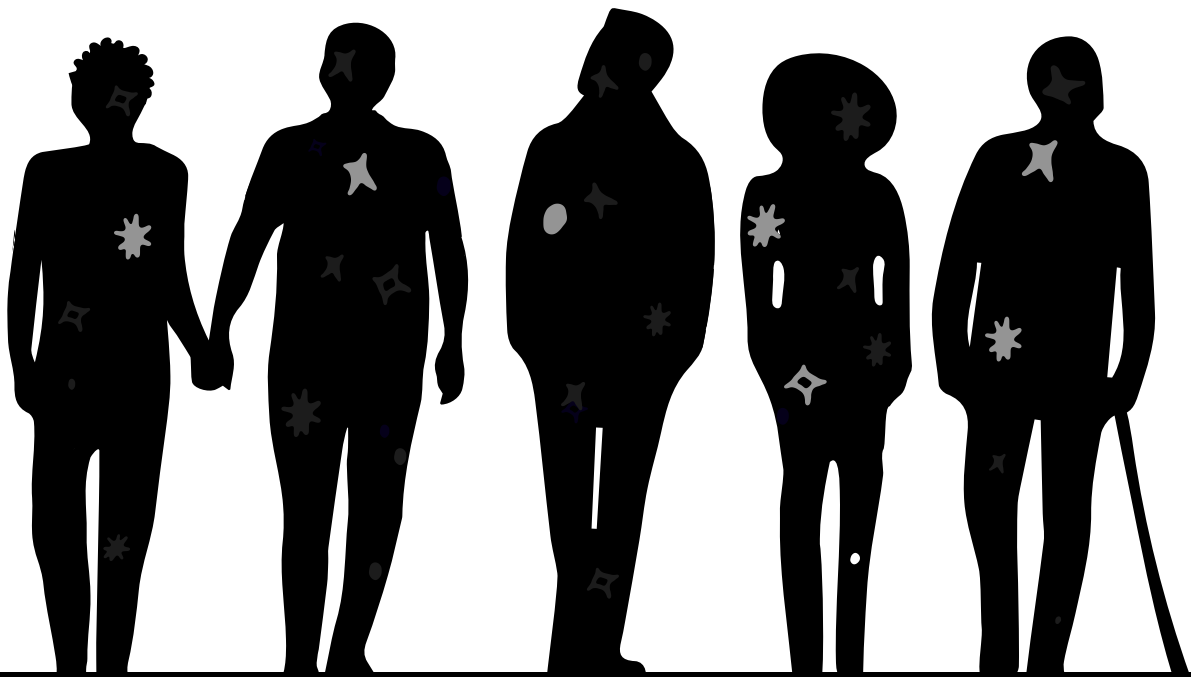


# THE COSMIC WE

Episode 1:  
Finding Refuge in the  
Interior Space

with Dr. James Finley



from the CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION

- James Finley: It was years later, after I left the monastery, that I saw that I had to really... Instead of seeing my spirituality as hiding in some interior place within myself, I had to find in my spirituality the strength to give me the courage to face my life as it was. I had to turn it around. So instead of using my spirituality as a medium of dissociating, I had to use it as a medium to heal from dissociating, to be authentically present to myself and the people in my life. And so it's in that big circle that I went through when I sat with people in psychotherapy, I saw how often there's variations of that pattern for people.
- Donny Bryant: This podcast explores the mystery of relatedness as an organizing principle of the universe and of our lives.
- Barbara Holmes: We're trying to catch a glimpse of connections beyond color, continent, country or kinship. And we're going to do this through science, mysticism, spirituality, and the creative arts.
- Donny Bryant: I'm Donny Bryant.
- Barbara Holmes: I'm Barbara Holmes. And This is The Cosmic We. Welcome to the second season of The Cosmic We, a podcast that explores relatedness beyond color, kinship, continent or country.
- Barbara Holmes: As we did in the first season, we're holding conversations with guests who live, work, and share their giftedness through science, service, spirituality, and the creative arts. And during these conversations, we hope to catch a glimpse of the mystery of relatedness as an organizing principle of the universe.
- Barbara Holmes: Today, we're really delighted to introduce Dr. James Finley. He is a colleague of mine and a core teacher at the Center for Action and Contemplation. Dr. Finley lived as a monk at the Trappist monastery of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky where Thomas Merton was his spiritual director. He later earned degrees from the University of Akron, Saint John's College, and Fuller Theological Seminary. James Finley is known for the books that he has written, the retreats, workshops he's held. He is also a retired clinical psychologist. Welcome, Jim.
- James Finley: Oh, thank you. So glad we can be together like this. Thank you.
- Barbara Holmes: Yeah, your story is fascinating. And from what I can tell, you left for the monastery at the age of 18, and you tell a story of your youth, a violent father, your trauma as a result of his toxic masculinity. Do you want to anything about that, and the ways in which you see toxic masculinity appearing in our society today?
- James Finley: Yes, because I think it's in the context of his toxic masculinity that my spiritual awakening happened when I was still very young actually. Yeah, my father, his father was abusive, and they were from Appalachia, like Protestant Catholic. They came over from Ireland and had farms there in Appalachia. And then they moved. A lot of those people came up into Akron, Ohio, where I live during the war, with the rubber factories there. And he met my mother. She was 18 years old. They got married. They eloped and had six children. And by the time I was very little, maybe three years old,

