

Kieryn:

I'm Kieryn.

Eve:

I'm Hannah. This is Kitchen Table Cult.

Kieryn:

Where two Quiverfull escapees talk about our experience in the cultish underbelly of the religious right.

Kieryn:

Hey, Hannah.

Eve:

Hey, Kieryn. How are you?

Kieryn:

I'm good. I survived my first week of school

Eve:

Yay.

Kieryn:

I get to write an essay. Yes.

Eve:

What are you taking?

Kieryn:

I'm taking English and motors and drives and I'm retaking machining and I'm finishing math.

Eve:

Awesome. Mine starts next week on Tuesday evening. We have our orientation day, which is where I learn which tutorial group I'm going to be in and who I'm going to be working with all year. And I already know two of my classes I'm going to audit, the history of education in America, and I'm going to take women in social movements, which is taught by one of the women's studies professors.

Kieryn:

Nice.

Eve:

Yeah. I'm really excited.

Kieryn:

That sounds awesome.

Eve:

It's going to be good. You got some mail, I saw?

Kieryn:

I did. Oh my God, yes.

Eve:

Did the back turn out okay?

Kieryn:

Yes, it's great. I'm going to show you a picture because we're on the internet. But it looks good.

Eve:

Yes.

Kieryn:

And I'll post a picture on the internet for everyone who's listening, if you want to see a picture of my uterus on a pillow, it's awesome. I can't actually make the pitch of the squee that needs to happen because my voice is lower, but it's there.

Eve:

What are you going to be doing with this pillow?

Kieryn:

I really want to stab it, but I also don't really want to stab it because it's great, but I will probably still stab it anyway.

Eve:

You should definitely. Take some needles.

Kieryn:

The catharsis is needed.

Eve:

Needles.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

That's what pins are for.

Kieryn:

Yes. Yes, this is correct, and I have a ton of those, so that'll happen. I'll just do that later after we're done here. I'll light some sage and stab.

Eve:

Good. And the photo needs to have the stabbed pillow in it.

Kieryn:

Yes. Yeah. Yes, that'll happen.

Eve:

Great. So when we got on the phone with each other this evening, we were talking about doing either courtship or educational neglect per a Twitter discussion earlier this week, and we changed our minds.

Kieryn:

Oops, sorry.

Eve:

We'll get to courtship later, that will be some really juicy stories, and so will educational neglect. We'll probably have a guest on for that one. But, why did we change our mind?

Kieryn:

Because we realized that in order to better understand the context of everything that we're going to talk about in the future, we should really explain what fundamentalism is and what cults are and how they're related, how they're different, and sort of get a broader angle of what it looks like because it's not just limited to Christianity.

Eve:

Right. There's a spectrum here, and it goes from high levels of control to low levels of control, and the further you get into high levels of control, the closer you get to being a cult. And there are different sociology academic positions on what makes a cult, but most of them come down to about ten criteria, and the reason we call this Kitchen Table Cult is because being homeschooled at the kitchen table in a highly controlled environment, it felt like a cult at home. Not just at church, but also at home.

Eve:

And so our families were microcosms of the cult culture, and I'm using that term in an academic way. So what were some of things that were part of our upbringing that register as cult symptoms?

Kieryn:

Very black-and-white thinking, very rigid, very literal interpretations of things, especially the Bible. No room for freedom of thought, no room for dissent, no room to think for yourself. You had to toe exactly what the leader believed, whether it was your pastor or your parents.

Eve:

And I'll just put a pin in that real fast, this is something that's different from communal culture where you're putting the needs of the group about the needs of the individual, that's not what was happening. What was happening was the needs of the leader were put over anyone's individual needs and the needs of the group.

Kieryn:

Right. Yeah, it was very much all about whoever is in the position of leadership and everything else was extra.

