

The Future Is Calling Us to Greatness

with Michael Dowd + 56 Experts



The ManKind Project and Gift Community

with Bill Kauth

Big ideas from this session:

- New Warrior Training Adventure, Warrior Monk training
- Co-creating local resilience and gift/barter economies
- Fostering a healthy future as one's primary legacy project

Michael: Bill, thanks for joining in on this conversation series, *The Future is Calling Us to Greatness*.

Bill: Good to be here, Michael. It feels like a good challenge.

Michael: Yeah, well, one of the things I've been doing at the start is always asking my guests to introduce themselves and let the listeners or readers—or not readers, but listeners or viewers who aren't already familiar with your work to get a sense of who you are, what you're best known for, and that sort of thing. Don't be bashful. Just help us get who Bill Kauth is.

Bill: Okay, back in '84 I was a feminist therapist and I got a call to do something for men. I had been in a men's group and I gathered together with two guys, Rich Tosi and Ron Hering, and we cobbled together basically an initiation for adult men into healthy masculinity. We used a lot of emotional cathartic stuff, and it became emotional literacy 101 for men, and of course, they were terribly wonderfully wanting this in their lives, so the thing just kept growing.

I started it in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It grew around the Midwest and into the coasts just about the time Robert Bly's book, *Iron John*, hit and sold a million copies. We were already in place, so our work grew. It's a very, very intense weekend an initiation for adult men.

Then it jumped overseas and now it's in—oh, god—eight countries. There are 60,000 men that have been through it and many of them sit in what we call "integration groups" every week. There are 10,000 men that sit in 1,000 groups someplace on the planet every single week. That's what I've been up to.

Years ago they kind of kicked me upstairs as the visionary at-large serving at my pleasure to do other things, and I created the Warrior Monk, which I took around the world for a decade. Most recently, I have married with an exquisitely wonderful woman named Zoe Alowan and she and I have been collaborating on building community or tribes for people. We started that about seven years ago, and we have a fabulous tribe here of 21 people deeply committed and bonded and trusting each other, both men and women. We found that bringing men and women together safely has been a challenge.

We've written a book called *We Need Each Other* and got another one in the works called *Toolbox for Tribe*. You're the first to hear about it.

Michael: All right, cool!

Bill: That's right up to date.

Michael: Well, that's great! Well, one of the things that I just want to say publicly here in this conversation with you—anybody watching or listening to this—that since 19—oh, god—1980 or so I've been doing various workshops and trainings and seminars and programs in personal growth, spiritual growth, relational health, personal transformation, all that kind of stuff. I spent several years training in neurolinguistic programming and Ericksonian hypnotherapy and did a number of years of Landmark Education, ended up becoming a Landmark Introduction to Forum leader and so on and so forth.

I have found nothing more powerful than the Mankind Project and the New Warrior training and the work that you all have done. I just want to mention that so that any man watching this, check it out. It's really powerful. It's really important.

Bill: Thank you, Michael. Fine blessing.

Michael: Bill, this series is titled *The Future is Calling Us to Greatness*, and I've been interviewing experts in peak oil and sustainability and climate change and some of the biggest hearts and minds on the planet around these topics and how they stay inspired in the face of really scary stuff. How do we get ourselves out of the inevitable depression and anger and frustration that we also feel to stay present to what's real? How did you awaken to some of these larger global-scale issues and sort of where's your heart and mind now on this?

Bill: I mentioned that my brotherhood about 15 years ago—I'm kind of a get-stuff-started guy and entrepreneurial kind of guy. Once it started, once the meetings get to be more than about a half a dozen people, I'm out of there. I don't like those kinds of meetings. It's not where my energy is or my creativity, so they gave me the title—well, I actually asked for it: visionary at-large and sent me on my way to serve at my leisure.

I've taken that very, very seriously because the visionary goes out and finds out what's going on ahead and brings it back to his tribe or his people. I kept doing that. the more I studied, the more depressing it was and I'd come to our annual meetings and I'd say, "Guys, peak oil is coming in and it's not looking good for humankind." Basically, I'd come back the next year and I'd say, "Remember how bad it was that year—last year? It's worse!" Eventually I got that they didn't even want to hear that stuff.

In fact, I took it around the country for a while and actually nobody wanted to hear it. It just depressed them. So I decided to refocus on something that they actually wanted, which was community and there's a very, very, very high correlation between community and having our hearts full enough emotionally and actually pragmatically in terms of taking care of each other as the world changes so rapidly.