two, he started drinking, and it was a bad mix for him, just really severe alcoholic. And what happened in his alcoholism would be these raging episodes, being physically violent towards me and my mother, my brothers. He was sexually abusive to my sister.

James Finley: And I think part of it for me as I understood it, when they first got married, he went into art school. He had these beautiful pastels like an artist. And I think there was a creative side to him that he saw in me and made him angry somehow. I sensed that because he just focused on me in a very intense and violent way. And because it happened repeatedly and there was no rescue that had a very deep effect on me in terms of just trying to get to another day and it was just a terrible time really. Yeah.

Barbara Holmes: For those people who are listening today who are going through that trauma right now of violence or abuse, who are waiting for something, God, someone to intervene, what would you say to them when they say, "Where is God?"

James Finley: Here's what I think it's the mystery of it really, how I put it to people, and I think any trauma survivor knows this is true. I'm here in Los Angeles area. So I'll say Los Angeles, but it's all over the world. Tonight in Los Angeles, there are little are going to be incested tonight again. And no one's going to stop that. There are little boys who are going to be beaten again at the edge of their life. No one's going to stop it. Because it went on and on and on and God didn't... If whatever it means that God helps us, it doesn't mean that God stops the cruel... It's a mystery of the cross really. God depends on us with God's help to set the boundary to make it safe.

James Finley: So the first thing is that God... That's why I say God is a presence that protects us from nothing, even as God unexplainably sustains us in all things. But what God does is incarnates that love in getting a realistic position like what can I do about this? What can I do? Where can I go for help? Where can I go for help someone could... And how, if I'm presently in risk, see, where can I get help prudently?

James Finley: Because sometimes if you're presently with a perpetrator, get help increases their rage, increases your risk. So how to be very prudent about doing what you can to get the help that you need to have a psychological ally to help you find your way out of the predicament into a better place. And then to know that as you do that and get out of the immediate situation, the inner work consists of the fact that although the traumas may be over, the internalized effects of trauma still live inside of you.

James Finley: So a triggering event is anything in the present that remind you of the trauma. So someone comes back from Iraq and they're at a stop at a stop site and the car next to them backfires, they'll have a panic attack because also took us a loud noise to recreate it. So to be in the presence of an angry person to be in the presence. And so you get into this post-traumatic stress disorder thing. So then you need help how to work your way through that, to understand those experiences, to integrate those experiences, to accept those experiences, how to be more empowered in the experiences. And that's the journey. It's unique as each person's own life. And so that would be some of the variables I think.

Donny Bryant: Jim, I've been so inspired with your work and the wisdom that you bring and have

shared, particularly making the connection between the inner spiritual transformation of a person in the correlation with suffering. And I think I recall in one of your talks that you said this and I quote, “The mature spiritual person has a heightened sensitivity to suffering.” Could you talk a little bit more about the relationship and the correlation between suffering and the spiritual maturity of individuals?

James Finley: Yes. Well, I would share the specifics of this is unique to each person, but the underlying themes resonate with each other. Like we're all interconnected with each other this way. And so for me, the place for spirituality and suffering touch each other is, my mother was a devout Catholic. My father was very anti-Catholic as was one of the sources of anger in the home as religion. And when she would take us to mass on Sunday, she would tell us to pray to God to give us the strength to get to the things that happened when daddy's drinks.

James Finley: And so one night, I was little more than three years old when my first memories, I remember lying in bed at night in the dark and listening to my father beating my mother outside the door. And I was very sad because maybe he hit me earlier that day. I knew the next day he hit me again if he wanted to and no one would stop it.

James Finley: And so my mother prompted me to do, I asked God to help me. And my experiences as God heard my prayer came to me in the dark and merged with me there in the dark, letting me know that I wasn't alone. It was a very deep experience for me. So when I woke up the next morning and went outside with the family, the violence continued on, but for me, it was much better because when my father thought he was hitting me, he was hitting that effigy of me that people could see, he didn't know the real me had been taken by God to some secret place inside of God where the violence couldn't find me. And so my refuge became this interior place in God.