Eve:

It all came down to power differential, so you couldn't challenge the authority, if you were interacting with people outside the group who had different authorities in their lives, they were suspect and you were taught to distrust them. And that also came into distrusting yourself, right?

Kieryn:

Right. Well, especially if you were not a dude because ... or at least for me, my parents, they kind of laxed on it a little bit later, but for the longest time, it was really, women could only hear from God through their husband or their father or whatever. And over time, that got relaxed and they were like, "Well, women can also hear from God, but it has to confirm whatever the man in their life says." So you can hear from God, but if it conflicts with the male leader, than the male leader's God hearing is more accurate than the woman's God-

Eve:

Hey, do you want to hear a joke about when I was leaving that line of thinking?

Kieryn:

Yes.

Eve:

So once upon a time, I was at college and this guy decided he was in love with me, and he was really stressed because I was clearly crushing on someone other than him, and he decided we had to have a serious conversation about this. And he's like, "So, I've prayed about this a lot, and God said that we were meant to be together." And I was like, "Well, I've prayed about this a lot too, and he didn't say anything to me of the sort."

Kieryn:

Oh, that's beautiful. That's so good.

Eve:

And he couldn't do anything because he wasn't already in a position of power over me.

Kieryn:

Oh. Oh, that's so good. Oh my God. That's beautiful.

Eve:

Men, y'all. Yeah, but I think that's another piece of it is in our particular world, gender rules were used to reinforce that, and they weren't necessarily the problem, they were a totally separate problem. They are a problem, but they were used to keep people really tightly in that space.

Kieryn:

Right. Which is the thing that cult-like environments do is they try very hard to keep you in the group and not let you out. So whatever they can control to keep you in, they will try to do.

Eve:

So what is going on in your world right now that brought this topic up for us?

Kieryn:

There's just a lot of politics that is happening. It's election season and I'm in California. And everywhere I go is infighting in one way or another, whether it's at school or in greater politics, there's a lot of the same dynamic and I see it over and over and over again, which is, there are this group of leaders that people respect and-

Eve:

With founding leaders, usually.

Kieryn:

... listen to and don't question. Right. People who've been there a while and are entrenched, and it's something that just every community that I've been in that has a lot going on, if they're not careful, they tend to have these traits where there's a set of leaders who everyone follows unquestioningly, and they tend to cultivate that. And then if someone comes in and questions that or starts trying to play with it or dismantle it or learn or do something or starts dissenting, then people start freaking out, they get more controlling.

Kieryn:

You then very quickly realize that there is an in group and an out group and there is the people who follow the party line and the people who don't, and I've seen a lot of organizations and a lot of groups just implode after that, and it takes a lot of conscious effort for people to get through that and continue working, a lot of groups don't.

Eve:

It sounds like a church split.

Kieryn:

Doesn't it though?

Eve:

I don't know where I've seen this before.

Kieryn:

This is what I say every time I see this happen. I'm like, "This feels like church."

Eve:

I have been working in nonprofits and development organizations internationally, on a national level, on a local level ever since I first got a job, and every single time I'm in these situations in the nonprofit world, I comment to someone at some point where I'm kind of stressed because there's this infighting happening and there's this control thing going on and there's this like, "You have to work hard because you believe in the cause, and we can take advantage of you because you believe in the cause and we don't have to pay you right or treat you right or whatever because we all believe in the same thing."

Eve:

And I'm like, "This feels like a cult. I've seen this before."

Kieryn:

Yep. Yep. Yep. Yep.

Eve:

I swear, every small group that I have ever been part of that is trying to enact social change ends up having a moment where they have to decide whether or not they're going to be a cult.

Kieryn:

Yep. Yep. Same experience here. Every single time there comes a moment where it's sort of like the defining thing, everything comes to a head and you either split and fizzle out and die, and you have this one section that just follows the leader and the other disperses. Or you can choose to be introspective and grow and learn from the experience.

