Lord we give thanks. For the ones we fight to love, Lord we give thanks. For people who see as we see, Lord we give thanks. For people we don't understand, Lord we give thanks. For people who don't understand us, Lord we give thanks. For easy conversation and expressed affection, Lord we give thanks. For gentle discord within our discourse, Lord we give thanks. For unity not sameness, Lord we give thanks. For charity and offerings, Lord we give thanks. For a world that reflects your goodness, Lord we give thanks. For humankind that bears your image, Lord we give thanks. For a day when we'll delight in our differences and not just tolerate them, for a gathering of every tribe and every tongue, for a table and a feast today, anticipating the one we'll enjoy with you someday, Lord we give thanks. Amen.

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