

Turning to the Mystics



St. John of the Cross: Dialogue 4
with James Finley

Jim Finley: Greetings. I'm Jim Finley.

Kirsten Oates: And I'm Kirsten Oates.

Jim Finley: Welcome to Turning to the Mystics.

Kirsten Oates: Welcome everyone to our dialogue on Session Five, Turning to the Mystics. Jim, good to be with you.

Jim Finley: Yes, good to be with you. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: So in Session Five you did something a little different. You didn't do your normal lectio. In fact, there was no text from John of the Cross in the episode. You did more of a meditative reflection. Could you just talk us through why you went in that direction?

Jim Finley: Yes. There's a previous session, that chapter, it was so deeply poetic. We thought it would be better if you and I went through it together as a dialogue because the goal here is to make these teachings as accessible and understandable as possible. So with that in mind, with The Dark Night, I thought it would really be helpful to see how... We've all experienced a dark night because the dark night is kind of a metaphor, a visual metaphor of the transformative deepening of love.

Jim Finley: So I thought if we could see how The Dark Night as that metaphor works in our love for each other, as between husband and wife, and then by implication between parent and child or teacher and students or people committed to help others with healing or to living alone or to being old or being one with the earth, any modality of love that calls us to a yet deeper love, how is The Dark Night part of that transformative process? And suggesting, and this is what we looked at in marriage then as an example, suggesting that first a dark night is actually a brightness that blinds our eyes and that we're living in a certain level of love. And then we're graced with an awareness of a yet deeper love that's so deep we can't comprehend it. That as it overwhelms us or touches us or reaches us, but we don't know what to make of it.

Jim Finley: In that sense, it's a dark night by the very luminosity of our inability to grasp it from where we presently are. The dark night then takes on a different meaning, in which once we've got a glimpse of that brighter light and our eyes get adjusted to it, then we see that our present level of love is a dark night and it's a kind of a darkness because it's a deprivation of the deeper light of love that we've been graced to experience. And then we see we want to then move into that brighter, but we want to stabilize in it and we want to leave behind that lesser degree of love, because now we've seen something that's richer.

Jim Finley: And then the dark night comes that we're attached to the lesser love. We're attached to it because these are patterns of the mind and heart. And it has to do with issues of control about not knowing how to leave them behind. And so we need to do love's work to courageously link beyond our present comfort levels into the bright light. And then as we stabilize in that, then a new wave it starts all over again, then there's another wave of love. And that goes on over and over and over. So it keeps refining us and refining us over time. So I was saying this, if we could see how this works in married love, then we could see how it works in parenting, or with the artist or the poet or the teacher or the healer or the person in

sobriety or the personal lives alone, any deepening of a love and the foundations of life itself.

Jim Finley: The dark night is a poetic metaphor that gives us a language for that, because if we could see it in each other, then we'll return back to John of the Cross to see in the same continuous way, how does it go on between us and God on the dark night within this infinite love? So that was the logic for that session opened to help the listeners see that.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. And it was very helpful. So I appreciate. And that explanation you just gave us a great summary. And I do want to repeat some things back because I think you've just provided a lot of clarity for us. So the dark night is about the deepening of love and how we might experience the deepening of love.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: And then I noticed last week and you said it again, there's these two aspects to the way love deepens. One is that we sense the deeper love and it's so bright we go into a dark night, we're blinded by it.

Jim Finley: It blinds us, that's right.

Kirsten Oates: Then on the second side of it, there's the dark night of longing for that loves, so fleetingly glimpsed to use your words. And does that dark night feel more like a longing? [crosstalk 00:05:37]

Jim Finley: Yes, exactly. It's a longing to abide in the depths of fleetingly glimpse as it grazes us, then having experienced it, having tasted it, then we long to abide in it. But the night is we don't know how to abide. We need help from love to follow loves promptings to do that. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: That's so helpful. It's just a great rubric, I think, to then apply to these different kinds of loves, which I'm hoping we can take some time to do a couple of different examples in this episode. In the previous episode you said whenever there is love, there is God.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: And I wondered... I think it's so hard to define love. So this sense that you've spoken about oven interior knowing, and then there's the in between, the something in between.