Eve:

Right. And it's kind of, honestly, psychologically speaking, it is a reflection of adolescence of a kind. The group is in its adolescence and it has to learn how to deal with the fact that there are no rules and you have to create them, and you could either be rigid with them or you can grow as you learn and adapt, just like we do as humans. Individually at some point we realize that our parents don't know everything, and their rules might not actually interact with reality correctly, and we have to accommodate with that.

Kieryn:

Yep. That makes so much sense, actually. That's a really good way to explain it.

Eve:

Yeah. So fundamentalism is something that is not just Christian, but the word fundamentalism originated in a particular part of Christian history in America.

Sibling:

She got through the gate.

Eve:

She got through the gate?

Sibling:

The side of it.

Eve:

Puppy.

Sibling:

She figured it out.

Eve:

Okay.

Sibling:

Where's the spray can?

Eve:

It should be in the bathroom, I thought. It's the red can.

Sibling:

Okay.

Eve:

Did you wipe down the carpet?

Sibling:

Yes.

Eve:

Thank you. Sorry. I'll have to introduce you guys.

Kieryn:

Yeah. The origination of fundamentalism.

Eve:

Okay. So fundamentalism is a word that is used much more broadly now, but originally refers to a particular church stance that was taken at the turn of the century, like in 1910, 1912 when modernism was on the rise, and the church overreacted. You want to talk about this a little bit?

Kieryn:

I don't know much about it besides what I'm reading on Wikipedia.

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Eve:

Yeah.

Kieryn:

Which basically spawned a bunch of essays.

Eve:

It's like the-

Kieryn:

A ton of essays.

Eve:

Where have we seen this before? It's like the Federalist Papers.

Kieryn:

Everywhere.

Eve:

Everywhere.

Kieryn:

Everywhere since the dawn of man.

Eve:

Okay. So they were scared. The church was scared, and so they decided to double down on, "What exactly do we believe?" So that, "You can't be a Christian and believe X."

Kieryn:

Yep.

Eve:

So they were getting-

Kieryn:

It's almost like they were making a massive purity test.

Eve:

Really? Wow.

Kieryn:

I know.



Eve:

I've never heard of this.

Kieryn:

Shocked.

Eve:

Shocking. So they were circling the wagons, and this is something I was ... I've been talking about this a lot recently, I said this on Twitter the other day. Fundamentalists are circling the wagons. Evangelicals want to pull you into the circle of wagons, but they believe basically the same thing. Fundamentalists are just much more overtly us versus them, where we give up on everybody outside of our group. We're just going to focus on the inside of our group, and the Evangelicals want to seduce you into that center.

Eve:

So they wrote a bunch of essays and it was basically against Roman Catholicism, against what they called higher criticism, which was basically Bible scholarship was developing at that point, to such a point where people realized that, warning heresy alert, that the Bible was written by a whole lot of authors, a lot of different authors in different time periods, and that-

Kieryn:

Hannah.

Eve:

What?

Kieryn:

Do you mean God himself did not reach an arm down from Heaven and write the Bible?

Eve:

No. He possessed the writers to make them write it for him. Instead of demon possession, it was God possession, it's the same thing. Have you ever heard of a prophet before?

Kieryn:

Right.

Eve:

No. So basically higher criticism is taking an academic interpretation of literature and treating the Bible as literature and saying the Bible has to read in historical context. The Bible has to be read in terms of the biases of the authors and what they were living through and what they knew about the world and what they believed about how humans were interacting with each other and how they should interact with each other. What were their absolutes?

Eve:

For example. For example, a really good example, Romans talking about sexuality and homosexuality and basically, those who have studied the historical context of that were like, "Paul is basically talking about pedophilia in Rome. He's not saying, 'Don't have sex with the people you love,' he's saying, 'Don't have unconsenting sex with minors. It's wrong.'" But given literal interpretation, you can't see that that way.