The more I look at it, especially recently, in the last four or five years, kind of the exponential effects, it is really looking seriously—so I honor you very, very much for taking this challenge given the severity of what's going on.

Michael: Yeah, well, thanks. One of the reasons why I've been focusing on how the past is rooting for us and the future is calling us to greatness is because it's a mythic frame. It's a way of holding time and holding the contributions of countenance, ancestors, both human and pre-human and the struggles and sacrifices that have been made, that if they weren't made we wouldn't be having this conversation right now. When I hold those in my heart, I'm then inspired to do what I need to do, what I can do, given my unique limitations and my strengths to hopefully contribute to a future with as less suffering as possible.

We now know that we're not going to be able to avoid suffering. We're not going to be able to avoid calamity. We're not going to be able to avoid climatic shifts. We're not going to be able to avoid bad news and some of it really, really challenging. Yet, how I find that if I focus on some of the challenges—and in many cases, I'm just imagining what the sacrifices and the struggles and suffering of my ancestors have been, but also I keep a picture of my granddaughter by my computer because she's the embodiment of the future calling me to greatness. She's only four years old.

I'm curious. What wakes you up? I mean I get some of the—I mean we all know that if we have already triggered certain tipping points, there might only be a remnant of humanity alive in 100, 200 years. That's a very real possibility. Yet, I think that if we, in the next three, four, five, six years, if we as a globe, as a planet, as a species, if the dam of denial breaks and China and India and Brazil and the United States and European union are all mobilized like we were at the beginning of World War II, I think we could see things that might even occur miraculously in terms of the speed of change.

Bill: Yeah.

Michael: I sort of live with that as a possibility, but also I'm at peace with my own mortality and our species' mortality. But what wakes you up on a day-by-day basis to do the work that you do? I mean how do you stay, for the most part, I mean I obviously know that we all dip down into sadness and anger and depression at times, but how do you stay, by and large, inspired to do the work you do on a day-by-day basis?

Bill: Yeah, thanks. That was brilliant. I'm enormously in alignment with you. You might be interested to know that I'm actually bringing Guy McPherson here and his projection is far more dire than the one you put out. He suggests maybe we've got decades.

Michael: No, I'm well aware of Guy McPherson's perspective and I really honor the work that he's done in bringing together some of the best science around the bad news and having us take a square look at it. I mean one of my interviewees in this series was Caroline Baker, who is, of course, very connected to Guy and draws on his work and she's playing the role of hospice. She thinks that the likelihood of near-term extinction is very strong and how do we play hospice for each other? I personally am not quite there, although I do agree that that's one possibility.

Bill: Yeah, she and Guy have just written a book together. He actually went and trained as a grief counselor, so we've got—most of the workshop he's going to be doing here, about three-quarters of it is going to be a grief workshop so that we can kind of be with each other to hold the pain and grief and sadness and fear around what we're actually seeing in terms of the planet warming up and species moving and dying and so forth.

Michael: Yeah.

Bill: It's hard stuff and I sent it out with a great deal of trepidation to my community here because I was afraid of like, "Do I have a right to do this? Or do I have an obligation to do this?" One of the very wise men in my men's elders group that's been around for about 10 years, he looked right at me. I put this out as kind of anguish in my soul and he said, "Bill, not only do you have a right to do it, but you really have a duty to do it."

Michael: Yeah.

Bill: I took a deep breath and I sent it out to several hundred of my friends and associates around here, and I've gotten a couple of dozen notes back saying, "Bill, thank you so much for your courage and putting that out there. I need that. I'll be there." I've been really blessed for having the courage to step into it, so that's felt good.

Michael: Yeah. So again, are there any exercises—I mean, for example, I asked this question of Nikki Silvestri. She's the executive director of Green for All, the organization that I

think Van Jones started. She blew me out of the water, frankly. I asked her, "How do you stay inspired?" She said, "I commune with my ancestors." I said, "What do you mean by that?" She said, "Well, I actually meditate and have a heartfelt inner conversation with my ancestors and I allow them to give me encouragement." For example, she said, "I know that my great, great grandmother was repeatedly raped and her children were taken from her." Nikki is an African-American woman. She said, "She didn't commit suicide. She continued on. I'm her direct descendant. She inspires me." I was just blown away.

Bill: Beautiful. You did ask that question. I wanted to actually go there, but where do I find some sustenance and it's very much like yours, really. I got it rather directly from Charles Eisenstein, who's probably on this...

Michael: Yes, he is.