Jim Finley: Yes. This idea first in John and scripture that God is love. So it says, and therefore wherever there's love, there's God. For the one who says he loves God and hates her brother says that person is a liar. So God is the infinite love that we experience and recognize in the love amongst ourselves, that God is the infinity of that love. And so what is love? We might say, and just for John of the Cross is so beautiful and some of his poetic insights into this love, we might say that love is first I want to apply or the person sees the beloved, as they see another person. And they see within the person the goodness of the person, a deep goodness. And the will is drawn to unite itself or to be one with that goodness, or to seeing of a certain depth of goodness or beauty. And then seeing that the love in us it sees that we see the person through the eyes of love.

Jim Finley: And then in seeing that, we're drawn and we want to be one with that goodness. So John of

the Cross says love produces likeness. So I can't be one with a beloved unless I join the beloved in that goodness. So the very love for the beloved draws forth in me to be faithful to the goodness in me. So the beloved and I can be one with each other in the goodness of love that we see in each other. And then in that uniting of that, then we seek them to be there for and with each other in love. And this is where it gets specifically in marital love. And this way John of the Cross these nuptial mystics, this way they see marriage as the main metaphor for then they're moved to give themselves to each other.

Jim Finley: Now, the teacher gives himself to the student, the doctor to the patient, to the person who works with the poor. We give of ourselves because we see the goodness in them. But particularly in nuptial love, it's a physical, emotional, complete donation of oneself to each other in love. And then they sense in faith that their love for each other sacramentalizes or embodies God's love that led them to each other, and they experienced God's love and their love for each other. And so those would be some of the parameters of lover, aspects of love.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, that's so helpful. And then what I'm hearing is whether it's married love or the love from the teacher or the doctor, that it's this awakening to God's love within it that opens up on the infinite possibility of the love. Is that...

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. That we see then the God's love is the love that gives us to each other. It's God's love we see once the child emerges. But we express our love for God in and through our love for our child, in and through our love for the beloved, in and through our love for the students, by loving the beloved by loving the students who are loving God present in the student, present in the world and so on. And likewise, that applies to art, that the artist or the poet with the one given to art or poetry is really moved by a love. They love poetry and they give themselves to the poetic and they want to abide in the poetic. And then they want to offer it as a love offering of what's given to them.

Jim Finley: The same with the artist visually. They see something immensely lovable in the flower or whatever it is and so they seek to surrender themselves over. They kind of channel that beauty out onto the canvas, whatever, so that when we see they gift us with that. So it's like they're offering. So we need to find likewise living alone with all your heart or being one with the earth. So we find that which moves us to love and to give ourselves to it in love. And the more we give, the more we get back. So the richness of the love is the self donating love of going forward to be one with that which we recognize the goodness that draws us to the love so it becomes a love path, like modalities of love.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. And John of the Cross he is concerned about helping us find our way to the ground of love, which is God, so that we might be in alignment or fidelity to the love that we're built for.

Jim Finley: Yeah, I think John of the Cross put it this way. And realize he's writing specifically culturally to the cloistered nuns and friars is a kind of a question of vocation that applies universally to everybody. He's assuming what we're saying here, that as he's

assuming that we realize God wants us to be an awake, present, engaged, caring, loving person, because God is love and to love God and so on. But what he's concerned about, then, where the dark night comes in is that when we take this to prayer, not that we find God's love in the beloved, in the child, but we find God's love in God in prayer. And we find God's love communicated to us first in our beliefs, through our faith, and through our constellations and through our insights and through our aspirations. So when we sit in prayer, this is how we grow in love. And then we carry that God's love for us and our love for God and we carry it out into our spouse, the child, the neighbor, whatever.

Jim Finley: John of the Cross is talking about the dark night where we start getting blinded by a light in which... We'll put another way, is that this is a way it goes with us on this earth, the way we're talking now. But when we pass through the veil of death, we're going to pass beyond God's presence mediated, or sacramentally embodied in our thoughts, in our aspirations, in each other. And we're going to crossover an unmediated infinite union with infinite love in glory. He's talking about what happens when God decides not to wait until you're dead to start communicating to you unmediated love of God. And that blinds our finite eyes because it utterly overwhelms the finite ways of experiencing God's presence as the beginning of an infinite way of experiencing the infinite [inaudible 00:14:15]. So he's offering guidance in that.