Eve:

So higher criticism was something that they wanted to push up against because it meant that the church had to broaden its interpretation of the Bible. They were also pushing back against evolution because that was on the rise, the belief in evolution rather than literal six day creation was on the rise, they were pushing back on Atheism because that was becoming more common, and would become much more common after World War I for good reason. So all of this, they decided to establish what the fundamentals of the Protestant church were.

Kieryn:

And that's where Christian fundamentalism spawned from, that was definitely a lot of what I learned. My parents definitely saw reading the Bible as any way other than literal was sacrilege.

Eve:

Right.

Kieryn:

The idea of it being a literary historical document was just blasphemy to them.

Eve:

Right. I was shocked when I got to Grove City College and realized that a lot of other Christians read the Bible like literature rather than literally.

Kieryn:

Yeah, that's still shocking to me.

Eve:

It's great. I love it. So yeah. So one of the things that is interesting now is the term fundamentalist is seen as a derogatory term internally within Christian circles because it does refer to this black-and-white absolutist mindset and this making people take a purity test of belief before accepting them into the inner circle. And-

Kieryn:

Yeah, and it's also very ... well, yeah, it's extremely dogma over people, but also sometimes to the point where you will be excluded from interacting with people if you don't meet the test.

Eve:

Oh yeah, shunning is definitely still commonly practiced. So the thing that we've seen since leaving fundamentalism is that fundamentalism as a descriptive term for how people think about things is rampant everywhere and it's not limited to Christianity.

Kieryn:

No. I've experienced it in the art community, I've experienced it in politics, I've experienced it in school, I've experienced it in just communities that I've joined at large-

Eve:

I see it in people-

Kieryn:

... and it's just a thing that happens.

Eve:

... in terms of recovery groups. I don't personally have experiences with addiction, but I see people who have experiences with addiction going to fundamentalism to become more rigid in their belief systems to prevent them from falling into whatever they're afraid of. It makes sense, if you are afraid of yourself and you're afraid of the world and you want to set up things in a very limited fashion to protect yourself, yeah, black-and-white thinking makes sense.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

But it's not a mature approach. It's not very self-aware. And we see this on Twitter all the time, we see this with white feminism where you have to be exactly X, Y, Z to participate in the in group, you have to like Hillary Clinton or you have to like this or you have to like that, all of these little things that are really not essential to having an accurate understanding of what feminism is.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

And you see this in call-out culture because that's the direct result of that. When people are canceled, it's showing that there's an absolute in and out mindset. And I completely agree that there need to be consequences, but I don't necessarily think ... God. I don't necessarily think that we have to go as far as we think we have, and our understanding of these things is largely influenced by assuming that a carceral system is a legitimate way to punish wrongdoing. Restorative justice is not something that's been well developed in our country or in our society, and so we don't really have space to think about these things as options.

Eve:

And so we get canceling, we get call-out culture, we get absolutes, we get purity tests, and we get essentially, social fundamentalism.

Kieryn:

Yes. Yeah, that's something that I see a lot, especially when big things happen and people get scared. When people get scared because of a political event happening, they tend to pull in. And when large groups get scared because of a political event happening and they pull in or-

Eve:

And that's the most-

Kieryn:

... lash out.

Eve:

That's the most human response. If you are afraid, you withdraw. You go into your shell and you protect yourself. But that's not a healthy long-term way to interact with the world, it is logical, but you're never going to recover from it. And so, to circle the wagons because you're scared of modernism, well the whole world is going to keep evolving without you.

Kieryn:

Yep.

Eve:

So you've got to just keep working with it and you have to keep adding the new information to how you process the universe.

Kieryn:

And I think that's the difference. I think people's capacity to do that is what separates people who are drawn to fundamentalism and participate in it and that is a fulfilling thing for them, and people who don't is the ability or the wherewithal to be introspective and learn and the ability to do that, and a lot of people who tend to stay in the sort of fundamentalist tendency don't really have the capacity to be as introspective and grow or don't seem to be able to put the work in.

