

Katharine Wilkinson ([00:02](#)):

It is no small thing to be human on earth. Here on this ground, under these skies, we are home. So when the climate shifts and the places we love are hurting, it feels personal. We feel the tug to do something, but there are so many paths and so many saying, act now, do more, be better. The heat, the seas, the losses are rising, time is running out. Pause. Let's take a breath. Urgency and overwhelm keep us stuck. We don't need more information. We need orientation. A practice to find true north within the swirl. That's climate wayfinding. It begins with the questions we hold. What is mine to do? Where do I belong? What path is worthy? No matter how rocky it gets. We look inward with care to follow our emotions and offer our superpowers. We look outward with curiosity to surface solutions and connect with community.

([01:16](#)):

And then we look forward. Not with certainty, but courage. To orient with vision and journey onward with a clear compass. Each of us is a node of possibility. Whoever we are, whatever we've got to give. And when one connects to another, nodes become networks. Scattered concern becomes shared direction. And we realize I am not too small. I am not too late. I am an essential part of Earth's abundance. And when we find our place within it, the healing begins.

Leah Stokes ([02:09](#)):

This is a matter of degrees. I'm Dr. Leah Stokes

Katharine Wilkinson ([02:12](#)):

And I'm Dr. Katharine Wilkinson. And today I'm not co-hosting, I'm actually the guest.

Leah Stokes ([02:19](#)):

That's right. The tables are turned because Katharine wrote a book. It's called Climate Wayfinding: Healing Ourselves and the Planet We Call Home.

Katharine Wilkinson ([02:29](#)):

This book is a guide and a resource for everyone who may be uncertain about the path ahead. Whether you are a climate veteran or newly curious, it's designed to help you find your way and navigate from climate ache to action and doubt to possibility.

Leah Stokes ([02:46](#)):

The book comes out on May 5th, but you can pre-order it right now at climatewayfinding.earth. We'll share a link in the show notes.

Katharine Wilkinson ([02:55](#)):

And you can also find a whole slew of events. We are hitting the road with this book to cities all over the country with bookstores, with cultural institutions, and we would really love to see some of y'all so you can find all of that information on the website.

Leah Stokes ([03:21](#)):

So Katharine, I have had the privilege of reading an early copy of this book, Lucky Me. But I want you to explain to our listeners what is Climate Wayfinding? Why did you write this book now in this particular moment?

Katharine Wilkinson ([03:34](#)):

So I think a lot of us can probably feel the sort of slippery ground under our feet of the world that we're living in. We're living in a world where maps increasingly no longer work, and that is true quite literally as climate impacts unfold and entire shorelines slip under rising seas, towns and forests go up in flames. Quite literally, our maps are having a hard time keeping up. But I think also our internal maps and our cultural and societal maps of how we navigate human life and what it means to have a life of meaning and contribution when so much is changing so fast. And the truth is that the maps are going to keep being out of date and maybe increasingly so. So I think the task for us now in this time is to really strengthen our navigational muscles, right? Our capacity for finding our way, which is inner work, it's relational work, and of course it is also outer work in the world.

(04:41):

And that's really what this book is about. It's about meeting us at the crossroads, meeting us in the places of uncertainty, supporting us in this very liminal time in which we live.

Leah Stokes (04:53):

And I know that this book in part grew out of facilitation that you've been doing at the All We Can Save Project for years. Can you talk to me a little bit about that work and what the process was like in terms of turning that in-person work into a book?

Katharine Wilkinson (05:11):

So back in 2022, we designed a learning journey for people who were holding some version of the question, "What should I do? Or what should I do now or next?" And we ran a number of pilot cohorts that year, and we realized we were really onto something and that people were getting something even transformational from the experience. It was really helping people move from that sort of murky stuck overwhelm to a sense of possibility and power and even joy in this work. We then started to train educators at colleges and universities across the US and Canada to take this program, adapt it to their campuses, bring it into their classrooms, and run it with students who are often holding these big questions about the direction of their lives and the direction that their climate work could take.

Leah Stokes (06:08):

Because we know that so many people care about the climate crisis and they want to act, but can really struggle to understand what their unique contribution could be. Just as one statistic, 84% of young people globally are worried about climate change, but we're only really seeing around 8% turning their concern into action.