Jim Finley: So that's his concern, but he sees it... This reflection that I shared on married love, it helps a lot if we can see it first at that same transformative metaphor, the dark night is fully present in each other because it's a continuum. It's an unbroken enrichment of that which is fully in each other, is in crosses over, like really dying of love really. It's like surrendering yourself over to love like there's nothing left of you but love. And that's what he's offering guidance in. Those who in prayer feel themselves that that's starting to happen to them.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yes, this brings us to the beautiful picture you gave us around the ocean, and being ankle-deep in the ocean. But the ocean is still the, even at ankle-deep, it's still the infinite depth of love is giving itself away at every level of the ocean.

Jim Finley: Yeah. So let's say using that as the metaphor, let's say at the level of ego consciousness, or the day by day ego consciousness of these mediations, we're at the ocean, we're kind of amazed by it. We're ankle-deep. And it's true we're on ankle-deep, but if we head out to deeper water, get plenty deep soon enough, where that deepening is a quantifiable, measurable deepening, one foot, two feet, 10 feet, 10 feet, 1,000 feet, 10,000 feet, and so on. And that's life in the ego consciousness that can be measured, and it's real.

Jim Finley: But what if poetically were saying that ultimately speaking, what if the ocean and it's hidden center, here the ocean becomes a metaphor for God infinite love? What if in his hidden center is infinitely deep, like it's an abyss, it's a bottomless abyss of love? And what if the bottomless abyss of love is giving itself away whole and complete in each incremental degree of entrance into it?

Jim Finley: So even when you're just ankle-deep, you're already in water way over your head because you're already... And God will live and move and have our being. Spiritual consciousness is the awakening of that. See? So it is that love moment when we were in that Merton sessions, turning to see a flock of birds descending. We're seeing children in a moment they're really children. It flashes forth something boundary listen vast that's intimate and unexplainable. And it's like that.

Kirsten Oates: What's so challenging in listening to these talks is that beautiful metaphor of the ocean and how we can switch out of the measuring problem solving mind and into the poetic sense of an infinite presence flowing through the ocean. And you can have that brief... My heart warms or upticks a little bit as I think about that. So why can I just realize that now that makes sense? I feel it. One cannot be fully realized in my experience.

Jim Finley: Exactly. But let's say when we hear it, when we hear this evocative language, it sounds beautiful, and we know is beautiful because it's true. And so we're momentarily kind of taken by the truth of it. But then four seconds later, it drifts away because we're back to cell phone went off. And for some people, that's what it's like. But what starts to happen with some people, and this is the spiritual path, the person says, "I wonder what I could do about that" especially if this fleeting moment is not a moment in which I intuit something more was given to me. But I fleetingly glimpsed the bliss like nature the love that every moment really is. What is the path along which I could stabilize in the habitual underlined state of interior quiet amazement and gratitude, which is the path. How do I do them?

Kirsten Oates: And this sense that depth is always present, that we catch the momentary glimpse of, but you use this line of how we skim over the depths of our own lives. It's just our natural tendency [crosstalk 00:19:10]. And the way I think our society operates to pushes us into busyness and deadlines, and we're a society that doesn't make room for the depth of our own experience either.

Jim Finley: I think that's true. I mean, I think what the tradition teaches is that in one sense, that's our natural tendency. But that natural tendency is really the unnatural tendency, because the natural tendency is the God given desire to abide in the depths. It's destiny. So the whole mystery in Christian this image of original sin, that is a blight on the soul. But there's the traumatized capacity to abide, We're exiled from it. The Buddha called it ignorance, Jesus called it blindness. You have eyes to see, but you don't see. So we can kind of sense we're caught up in it, but there's something contrived about it. I mean, there's something... I feel more interiorly grounded if I could stabilize in the deeper place my soul longs to go. But it's elusive. That's what these podcasts are about, that's what the teachings are about. What is this kind of very childlike, humble, patient attitude, and all sincerity, in which we have the daily rendezvous with God, in this processing carry it through the day so little by little by little, it becomes more and more stabilized for us?