Eve:

I'm sure you get this a lot too. I have people telling me all the time that I'm wise beyond my years or super mature.

Kieryn:

Yep.

Eve:

I was talking about my divorce to someone recently and she was like, "Of all the divorced people I know, you're the most self-aware in how you talk about it and what you did and what he did and how it all

went down and why." And my response is always something along the lines of, "I had to completely strip my belief system down to nothing and rebuild. How could I not?"

Kieryn:

Yeah. People are often really impressed with how self-aware I am and how observant I am of situations and how good I am at reading things, and I'm just like, "I've stripped my identity and started over so many times. I have started over from scratch. I've had my world shaken, I've had everything turned upside down more times than I can count. So yeah, I'm pretty good at figuring things out and I can see what's happening."

Eve:

And none of it scares me anymore.

Kieryn:

No, it doesn't scare me. No.

Eve:

It's like, "Okay, cool. Here we go again. Let's see if I can do it better this time."

Kieryn:

Yeah. I feel like it happens so often for me that I'm just sort of like, "Oh yeah. Nope, it's been like a year, it's about time that I do something life-changing."

Eve:

Oh my God. Yeah. Yeah. Look, I'm a Taurus, I don't like change. I'm really good at dealing with it, I can go into crisis triage mode like that.

Kieryn:

Oh God, me too.

Eve:

Do I enjoy it? No. But I'm really, really good at it. I'm really good at it.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

And that's the thing that I don't see, that resilience is something that I don't see in this communities because you set up absolutes. You set up, "This leader is infallible. This text is infallible. This is the only way this can be. This person is good. This person is my one and only. This is that. And this candidate is everything we want. And this is the only way to approach-

Kieryn:

"This one ballot initiative is the solution to everything."

Eve:

And I'm like, "Guys, life is really, really long. This ain't going to last."

Kieryn:

And really, really complicated.

Eve:

It's a good idea, but we're writing on the whiteboard here, we're not writing in Sharpie.

Kieryn:

Right.

Eve:

Okay. So fundamentalism as a mindset is this kind of rigid black-and-white thinking that requires purity tests, there's gatekeeping, you submit yourself to the ideology, don't question it. Dissent is bad. You have really impractical loyalty to the original intent of the group or whatever. How is that different from a cult? Where do we get from one to the other?

Kieryn:

It depends kind of on the intensity, and cults tend to have a charismatic leader or set of leaders, so it's around a set of people. So you can have sort of movements that are high demand or groups that are high demand and environments that are high demand that aren't necessarily cults because you can leave.

Eve:

Yeah. Right. I think that-

Kieryn:

Cults are very not leaving.

Eve:

Well you were talking about shunning earlier. I think that groups where, "Okay, we're uncomfortable with dissent, and if you leave, okay, we feel weird about that, but we're not going to shun you," that's one thing, but total ostracization of social interaction.

Kieryn:

And I think that's kind of where one of the key differences is, is when it's you can leave and you're okay, or you leave and you're shunned or get pushed out.

Eve:

What are the consequences? Yeah. So it is kind of a slippery slope of sorts, but I think it's actually not a slippery slope because I don't think one necessarily leads to the other, I think it is a spectrum.

Kieryn:

Yeah. It's a series of steps that you can go back from at any point.

Eve:

The more afraid you are, the further you get toward cult.

Kieryn:

Right. Yeah. And it's something that it's not hard if you follow high demand groups, you can kind of see, you can kind of track the starting and then when it becomes more paranoid, more demanding, more inside, and then you get problems.

Eve:

Have you watched Wild Wild West?

Kieryn:

No.

Eve:

Okay, it's on Netflix.

Kieryn:

I don't think so. It sounds familiar.