Bill: Yeah, I found him back in '08 just by his writing. We brought him to Ashland in '09. We've been living into the gift culture. Just been seeding since then. Anyway, in his writings and in his talks, he said one thing that has just really set with me, which he said at some point, everybody was saying, "Well, Charles. Have you looked at this and this and this and this?" He started studying the state of the world and he basically said, "Holy shit! This is going to take a miracle."

Michael: Mm-hmm.

Bill: Then he started studying miracles and discovered they're all around. They're everywhere. I've known that for many, many years. I've lived my life from the perspective of a call. I get the miracles, and as you were suggesting, they may show up in ways that we can't imagine. In fact, that's miracle by definition. You can't really imagine, so it could lead to a global martial plan as it gets more and more obvious. It could lead to a shift in consciousness that lets us—I don't know, but I live in that sense of miracle and do everything I can do to make it a smooth journey, as smooth as it's going to be for all of us.

Michael: Well, one of the things you're doing and I think everybody that's watching or listening in on this conversation or this series, if they're awake, to not just be engaged in learning about the big picture and the big scary stuff, but get to know your neighbors, get to know your community. Build tribe, learn some skills that will be needed, barterable skills, skills of survival, skills of growing food, skills of preserving and canning, skills of staying warm when there's no power, whatever it is.

But just to be resilient and to be prepared for not the end of the world, but also not for perpetual progress either, that we've got chaotic times and contraction coming, and in a worst-case scenario, we've got real serious, serious suffering, but even in the best-case scenario, we're not going to avoid suffering. Get to know your community and build skills and resilience.

Bill: That's totally what we've been doing, but it's more on kind of the personal, emotional bonded level. That has been just an enormous challenge. Our whole culture is geared to move away from that kind of bonding and connecting in hundreds of ways. There have been tons written about that. We have struggled a lot and we finally found the key to it after seven years, and it started early last year. We actually—kind of like the Warrior training. It's a funnel. It's kind of a shared value experience of heart opening that the men, they go through this funnel and they come out transformed and bonded with each other in a way that's almost unimaginable for most men.

Michael: Yeah, right. It is.

Bill: I kept spreading it around the world. It's literally a transformational experience. What we did is we built—we just called it a "tribe training," and it's only based on three things. One is deep intimacy, experiences of genuine, authentic, eyeball-to-eyeball, heart open intimacy, which we bring people through that. Then conflict resolution, of course, because...

Michael: Absolutely.

Bill: The other is serious safety for men and women together. Given the patriarchy for 5,000 years, women still don't feel terribly safe, so we have to really bend over backwards to make sure that they know that we're safe and we have a promise not to act out sexually in any way. It's all about transparency. Once people get that, they step right in and so that has bonded our group real tight.

You'll find this interesting. Once we get really tight with each other and we meet every week. That's one of our mandatory kind of things. If you're not willing to meet once a week, see you later. That gives us a great deal of time together, and most of us actually hang out two, three, four times a week with each other in different ways. Many of us do.

Michael: Yeah.

Bill: What we found is that as we get really close, it's kind of like a marriage. Stuff comes up. You start finding the little picky things and it leads to conflict and conflict, I believe, actually bonds people tighter than before. We actually have a safe enough place where that kind of interpersonal stuff can happen, and our tribe is really lovely. I feel it's just wonderful and we want to have that for everybody.

Michael: I'm so glad you mentioned that because this has been something that's been the focus of much of my adult life. How to have the healthiest of relationships that doesn't avoid conflict, but actually leans into the conflict so that the conflict can help the system or the family or the tribe or the whatever grow. In fact, I wrote an article—gosh—20 years ago probably now

that still is one of the things I'm most proud of. It's called "Living and Loving Pan Faithfully," which means being faithful to all or faithful to life and I identified what I called at that time the "eight-fold path of Pan faithful living." I'll send you the PDF. In fact, I'll probably make it available to everyone. I'll just let them know what the link is in this series because it's just exactly in alignment with what you're now articulating and the importance of it, especially in challenging times. How do we really trust each other deeply? How do we communicate respectfully and move through conflict in the most mutually enhancing ways possible?

I mean this is vital human stuff that we used to have. I mean for 99% of human history that's what tribes were about is helping us to do that, but we've lacked that now and we've got to rediscover it in many cases.

Bill: One of the little bywords we use is, "You can take the people out of the tribe, but you can't take the tribe out of the people." That's built in for hundreds of thousands of years.

Michael: Yeah, that's great.