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, beautiful. You talked about the nuptial love being taught across different traditions, not just in the Christian mystical tradition, but across other traditions as well.

Jim Finley: Yes. Say in every world religion, each world religion has its own mystical lineage to it. So in Judaism and Torah and the prophets, you have Kaaba law, Kabbalistic mysticism and Judaism. And in Islam, you have the Sufi tradition. And in Hinduism, you have Patanjali,

the yoga sutras of the yogi namaste, this deep of realization. And in Buddhism, you have seeking to realize what the Buddha realized on the night of his enlightenment, the outer purity of the Dharma Field free of craving, free of delusion, free of reification, turning things into thoughts as kind of the divinity of the phenomenal world. So in those traditions, some of the traditions are almost lined up with this love mysticism would be the Sufi tradition, Rumi, which is a love mysticism. And also Bhakti yoga, the Bhagavad Gita, the beloved.

Jim Finley: And so you have this love mysticism in Hinduism, and love mysticism in Sufi. Then in Christianity later in this series, when we talk about Meister Eckhart, he sees it as mind, have a virginal mind. And I think the parallel there is in Buddhism, on emptiness in mind. You see love in Eckhart and in Buddhism. In Buddhism, it's in the bodhisattva, and compassion is the body of emptiness. So both are always present. But Thomas Merton was very good at seeing these affinities between his own mystical lineage as a mystical Catholic. And he invited these dialogues with Abraham Heschel with the Muslims and so on, because he wanted those in their own tradition, that transcend their tradition through mystical union they recognize each other. And we have much to learn from each other about this abyss like love at every moment and every breath like that.

Jim Finley: Turning to the Mystics will continue in a moment.

Kirsten Oates: I find that really exciting to hear the way we can be in an experience of kind of solidarity around some of these truths with other traditions and learning from each other. I think that's a great thing for us all to hold in our hearts.

Jim Finley: Me, too. And when we're talking in the Merton section, we're talking about that. We said the world will not survive religious people based on tribal consciousness, because they'll use it in the name of attacking and brutalizing each other, we see that. It's a bit of those in each tradition moved towards what's deepest in their tradition, which is its infinite union. They converge at the center and recognize each other. So they would speak with one voice. It will be a powerful unity message to the world. And CAC, the living school and so on is very much in concert with that.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Even though these mystics use nuptial love as the metaphor, it still is just a metaphor, so people who may never get married or who choose a life of celibacy or singleness, this teaching is still for them, because it's just the poetic vision- [crosstalk 00:24:57]

Jim Finley: Yeah. John of the Cross wasn't married. Teresa of Avila wasn't married. All these classical mystics we speak of none of them were married, interesting enough. We need more married mystic. There's historical reasons for that by the way, whether it's that formal recognition of the married mystic. No, it's really we take that metaphor, and in the Old Testament, the Song of Songs, see this love, I will kiss the beloved. I went out seeking you and you were gone, and so on, is really for all of us, because how can I find this love present in the life that I'm living? So let's say if I live alone, not just reluctantly, because I have no choice, but what is solitude as a path? But time is never less alone and one alone, because God alone is God and I alone am who I am.

Jim Finley: So there's an interior intimacy to solitude. And I can love solitude and live by solitude like the hidden life of God as a path that touches the whole world in ways I don't understand. So

likewise for the artists, for the poet, or someone who teaches little children in a classroom, you spend yourself. You just give yourself to them in love, and it circles back around and touches you. And you're touched by how wonderful they are or how beautiful they are or how grateful you are to be with them every day. And so that's what we need to find. We need to find where providentially in the midst of where we're living, where whatever the circumstance is, that is the circumstance in which we're defining this, quote nuptial love. This each onto each self donating love of this love giving itself to us.