Eve:

It's a documentary about a cult that was in Oregon and ended up being disbanded, but a lot of big names that we know today were in it in the 70s when it was started. Bhagwan was the leader and you see his books around still under the name Osho. Anyway, so I think the thing that that series really shows well about a cult thinking versus fundamentalist thinking is where the us versus them goes. Fundamentalists acknowledge that other people's version of reality can exist, but they're like, "But they're wrong."

Kieryn:

Yes.

Eve:

A cult actively tries to dismantle anything that challenges their view of reality.

Kieryn:

Yes. Their view is the only one that is real, everyone else is lying.

Eve:

Well not just everyone is lying, but everyone else is lying because they're out to get us.

Kieryn:

Yes.

Eve:

There's that victim mentality that goes with it.

Kieryn:

Yeah. It's extremely paranoid.

Eve:

Yeah.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

That paranoia is really part of it.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

Well, I think we're going to take a quick break and get back in a minute to talk about how you can avoid becoming fundamentalist.

Kieryn:

Hooray, we're back.

Eve:

Hey, we're back.

Kieryn:

And now, we should talk more about how to keep kind of fundamentalism and fundamentalist mentalities at bay. How do you avoid becoming a cult?

Eve:

How do you avoid becoming a cult? Well, I think dismantling power structures as they get set up is probably the easiest way. But how do you avoid becoming fundamentalist is kind of a different question. I think it really has a lot to do with being able to see the world in shades of gray and understand perspectives that are different from yours and see them as valid.

Eve:

And I think compassion is inactive in the imagination, and empathy is when you are able to experience the same emotions as another person is experiencing. So putting yourself in another person's shoes



really requires a lot of work in terms of emotional intelligence, and so I think that's the first place to go for trying to avoid being fundamentalist is, drop the absolutes and look at the world through a prism that has a whole lot of different sides.

Kieryn:

Yeah. I think that, at least for me when I'm looking at it from myself and I see trauma happening in groups and I see the turning point or the threshold approaching, it kind of helps me to remember what I did to escape because it's sort of just the same thing on a smaller scale, which was realizing that I can be wrong about things and that I am wrong about things, and accepting that and moving forward and growing and learning and not doubling down on my rightness.

Eve:

Yeah. I think that's really huge because we both came out of that world with this whole algorithm for how life was supposed to work, and we plugged everything into it and it didn't compute the answer we expected. So now we were standing with like, "We have a total blank slate. What the fuck? What the hell? What are we going to do now?"

Eve:

And you have to be willing to assume that you don't know everything when you're in that position because it didn't work.

Kieryn:

Right.

Eve:

You have a tattoo about this, don't you?

Kieryn:

I do, yeah. So the kind of story behind it actually was I got it after I started filing for divorce in 2016, which was also a huge thing because that was something I was never supposed to do. My parents thought divorce was the unforgivable sin. Divorce is worse than being gay to my parents.

Eve:

Oh, absolutely. Because you can suppress being gay.

Kieryn:

Right. Yeah. It's a choice, obviously.

Eve:

You can't undo that bond because your soul is now merged with that other person.

Kieryn:

Right. So obviously that's incorrect. And this is not the first time that my entire world has flipped on its head and I've found myself standing where there's no floor having watched everything collapse from

around me and having to build myself from the ground up, and I decided that I wanted to get a tattoo that kind of reminded me of the process and of sort of how I see life, and I've talked about this sort of loosely before, but I don't think you're ever done growing as a person. I think you're always growing, and that's sort of the way I see life is, there is always more for me to learn, there is always something that I don't know. I am always going to be continually evolving.

Kieryn:

So the tattoo that I have on my wrist is the word evolve in cursive over the infinity symbol, which is then over the HTML entity for the infinity symbol because I'm that kind of nerd. But what it means is that I should always be open to change, I should always be open to grow, I should always be evolving and continually growing, and admitting that I'm wrong and admitting that I make mistakes, and moving from that. And that's something that I've talked about in therapy too.