Katharine Wilkinson (06:30):

I think it's so important that you bring in that statistic, Leah, because as we talk about a lot on this podcast, it's not a shortage of care. It's not a shortage of worry, right? But what we have a shortage of is participation, is people getting off the sidelines and into climate action. We also have the challenge of keeping people in climate action, right? Especially in moments like this one where we're a movement under duress. This work is really hard. It's really depleting. I hear constantly about people piecing out of corporate sustainability roles or nonprofit organizations, or it's really a time when we need to take seriously the people who are making all of the rest of this work possible. So that's really what this work is about. And we've run the program as the All We Can Save Project for people at every stage of their lives and of their climate journeys.

(07:27):

Young, old, early career, mid-career, retirees looking for a third act, the grizzled climate veterans and the bright-eyed climate newbies and everyone in between. And what's been really cool is that the process of this work really works for all of those folks.

Leah Stokes ([07:47](#)):

So I'd love to hear about how the program, which you've now transformed into a book, how that has turned everyday people into activists.

Katharine Wilkinson ([07:55](#)):

Leah, I think you'll really like this example. Someone who had spent his career in really in the world of political organizing, particularly at the local level. He had never done anything on climate, and this ended up helping him take a path trying to see gas bans brought into local city ordinance, using his superpowers of political organizing and political strategy for a topic that he hadn't previously engaged in. A theater professor said at the end of the experience, "I thought that I didn't actually have anything to contribute on climate, but she came to see how essential cultural and narrative change is in this work, and she realized that her unique talents and gifts in the world could be really, really generative in really important ways." So that's been happening over the past couple of years. We're now active on over 50 campuses. And as we got into that work, I realized, ah, there is a book here.

([08:56](#)):

So I wrote a series of essays. We pulled in the best experiential pieces of that program, journaling prompts, creative mapping exercises. We shaped reading group agendas so that the program doesn't have to just be held by a trained facilitator, but it can actually be experienced by individual readers, by groups of people, maybe it's in a neighborhood, maybe it's in a faith institution, maybe it's at work who really want to get together and support one another in their climate engagement and their climate leadership.

Leah Stokes ([09:42](#)):

The book itself has this sort of unique interactive structure for the reader, and it's anchored around the head, sort of the intellectual work, the heart, and the hands, what you can do physically. And I would love to know, where is the heart? How do you see that part of the climate wayfinding journey?

Katharine Wilkinson ([10:03](#)):

So I think there are kind of two big pieces of that. There's probably heart that really runs through this whole book really, but I think there's a piece about our emotional life, right? We've done episodes about that on the podcast before, but our emotions are potentially really difficult, right? They can potentially keep us paralyzed. They can keep us kind of frozen from moving into our most generative offerings. But if we work with them with care and attention, they can also become fuel, right? The emotions of grief, of fear, of anger, often these are actually emotions that are telling us what matters to us, right? And there's a heart piece in this book too that's about beauty, it's about art, it's about poetry and song. And I think all of those are such important heart, soul nourishment that lots of social movements have relied on. And I think we could use, frankly, quite a bit more of that in the climate space.

Leah Stokes ([11:13](#)):

Yeah. There's poetry in this book, there's playlists, there's a sense of joy and culture and art that's infused throughout it. And there's also stories of other climate activists, inspiring stories that you sort of set up as lighting the way for the reader. So you have, for example, Sister True Dedication, Valerie Courtois, and of course, Kate Marvel, who our listeners will know from the podcast. Why did you want to tell those specific stories in this book?

Katharine Wilkinson ([11:44](#)):

I felt like it was really important for readers to hear from multiple voices and multiple experiences. So for example, Collette Pichon Battle is the first story in the book, and Collette is living in BioLiberty, Louisiana, which is a place that we are almost certain will be lost, right? It will almost certainly go underwater. And what does that mean for her work? How does she keep showing up when she knows so much of that loss is already written into the future? Kate, I think of in some ways as a cartographer. So the science that she does is helping us understand the possible futures ahead, helping us chart these new lands that we are not just living through, but feeling through. Many of these are people who have been, in some way, teachers for me in this work. Sister True Dedication is a monastic with Plum Village.

([12:48](#)):

Leah, I know you have done some work with Plum Village as well, and I think she has so much to offer to us in terms of how to work with the emotional content of climate and how we want to be in this work. So she's the lighting the way story in the chapter on emotions.

Leah Stokes ([13:09](#)):

Yeah. These people have come from lots of different walks of life. You just talked about a monastic and an activist and a climate scientist. These are quite different jobs, and yet everybody is still bringing their own energy and light and experience and superpowers to the table.

Katharine Wilkinson ([13:28](#)):

I also think it really normalizes the sense that way finding is for all of us, right? That even these people who seem to be climate luminaries in some way, who seem to have it all figured out, right? They have also had to zigzag. They've found themselves in moments that they didn't expect and they didn't quite know how to make sense of. They've had to take a right turn when they thought they were going to take a left turn. And I think there's something so beautiful about just holding that as part of the truth of the human experience, but particularly the truth of trying to be a useful human healing our planet.