Kirsten Oates: And you say that John of the Cross if he was meeting with us individually as our spiritual director, he wouldn't start with his nuptial love and what he would start with- [crosstalk 00:27:03]

Jim Finley: Can I record this, John of the Cross? Yes, sure. Go ahead.

Kirsten Oates: But he'd start with your own life and where this might be arising in you. And then you offered something else in that session. Even in the discussion between the two people about that person's life between John of the Cross and the director that the love may arise even in that encounter.

Jim Finley: Yeah. See, I think this is so important in psychotherapy, like the depth dimension of therapy or spiritual direction. A person doesn't come to spiritual direction and get a lecture on definitions of God. And the director doesn't start right in with a lecture, the director starts by listening. And then the director joins the person on where they are and the person feels met where they are in the desire for God. And then that relationship between the two of them can become a sacramental moment in which the love arises for both of them in the encounter. Yeah, sure.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, it's a beautiful picture of spiritual friendship and how we might be able to invite this kind of depth in the way we listen to and talk to others.

Jim Finley: That's really true. And even these podcasts are these way, I mean they're so mysterious in a way like monastery in Cyberspace thing that you and I will probably never see the vast majority of people might be listening to this. And some might be listening to it after you and I are both dead. And we're woven into them and they're woven into us, and there's a kind of a non spatial recognition or something not limited by space or time. And the love that arises in this love space, the eternity of it all is sort of mysterious. But the path is being sensitive to things like that.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, yeah. And you passing on John on the Cross means he's not limited to time and space to the way you're passing on his teaching.

Jim Finley: Yes. I shared it. I don't know if I did. As I would say with Thomas Merton and direction at the monastery, and I saw he really was a living mystic. I saw that he embodied the lineage. And I would take John of the Cross, walk out in the woods, sit at the base of a tree, and read John of the Cross out loud to myself. And it was the same voice back to the six... Like a timeless voice through the ages, like that. And then there's also the tradition that when the teacher dies, the teacher still helps you. That he's present in the beauty of his words. It wasn't just words for him when he wrote it and it's not just words for him now. And so it was a kind of interconnectedness that crosses the boundary between birth and death and time, and

we're woven into that.

Kirsten Oates: With a pause, little breath. It's a beautiful concept. Well, I wanted to use an example from my life to see how this might translate. I appreciated you sharing your vows with Maureen, that was beautiful. And so I wanted to offer something, too. And so Jimmy may stand in as my spiritual director for this.

Jim Finley: Okay.

Kirsten Oates: Take a sip of tea.

Jim Finley: I'm ready.

Kirsten Oates: Well, what came to mind to me when I was listening to that episode and... As people are aware, I was not able to have children naturally. And in the end, my husband and I decided not to pursue any other avenues for having children. But then, many years later, my sister in law died unexpectedly and tragically and left her son completely alone, no father on the scene, and yeah. So I felt a call in my heart, and I did feel like that a deep, deep, deep call in my heart to adopt him into my heart like my own son. And it was, in terms of what you describe as a dark night, there was something about the loss of a mother's love. And actually, before she died, the night before she died, he said to me his greatest fear his whole life had been the fear of losing his mother, and he didn't know what he was going to do.

Kirsten Oates: And it was kind of in that moment that my heart started to break open and want to be there for him. And I said, "I don't know what you're going to do either, but I know you won't be alone. I'll be there." And so would that be a kind of dark night? It was a new kind of love for me. And I will say too I haven't had a baby. So I haven't been through that kind of physical pain. But there was a lot of physical aching and pain around the grief and sadness he was facing. I felt that in my body, the sense of the loss of the mother's love.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Sure, a few thoughts coming in, we'll practice here how would that apply here, dark night. Let's say first of all that the maternal instinct is in every woman, is part of a woman's nature. And the paternal instinct is in every man, is part of [inaudible 00:33:10] it's a dimension of the feminine as a maternal instinct. But not every woman is very aware that in very strong or significant way. Likewise, as there are some women who have given birth to a child or more than one child, and they're not at all motherly to those children. The mother love energy isn't for different reasons. So one way to look at this, then, is a dark night begins by God instilling in you the desire to be mother. And it comes as the awakening of your innate nature given to you by God as a woman, like the awakening of the mother energy.