Kieryn:

That's what really kind of is the defining point and what separates me from my parents and from falling back into that mentality, is that I am self-aware, I'm doing the work, and I realize that I'm wrong and my wrongness does not lead to an identity crisis, it leads to growth.

Eve:

Yeah. The people who are the most rigid about adhering to their assumptions about the world are the ones who are going to struggle the most when those assumptions are turned over. And for someone like you and me, we've been through this enough times that we regularly expect to be wrong on an existential level that will fundamentally turn everything upside down.

Eve:

So it's this constant journey for us where we're kind of adjusting our approach to life, we are hacking our brains, we are hacking our understanding of reality, we're adding information as we gather it, and we're adapting and we're evolving. And people who aren't able to do that tend to fall into that fundamentalist mindset where they limit themselves and they limit the world and their ability to grow and see the world in Technicolor functionally.

Kieryn:

Yeah. What have you noticed? Have you been in places where people have been able to grow, like in organizations where-

Eve:

Oh yeah.

Kieryn:

... there was a point where they could've gone one way or the other? What worked? What didn't work?

Eve:

I love working with organizations that are able to do that because they pull best practices from other orgs and they were like, "Okay, so when you got to this point, what did you do? How did you fix it? What went wrong? What can we learn from?" And taking that information and learning from mistakes from

others and finding things that are tried and true, it's really healthy and it's really refreshing when it happens.

Eve:

And it really comes down to knowing your limits and having a clear understanding of, who am I and what is my role here as an individual, but also as an organization, what is the situation? What are we trying to provide and what are our limits? It's having boundaries around identity as opposed to ideology.

Kieryn:

Yes. Yeah, that's sort of another thing sort of tangentially that's related is a lot of people who tend to be really fundamentalist is their belief is their identity. My parents' was faith healing, so the thing that they stood their ground on was that doctors were literally of the devil, and if you disagreed with that, that was what cut you out of our lives.

Kieryn:

And homeschooling was also another part of that for my parents, where homeschooling was a huge part of their identity, and so if anyone questioned homeschooling, they were questioning my parents' existence on a fundamental level. And I've noticed that a lot of people, it's really easy when you're really angry and you're really passionate and you really want to change things to make politics your identity, and then you just hold onto that and you can't be wrong. And that also just leads you down.

Eve:

So Chesterton has this concept in his book *Orthodoxy* called the madman's box, and of course this is ableist language from pre-World War II, but he talks about how his madman is the most sane of all humans because the madman is removing pieces that don't fit in the box and leaving them outside the box. And then everything within the box works consistently and coherently, kind of like a little wristwatch. It all ticks together really well, and it is supremely logical, but the world is not a logical place. There's a whole lot that we don't know or understand, and we have to constantly learn and grow with it.

Eve:

But if you remove all of the assumptions that challenge your ways of seeing the world, you're going to isolate yourself within that little box and never grow.

Kieryn:

Right.

Eve:

And so I've had people cut me off, I had one of my best friends from high school, when he realized that I thought ... no, I had an academic position of believing that the Bible allowed for premarital sex to not be a sin. He was like, "Well, this is a fundamental parting of ways, and I'm sorry that you're walking in the darkness," and that was the end of our friendship.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

Because the minute that I step outside of his box, I become a threat to his box.

Kieryn:

Yep.

Eve:

He stayed friends with me during the divorce, but that was the turning point because I wasn't staying with the whole super conservative courtship world after that and hitting reset on the system. And I was like, "Because it didn't work."

Kieryn:

The system doesn't allow for divorce. What?

Eve:

No, the system didn't work.

Kieryn:

The system's broken.

Eve:

And he was also pushing for me to get an annulment, which had some validity, but the system didn't work and the marriage was what it was, and according to the system, it wasn't valid, but it was a valid marriage. So I had to move on and start from the beginning.

Kieryn:

Right. Yeah.