Bill: The title of this project is stepping into our greatness. I think of being able to function as a leader, as things get more and more contracted, as one of those pieces of greatness that a lot of us are going to be called to step into. Given our brotherhood around the world, most of those men are very highly trained in emotional literacy and many of them have been through the leadership tract. There are thousands of guys that—I like to say when I was a leader in the early days there are hundreds and hundreds of men now that are far better than I ever was. We literally are training leaders to be able to step up as the contraction keeps rolling over us.

Michael: Bill, say something about the work, the current work that you and Zoe are doing.

Bill: That's the tribe building. We did a workshop here in Ashland that's called "The New Tribe Training," back in May and we'll be doing another one in April here. That's bringing in people from around the country and actually walking them through the entire process that we've taken our people through. That's one thing.

We're also, as I mentioned earlier, rewriting our book because we have learned—we put it out back in 2011 and we've learned so much since then that we simply have to write a new book so that people can take it. It's called *Toolbox for Tribe*. It just couldn't be more simple and yet incredibly complex and challenging on another level. But if people are actually willing to step up—this is another thing. If people are willing to step up and actually use it, if they have the volition to have a tribe, we've got the step-by-step.

I'm finding that unfortunately it's rare for people to have the qualities needed. The first one is—this is very highly relevant to you. Our first one is stay put. Don't move! You've been moving faster than any human I know.

Michael: It's interesting because these last 12 years that's what we've been doing is traveling all over North America. In fact, you go from your bedroom to your bathroom to your kitchen and you keep feeling like you're home. Well, we go from one region to another to another and it keeps feeling like home because no one place is home. We actually have the generalized feeling that Nora, which is our personification of North America, Nora is our beloved. Nora is our home, but we also have the sense that in the next couple years we will probably settle down most likely in Michigan and part of that is because we really feel that now is the time.

If we do that, say, in two years, we'll have been living on the road for 14 years, and it really is now time to settle in, build tribe in a local community. I mean we've got an extensive network of tribe, no doubt, but to really build locally and develop those skills of community building, resilience, growing food, supporting each other, and helping communities themselves to become more resilient and more sustainable, ultimately.

Bill: Yeah, you get the paradox of the current worldview that we literally have become a planetary culture. Zoe and I also have friends all over the planet that we love a great deal, and a lot of our focus is local now.

Michael: Yeah, exactly. It needs to be.

Bill: We'll have that book ready for you by the time you settle in Michigan.

Michigan: Okay, good! Well, Bill, there's a question that Connie has been inviting me to ask all of my guests, and I think I've only forgotten once or twice. It's fun. It's off-the-wall, but here it is: if you had the opportunity to have a dinner conversation, like a dinner with any three people in human history where all four of you are together there. That's one possibility. Or a one-on-one over a beer or a glass of wine or a meal or whatever, but any three people in history, either one-on-one or at a dinner party with all four of you. Who would those three people be and why would you choose them?

Bill: Bucky Fuller comes to mind.

Michael: Yeah.

Bill: I've always loved his wisdom and creativity and deep knowledge of what's going on socio-politically. I think I would enjoy that a great deal. I like Paul Goodman, of all people. I think he wrote this book called *Growing Up Absurd*. One of those seminal books for me way back when. It's like he got the craziness that I was living in and he was able to put words to it and allowed me to open to new possibilities way back then.

The other is Alice Miller. She's the one that wrote the *Drama of the Gifted Child*, in which she identified, again, rather like Paul Goodman, the wounding that damn near all of us in this culture suffered just as we've separated from nature and from authentic life, and we're abused by our parents unknowing to them. They thought they were doing the best they could. She also was a seminal character. I think she's still alive, actually, still writing and painting.

Michael: Yeah, cool.

Bill: You should arrange that, Michael.

Michael: I don't know if I've got that much power with the powers that be, but yeah, it's an amazing thing when we think about that we're standing on the shoulders of great people, great men and women, and yet there are the unborn who are not yet alive will look back and this is one of the things I challenge my audiences now. I'm speaking all across the United States on this theme, "The Future is Calling Us to Greatness." I actually end with a guided meditation where I invite them to imagine some ancestor of theirs giving some words of encouragement, and then I'm silent for about 30 seconds, and then I invite them to allow somebody who's alive 100 years from now or further out to call. What would they say? What might they say to call them to greatness? It's amazing. Often people are in tears and it's just really powerful stuff comes.

Bill: Yeah, it's a little form, a little grief workshop.

Michael: Yeah.

Bill: As we stare into the abyss of what might happen.

Michael: Yeah, exactly. Well, Bill, what do you see happening that gives you some encouragement and what do you see are some of the biggest things—one or two sort of biggest things systemically? Obviously, there are all kinds of things that individuals and communities can do, but what are the one or two biggest systemic things that you see still need to be done?