Jim Finley: But then, the desire to be a mother, one is a dark night and the motherhood is incomprehensible. It's a mystery no one can adequately explain the mystery of being mother or father. But then, the dark night was a ray of darkness, and that you decide to be a mother and couldn't be a mother, that's okay. So then you say to God, "Well, gee, this isn't fair." I mean, seriously because this is a lot of tears here, this goes deep, deep, deep, deep, because it isn't a temporary thing, this is for the rest of your life. This is for keeps. And so what are you going to do then with this desire that can't be consummated physically, the way would normally be consummated by having a child? And so then you say that that unconsummated desire, speaking about this poetically now, was preparing you for an unexpected

motherhood.

Jim Finley: When his mother died, not only did his mother die, but of all the people to say, I don't know what I want to do without my mother. And he said that to a woman who so deeply wanted to be a mother, that that's God right there. And then you were moved, and you didn't have to think about it. I want you to know, I'll always be here for you. And in that moment, there's a kind of a spiritual motherhood. That's the essence of the motherhood, a God is the infinite mother who mothers forth these maternal energies. So I think sometimes this unexpected depth of love comes out of expected ways. For example, the mother gets unexpected intimations of being smitten by her child in the presence of her child, or the husband and wife get unexpected depth deepening of their love for each other.

Jim Finley: But sometimes, we were given a desire for something, and we can't consummate the desire for the deeper thing in the way that we're in. And that dark night of being powerless, an unexpected way that God has in mind comes rolling over us. And we're kind of surprised by it. I mean, we couldn't have planned it if we tried, it's such a mysterious bonding, very deep, deep, deep, deep thing. Then it happens again that you sit with it. You know it's true, you can feel it. But it's also a dark night, and that it's even more unexplainable than ever. You know what I mean?

Kirsten Oates: Yes.

Jim Finley: But the unexplainable depth of that maternal fulfillment, God's the infinity of that depth. And in some sense then, it's an intimation of eternity. It's an intimation of an eternity because in a way, we might say that God, the divine father, is the infinite origin of the mystery of the desire to be a father. This is innate desire of every father, man. And God the divine mother is the infinite origin of the desire to be a mother. So God mothers us. God is mothering us, and we're mothered by God into this love through this mother energy like this. By the way, this is an insight into least what celibacy is meant to be as a mystical depth, because by this sublimated love energy.

Jim Finley: So let's say Teresa of Avila, is over the centuries has mothered many, many, many, many, many people that weren't among a number into the love of God. And John of the Cross was never married and had no children. But he's fathered many, many, many, many people into God's love. And so I would ask those would be some of the ways that I think would be worth looking at. And by the way, another piece of it is, it never takes away someplace in yourself that you wish if it were possible you would have been a mother. And that little piece is precious thing, because that's the poignancy of the mystery. But we're sometimes given a gift on God's terms, not on our terms, and it's part of the path.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you, Jim. The other part of the teaching you offered that made me think of this relationship with Will, is where you talked about the pure the love, the more important not to be passively in collusion with the compromises. And I think when Will came into my life, I became very aware and had a strong desire not to do anything that might be out of my negative habits or that might have a negative impact on him. And I became very kind of vigilant about looking for that.

Jim Finley: That's right. That's right. John of the Cross says here too. He said the more love deepens

between two people or group, say between two people, the more the love saddens them to think that they would do anything to cause sadness to the beloved. That love prompts them to be faithful to what love is asking. And so it keeps refining our intentions like this. And then we see that we're not always able to live up to that intention. And God has mercy on us in it and inspires us anew to keep living up to it. And so that's an important piece of it, [crosstalk 00:40:19] we're meant to be indifferent.

Kirsten Oates: ... dark night moments, because it seems to have that same rubric within them when you do something that negatively impacts the beloved. And it's a moment where you really long for the love to be pure and to never harm anyone.