Eve:

It's this inability to incorporate new information and just choosing a point in your intellectual development to just stop.

Kieryn:

Yeah. Yeah.

Eve:

Yeah. It's constricting.

Kieryn:

It is. And I watched my parents do that. I watched that change happen because I was born before. So I remember when my parents were normal and had friends and didn't cut people off for disagreeing about whether doctors were good ideas. And then over time as they became more entrenched, more paranoid, more literal, and much more black and white and rigid in their thinking and their view of the

world, and they really got to the point where it was basically, "Our way of the world is correct and nobody else's is. And everybody else is going to Hell."

Eve:

Yeah.

Kieryn:

And I watched that shift happen, and it got to the point where at one point I was a teenager and they were like, "No, it's bad if you change." And I thought that was surprising considering I remembered just how drastically we had changed just over the course of my lifetime.

Eve:

That's really interesting. And also a teenager growing up, you have to change. How that not possible?

Kieryn:

I wasn't supposed to.

Eve:

Yeah. I think that's the thing is, how do you avoid becoming fundamentalist is you have to hold your ideas about how the world works and your ideas of self in an open hand and not clutch it tightly because it's going to change, and it may not fit and you might have to discard it and you might have to take on something new, and that's just part of being an adult. That's just part of evolving. And everybody has to go through it, and the ones that don't are the ones that end up hurting themselves and others.

Kieryn:

And I feel like that's something I've seen play out personally and also in support groups, in the arts world, in politics, in school. It's something that's really pervasive. And what I've noticed is something that I really appreciate is with the organizations and communities who do well is when things come up and they have fights and they're getting criticism is, they step back for a second and they think about whether or not they're doing something wrong. They figure out what the problem is and what went wrong. "Why are people saying this? Why are people calling us racist? Why do people think we're insensitive? Why do people think we're mean? Where is the breakdown? What's happening?"

Kieryn:

And then what happens is not that these organizations come out and say, "No, we're not racist, we're perfect. Thank you," because we're like, "Oh, we messed up. We're going to try to do better," and then they do better.

Eve:

Right, because they're not-

Kieryn:

And the important thing is they do better.

Eve:

They're not clutching onto this idea of themselves as not racist, they are clutching onto this idea of themselves as, "Our goal is to not be racist, so if-

Kieryn:

Exactly.

Eve:

... we are told that we are failing at that goal, we need to examine how we're going about it and change, not double down and say, "No, actually we are what we think we are."

Kieryn:

Right.

Eve:

Because we're not all who we think we are, and we all have blind spots, and there are all things that we need to learn. And that's just part of being human.

Kieryn:

It is part of being human. And the best way to combat sort of the fundamentalist mentality is to make room for mistakes, but to make room to learn from mistakes and recover from mistakes, it's allow for mistakes.

Eve:

And not just to allow for them, but to really embrace them as opportunities and not failures, because a mistake is something that opens the door to growth and learning and healing and being better, it's not a slap down. It's not saying, "Bad dog, go sit." It's like, "All right, let's walk through this new door and learn something."

Kieryn:

Yes, exactly. It's a way to learn, it's not a failing. And the environments where if you do make a mistake you're ostracized are the ones that are really clutching and there's no room to grow.

Eve:

Yeah. I think that's pretty perfect. Well, thanks guys for listening.

Kieryn:

Check out our Patreon because we're going to do an after-dark soon.

Eve:

Yeah. And if you have any questions, you can send them to us. And I know we promised you guys a courtship episode soon and an educational neglect episode soon, so we'll get that to you.

Kieryn:

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Those will happen, but we felt it was important to have this preface to understand the overarching world of both of those things.

Eve:

Right. Because the rigidity that we experienced in both of those situations was directly tied to the fundamentalist mindset.

Kieryn:

Thanks for listening.

Eve:

Thanks for listening. Talk to you next time.

Kieryn:

Bye.

Eve:

Bye.