Leah Stokes ([14:11](#)):

Yeah, I think that's so true. And people can often sort of hold prominent activists or scientists up on a mantle like, "Wow, this person's on another level than me." But what the book is trying to do is democratize the idea of democracy, says anybody can participate. And so I want to understand, how do you help everyday people who are going through this process in this book, how do you help them think about their superpowers?

Katharine Wilkinson ([14:39](#)):

I really love this part of the program and I really love this part of the book. The chapter is called Offering Our Superpowers. You already have superpowers. You don't have to go out and find them. It's literally about offering the gifts and the skills and talents that you already hold. But sometimes it can be hard to put our finger on those things. I mean, not everyone is Leah Stokes and is dialed in on their awesomeness in the world. Sometimes our superpowers have a way of hiding from us, particularly if they're not rewarded in school, in capitalism, but also sometimes we psych ourselves out and we think, "Well, I have superpowers, but they're totally irrelevant." There's nothing to do with those superpowers in the world of climate, and that just couldn't be further from the truth.

([15:33](#)):

And thinking about this quality of life force, right? What is life force? That is the most powerful dynamic on our planet. It's what we're striving to contribute to and to help continue. And from my perspective as a human, life force feels a lot like some intersection of deep joy and authentic power. So not the

hierarchical power over kind of power, but that inner fire that you can feel welling up in you or that inner strength that you can feel welling up in you. And similarly, joy, right? It's that sort of effervescent experience or that glow of meaning and significance. And what you begin to realize is there's some pretty cool and interesting convergence of joy and power. And often at that nexus, there's some really key insights into the gifts that we want to offer the world.

Leah Stokes ([16:37](#)):

Yeah. I think that's so powerful to orient the climate work, which from an outside perspective can feel like doom or sadness or anger to orient it towards joy is a really counterintuitive thing that I think has a lot of power.

Katharine Wilkinson ([16:54](#)):

Well, also, why would you want to spend time in a movement or in a community that had no joy? That is not the kind of party anybody wants to go to.

Leah Stokes ([17:05](#)):

Exactly.

Katharine Wilkinson ([17:06](#)):

It is a movement building strategy to bring joy into the work, but it is also a strategy for longevity. It's really hard to keep doing work that you don't find any pleasure in. It's really hard to keep doing work that you don't feel strong and capable in. So the more we can center power and joy, I think the more we set ourselves up to be part of this work for the long haul. This note actually makes me think about one of the poems that I curated for this book. It's called Optimism by the wonderful Jane Hirschfield, and maybe I'll just read it for us. Optimism. More and more, I have come to admire resilience, not the simple resistance of a pillow whose foam returns over and over to the same shape, but the senuous tenacity of a tree. Finding the light newly blocked on one side, it turns in another.

([18:06](#)):

A blind intelligence, true, but out of such persistence arose turtles, rivers, mitochondria, figs, all this resinous, unretractable earth.

Leah Stokes ([18:33](#)):

As individuals, you talk a lot in the book about the sort of myth that we hold that some charismatic leader is the one who's going to save us or they're the one we should look to, but you instead point people to connect with community that actually all this work is done in a network, in a web with other people. So I want you to start talking a little bit about that chapter, connecting with community. And I thought it was interesting how you opened that chapter by talking about carbon. Can you tell the listeners a little bit about that metaphor that you use there?

Katharine Wilkinson ([19:10](#)):

So we talk a lot about carbon as kind of a bad guy in the world of climate, right? This is something that has been burned and released up into the atmosphere and it's causing a whole bunch of problems. But carbon is really cool and carbon is the element of life. And the way that carbon is the element of life is by being in collaboration with other elements. So carbon makes more compounds than all of the other elements on the periodic table combined. Carbon, I feel like is sort of out there like, who wants to play with me? And I think it's actually a really interesting metaphor for us to hold as we think about this idea of operating in links and connections and relationships and webs, we can't get very far alone. We only get

far together. So we can do the inner work. We also have to do the relational work and think about who are the collaborators out there?

(20:16):

Who is my kindred community? Who could I get into good trouble with? How do I cultivate that with real care and intention?

Leah Stokes (20:25):

Yeah. And maintaining those relationships is so central to the work because we can't do it alone. There'll be somebody else who has a relationship with a policymaker or someone else who's got ideas or who can talk to journalists or that networked component is how campaigns are built to change policy, for example. It's how art is made, right? There's a real sense that an individual can do things alone, but that isn't really true in practice.