Jim Finley: Yes, Let's put it in this way. Anyone who's been married for a while, you know very well each other's infidelities to all that love could be, resentment, withholding intimacy, wanting to control, being insensitive to the hurting places, being... Everyone knows that. And they feel the sadness of it. And they feel a call to renewed vulnerability to keep calling each other out in a loving, respectful way as loves work. And so knowing that we're loved by the beloved in the midst of our infidelities, to all we know the beloved deserves, is part of the poignancy of love, which is an echo of how God loves us. That's why I say to people, we're all unfaithfully faithful and faithfully unfaithful. Look how faithfully unfaithful we are. It must be something to it. And we're not done yet either. I'm not going to live up to [inaudible 00:41:47] and yet, even though we're so faithfully unfaithful, we're still unfaithfully faithful. And that's the mystery of love, I think. I think that's the tenderness of it.

Kirsten Oates: It feels to me to like this same mystery of the way the dark night's described. It's that knowing and longing, but not quite being able to maintain the depth. Yeah. [crosstalk 00:42:12] deepening, deepening, deepening.

Jim Finley: Yeah. See, because if I could live up to love, that'd be one thing. Although I want to live up to love, and I fall short in living up to love, and once there is a dark night to me because it saddens me but then I see to God, it makes no difference. I see that God's infinitely in love with me anyway in my inability, which is experiential salvation. And this as part of the mystery of love really I think is that.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. And that just reminds me in those moments how important it is to bring that to God's presence and to find that love and compassion for ourselves when we make a mistake so that we can come back grounded in love and compassion to make the apology or to try something different.

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. We used to always say, you know, in AA they talk about practicing rigorous honesty. And that is rigorous honest you just bring yourself forward. The way I talked yesterday, I should have... It's like there's just the willingness. And then that makes you a person who's easier and easier to be with because you're more and more real. You're more and more... It's a very paradigm paradoxically freeing thing.

Kirsten Oates: I do remember when the situation with Will where I was trying to kind of fully adopt him into my life and make those transitions. I did turn to God to be fueled by love and a patience and an energy that was beyond what I had previously known because love was demanding that of me. Do you feel prayer can operate that way if we call on God to really

help feel and expand the love we're learning to bring into the world?

Jim Finley: I really do. So for example, let's say in prayer say we're reading the Gospels, and let's say in reading the Gospels, Jesus saying fear not. And fear not because with you is impossible but with God all things are possible, infinite. You can't do anything to stop me being infinitely in love with you. It's set. So now we got that settled. At least for me God says it's settled, I know you're still trying to take that hint. Then we realize we the truth of it but it's almost we can bear being conditionally loved. But to be unconditionally loved, because there's no control in unconditional love. So the more I realize that's how God loves me, it inspires and moves me within my limitations to pass it on, to share that with people because God shares it with me.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Well, I hope this dialogue has been helpful to people. And I do wonder if there's listeners out there that have experienced their own way of going through the dark night as a teacher or as a poet or as a baker or as a... It would be lovely to hear some of those stories to make it feel real for everyone. Jim, in the next episode you're going to go back to the format of lexio and you're going to kind of reflect on how this nuptial love, the metaphor of nuptial love relates to the unitive love between God and us. Is that...

Jim Finley: Yeah, what we're going to do we're going to take a break here, a little space here. In a way, we're going to continue what you and I have been doing. Only now I'm saying, now that we're hopefully experientially clearer about the dark night as this transformative mystery, then I'd like to return in a briefer time, returning back to John of the Cross in his book, *The Dark Night*, on how the same continuum of the dark night goes on between ourselves and God. And so to kind of round out again, returning back into St. John of the Cross. And that in turn will then leave us to talk about the light that shines out of the darkness of being married to God, the mystical marriage and free yourself and I conclude with that. So yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Well, thank you for today, Jim. This has been a gift, and sending love to Maureen and to Will who have joined us in the midst of today. I felt both their presence in our discussion. Thank you.

Jim Finley: That's great. Thank you.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for listening to this episode of *Turning to the Mystics*, a podcast created by the Center for Action and Contemplation. We're planning to do episodes that answer your questions. So if you have a question, please email us at podcast@cac.org or send us a voicemail at cac.org/voicemails. All of this information can be found in the show notes. We'll see you again soon.