Bill: Oh, geez. That's such a big question. Again, Charles Eisenstein talks in *Sacred Economics* about the economic changes. Naomi Klein has got that new book out—man, just a couple of weeks ago on capitalism and the...

Michael: Yeah, *This Changes Everything* I think is the title.

Bill: Geez!

Michael: We just ordered it on audio, but we haven't started listening yet.

Bill: Beautiful, so that stuff is popping up all over the place. It's obvious that the old economic system has been so destructive and needs to be dramatically changed. That's a big systemic thing that drives the old story, so that's huge. Everything. Law and medicine.

We already have the solutions to make all those things more human and more healthy. So I've been watching that stuff for decades. It's brilliant. We have all the solutions we need. In fact, Charles, again, he's just off to Findhorn for this conference on the new story.

He's been putting some stuff out about they're not going to get together and have all the bright young people share their best shot. They're actually going to get together and have the new story, to hold the new story, because it's like we know the problem, we know the solutions, and how are we going to synthesize those together? I take some hope in that, that that conversation has huge focus. That feels good.

I also want to say that my political friends around here—they're my age or mostly boomers. We're tapped into the millennials and some of these incredibly beautiful, bright young people are starting to actually take action, go around and round up some money and some support to get carbon credits because they see that as the single most useful, functional thing. It's kind of what the big march a couple days ago in New York was all about, although they didn't call for anything specific. They're calling for something, something that has some teeth. Chances are we're not going to get it again, but it's being called for. That steps into that area of miracle.

But I'll tell you those young millennials, I love their energy and their enthusiasm and their beauty, and it breaks my heart when I think about the world that they're actually stepping into.

Michael: Well, amen. I mean we just met—my wife and I—Connie and I just met with my 24-year-old daughter and her boyfriend just the other day, just last night or night before last and talking about all these things. One of the great joys for me was when my daughter spent a week with Joanna Macy. I mean it does a daddy's heart great when one of my great mentors is also able to mentor my own daughter.

Bill: Yeah, beautiful. She was just here a month or so ago. Boy! Just to be able to talk to her for a few minutes and share a little hug was just precious. She sure gets what's going on and has been doing this grief work for decades now.

Michael: Yeah, amen.

Bill: Like here and the stuff we're just talking about.

Michael: Exactly. Well, her book *Active Hope*, how to stay sane with the mess we're in or something like *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in Without Going Crazy*. That's it—is

actually Connie's and my bestseller. I mean as we travel North America, we sell books and that's the top seller that we've had.

Bill: Wow!

Michael: Bill, anything else that you want to say on this theme of the past rooting for us and the future calling us to greatness?

Bill: Yeah, what you're just saying, what you just said, as that book being your bestseller, it's people are hungry for it, which means that, again, they know what's going on. As I've been inviting people to come and hear what Guy McPherson has to say, actually, in my invitational letter, I said, "For the last several months, what I've been doing is connecting with some of my really bright, competent, highly educated friends and we enter this conversation about climate change." It usually takes a couple of false starts before they can feel my heart opening up, and then they share and they completely get it. It's like we all know, so the next step is actually finding the way to be with each other and open our hearts so that we can feel truly safe to step into our greatness, I think.

That's been one of Caroline Baker's theses for a long time is that if we can actually fall into our grief and experience it fully, we come out the other end with a kind of ebullience and knowing that we've been there and done what we can, and then our ability to act gets potent. In that potency, I think, come the miracles that we don't even know about yet.

Michael: Yeah. Amen, amen! Wow! That's exactly my own heart. That's my own commitment, and really, what you just articulated is sort of the core meme that I want people to get from this series.

Bill: Yeah.

Michael: Bill, if people want to go further into your work, what website or websites would you recommend they go to or just any resources that you'd like to most highly recommend?

Bill: Oh, sure. Giftcommunity.net. Weneedeachother.net will get you into our website, and get on our—sign up to be on our mailing list. I'm forgetting what they call that and we'll stay in touch and let you know when and where the seminars are and when the new book is ready to go.

Michael: Cool. Great.

Bill: Giftcommunity.net.

Michael: Great. Well, Bill, love to you and Zoe and your work. I look forward to hopefully crossing paths in the not too distant future, and I've held you as an older brother on the path for two decades now, and I'm just glad we had this opportunity to talk.

Bill: Yeah, likewise, Michael. I hold you dearly in my heart and I'm delighted at the level of alignment that we've found here in this conversation.

Michael: Yeah, me too. All right, bye-bye.

Bill: Bye.