Katharine Wilkinson (20:57):

It's not. I mean, we couldn't even live for a second as individuals alone, right? So to think that we could do climate work alone is just kind of counter to the realities of nature.

Leah Stokes (21:11):

Exactly. And in this chapter, you describe a retreat you went to in December 2015 when you were having a kind of hard time with the climate work. You ended up at this Lakeside Center with a group of strangers. What happened there and how did that inform your thoughts about community?

Katharine Wilkinson (21:29):

This was a really beautiful experience that was organized and held by the Center for Courage and Renewal, which is Parker Palmer's organization. They were for quote unquote young leaders and activists. And I found myself there at a really, really hard time in my professional life and in my family life. I found myself really disconnected from my sense of passion, which I've always been able to rely on, and I found myself disconnected from a sense of possibility, both personally in my own path and possibility for the world. I was frankly probably depressed. And in this retreat, we were there from all different corners of social change work, so not all climate people. And so much of what we did was to create generous space to be in conversation very Quaker with ourselves and in conversation with one another. And I found it to be one of the most profoundly generous experiences of my life, and it left me so convicted that we are deeply capable of giving each other what we need and that it is mostly not rocket science, right?

(22:52):

There are parts of healing the climate crisis that are actual rocket science. Taking care of each other in this work is not one of them. And I think we need to make sure that we offer these kinds of spaces, we hold them with one another. And one of my very favorite things about this book is that some of those options for doing that are built right into these pages.

Leah Stokes (23:18):

And of course, this book is coming out a year and a bit into the second Trump administration. It's a time, as we talked about, where the climate movement can feel a little bit lost and individuals within this movement might not know exactly what to do. There have been rollbacks of policies, attacks on science, and of course, attacks on our democracy. So how do you hope that this book will find people and what do you hope it will offer them in this moment specifically?

Katharine Wilkinson (23:52):

It initially scared me that this book was going to be coming out in the particular context that it's coming out in. This is a time when people are pulling back, I think, from climate conversations in lots of quarters. And I think when a movement is really in a hard moment, when a movement is experiencing the kind of losses that we're seeing, is feeling depleted and maybe dismayed about what our future prospects look like. That is a really good time and a really important time to come back to first principles, right? To come back to the people who have had their hearts broken by what's happening on the planet and have in some way said, "I'm in. I want to help." Even if they haven't gotten off the sidelines yet, we've got a lot of uphill work to do and I think we have got to shore ourselves up with that deep fire of motivation, with that sense of relationship and trust of orienting to what is still possible, even as so much harm is happening.

(25:05):

And so ultimately, I am glad that this book is coming out in this time.

Leah Stokes (25:10):

And I think it's not about offering false hope. Sometimes with the way that you and I are in this work where we are hopeful people oriented towards the possibility of change, people can criticize that. They can say, "Well, that's not how it is. Look at the earth system, look at the data. We're in a bad place." But that isn't, in my view, nor really in the scientific literature, a place where people can act from very easily. If you are so scared, you become paralyzed. And so this is a tough moment. We can't sugarcoat that, but often when movements are in the wilderness, when they don't have power, that's when a lot of generative change can come together. It's when the Green New Deal happened in 2018, during Trump's first term. So this book can provide a way for people to think about what they can be doing in this moment, to plant the seeds for the future as you talk about.

Katharine Wilkinson (26:12):

Absolutely. And I think the history of social movements shows us how important these kinds of spaces are, right? Spaces like a reading group. You think about second wave feminism and the consciousness raising circles that were happening in living rooms way before any demands reached legislatures, right? You think about the interplay within the civil rights movement of the role of the Black church or places like the Highlander Folk School, and then the direct action that grabbed headlines and ultimately forced change at the legal level, at the policy level. You think about back to Quakers, abolitionists organizing in Quaker meeting houses. You think about the big win on climate last year at the International Court of Justice that grew out of a classroom in Fiji, right? It is so important that we cultivate these small spaces because those small spaces are precisely where big change takes root.

(27:17):

And if we're not cultivating the small spaces, our aspirations for big change are not just unlikely, they are probably not going to happen, period. You don't get to the big movement, you don't get to the big splashy movement moments without that quiet, small work that is often where power begins.

Leah Stokes (27:46):

Well, thank you, Katharine, so much for sharing this book with our listeners. In the past, we've done episodes on this show of What Can I Do? And people have told us that was an amazing resource that really helped them. And I think that folks will find this book the same way, that it is a guide for the work, for finding their way in or back in or through challenges. So I really think that our listeners would really benefit from checking out this book.

Katharine Wilkinson (28:14):

Thank you, Leah, for holding space for this conversation. It's fun to be interviewed by you, and we are really excited for this book to reach people. In so many ways, this is the book that I have needed at various moments in my own climate journey, and I hope it's a book that arrives to people meeting them right where they need it.

Leah Stokes ([28:37](#)):

The book is Climate Wayfinding: Healing Ourselves and the Planet We Call Home. It's going to be out on May 5th, and you can pre-order it now.

Katharine Wilkinson ([28:45](#)):

Thank you, Leah, for the pre-order nudge. Pre-orders are the best possible way to show love to a book, and right now we've also got a way to show love to readers of this book. Bookshop.org is offering 15% off before May 5th, and they will also send a beautiful limited edition art print that is inspired by the book. In addition to getting a copy, you can find all of our book tour stops. I'm going to be beebopping all over the US from mid-April until the end of May. We're going to be at the Exploratorium in San Francisco, the Bell Museum and the Twin Cities, the Museum of Science in Boston. We'll be at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta with the Climate Museum in New York and many, many more. We would love, love, love to see listeners of a matter of degrees. And if you're excited about taking this journey, not just solo, but in community, you can find resources for starting a reading group on our website, climatewayfinding.earth.

([29:49](#)):

All of the book tour details are on the website, all the info about ordering the book. And if you do use that bookshop.org promo, use code climate one five, climate 15 to get 15% off and get your art print. And while we're on the topic of books, I can't let us in the episode without mentioning that Leah also has a book coming out this year. The Carbon Wave is out this fall, September 15th. That seems like a great birthday for this book, and it is also available for pre-order. So check it out at bookshop.org.

Leah Stokes ([30:30](#)):

My book is a story of how the Inflation Reduction Act passed, and there's a lot of parallels with your book, Katharine. Although it's narrative nonfiction, so a bit of a different structure, it has similar ideas about groups of people coming together, about us being carbon-based beings and how we can change the future. So I think we'll have a lot to talk about when we do an episode on that in a few months time.

Katharine Wilkinson ([30:55](#)):

Well, I can't wait to turn the tables and interview you, and I can't wait to read The Carbon Wave. So to close this episode, we thought it might be nice to hear a few bits from the opening, the preambing of Climate Wayfinding. I suspect you, like me, feel a deep ache about what is happening within our web of life. Perhaps you glimpse news of the latest unnatural disaster and look away to remain afloat, or you survived one and wonder how to rebuild. Perhaps you boil with outrage at those who gamble our lives, or you boiled so long that you've run completely dry. Maybe you want to grab a friend's hand and say, "Do you see how bad this is?" Over the past 27 years and counting, I have been on my own winding journey as what you might call a climate person. Along the way, I have found myself wishing for maps that did not exist.

([32:00](#)):

I have hit many crossroads and a few outright dead ends, and I have needed support with how to be someone who loves this planet and craves a sense of purpose. At times, the road has rattled me, but it has also been rich with revelation. Our moments of seeking are uniquely precious in the human experience.

They rows, they goad. They can send us down the slipway of healing and transformation, first in ourselves and then in expanding circles. To find our truest ways forward is at heart an act of generosity. There's a fresh scent in the wind. The terrain ahead is calling. Let's begin.

Leah Stokes ([32:51](#)):

A Matter of Degrees is co-hosted by me, Dr. Leah Stokes

Katharine Wilkinson ([32:55](#)):

And me, Dr. Katharine Wilkinson. We are a production made in partnership with The 2035 Initiative at UC Santa Barbara and the All We Can Save Project.

Leah Stokes ([33:05](#)):

Thanks to our funders and supporters who make this show possible, including the Anton Vonk Chair in Environmental Politics and the 11th Hour Project. If you'd like to help us make more episodes, please reach out.

Katharine Wilkinson ([33:15](#)):

And if you're digging the show, hop on Apple Podcasts or Spotify and give us a five-star rating or leave us a review.

Leah Stokes ([33:22](#)):

Script writing, fact-checking, communication, research, and production support are by Lucas Boyd and Christin Palmstrom.

Katharine Wilkinson ([33:29](#)):

Sameer Sengupta is our editor and sound designer. Rose Wong designed our show art. Sean Marquand composed our theme song. Additional music came from Blue Dot Sessions and Epidemic Sound.

Leah Stokes ([33:41](#)):

You can find us online at degreespod.com and on YouTube.

Katharine Wilkinson ([33:47](#)):

Stay tuned for more stories for the climate curious.