James Finley: Later on when I became a psychologist, I realized, oh, what I was doing was I borrowed from my mother's religious images as a foundation that I was dissociating. I was in a dissociative state. So I wouldn't come psychotic. I had to distance myself. And so my spiritual awakening merged with that interior secret place, they continued all the way through high school. The violence got worse and that's when I went to the cloistered monastery.

James Finley: It was years later after I left the monastery that I saw that I had to really, instead of seeing my spirituality as hiding in some interior place within myself, I had to find in my spirituality the strength to give me the courage to face my life as it was. I had to turn it around. So instead of using my spirituality as a medium of dissociating, I had to use it as a medium to disheal from dissociating, to be authentically present to myself and the people in my life. And so it's in that big circle that I went through when I sat with people in psychotherapy, I saw how often there's variations of that pattern for people.

Donny Bryant: I appreciate that not just the presence of the reality of the present suffering,

but you're speaking to the unhealed or the unprocessed trauma that could also cause present pain in suffering when we are experiencing those triggers. How do I find peace that may be disconnected from the reality of present suffering?

James Finley: Yes, I think first of all, you find who's around that in any way at all you know to be a safe person in your life? So for me, for example, my grandmother, my mother's mother, she's the matriarch of the family. And I know she loved and cared about me. Her sister, my aunt was a nun, my aunt Lucile, she cared about me. And I had a couple of teachers at school. And so you're not completely alone, like who's the person?

James Finley: And for me, what was deepest of all for me was, especially when I went to the monastery story is, there were certain moments of awakening for me that were very powerful for me. And I knew that God's oneness with me, those granted to me in the awakening. I realized that it wasn't in those moments, anything more was given to me, but I fleetingly glimpse the oneness with God that's true of every moment of my life.

James Finley: And therefore, I can have faith that lives inside of me and through a spiritual practice, I can sink the tap root of my heart like a refuge in God, like a rendezvous place and with God's help little by little. Because I think really the intensity and density of the trauma closes off access to that point of God's oneness with us because it's very subtle, but it's infinitely more real than the trauma.

James Finley: So I would think, first of all, just for little moments, sometimes even childhood moments where you send something of the holiness of life or life matters or God's oneness with us or the mercy of God. And then foster that in a daily rendezvous with God to deepen that as your reference point from which to draw the courage and the insight to very methodically, like courageous prudence to find your way out of the darkness into the light.

Barbara Holmes: And the monastery itself was no picnic. I think you say at one point that it was God's Marine Corps. You tell us a little bit about that.

James Finley: In the Catholic tradition, the religious life, the life of the evangelical counsels, poverty, chastity, and obedience as a symbolic way of expressing one's discipleship. So most people in that life, that vowed life, they have an active ministry, a charism. So teaching or working in hospitals with the poor very expressive.

James Finley: But in the Catholic tradition, they're also cloistered orders. So for example, the Poor Clares, the Carmelites nuns, Teresa of Avila, the Carthusian hermits, the Camaldoli order, and the Cistercian Order that I entered, they have no active ministry. It's completely hidden life giving witness to the ultimate reality of God in our life is that like an eschatological sign in the community. And so it's a very simple life of silence, chanting the Psalms and this interior conversion. St. Benedict talks about the deifying light and silence.

- James Finley: And then this is just before the Second Vatican Council, some of this has changed, but we got up at 2:30 in the morning, slept on a straw mattress on boards in a common dormitory, went up to the chapel and chanted the Psalm seven times a day for canonical hours. We did manual labor ora et labora. The rest of the day was inside. We didn't talk, we use sign language. I didn't talk to anybody for six years except for confession and spiritual direct.
- James Finley: So I lived in complete silence, chanting the Psalms this way. And it really affected me. I can't tell you. And then I had Thomas Merton as my God for it. And I started having these experiences there of God. So it was rigorous, but it was God's Marine Corps in that sense, but you get used to anything. And what I saw in it was a simplicity shining through it. See, I saw it as a radical fidelity to the utterly delicate infusions of God's love and to our heart.
- James Finley: And I was being... See, it's like, how can I learn from God in this place of silence because God brought me to this place that I might learn from God, how to surrender myself completely to God who in Christ I know is a completely surrendered to me. And the reciprocity of mutual self-donation and love, this union occurs. And that union, although it's hidden, it touches the whole world in ways we don't understand.
- James Finley: Thomas Burton had insomnia and he writes in one of his journals. He said, "And suddenly the bed becomes an altar and in a distant city, somewhere, someone is suddenly able to pray." And so our spiritual work like Christ work on the cross, it permeates all time, it permeates all space. And when we're entirely faithful to this hidden way, it's a form of interconnectedness with all of humanity like that. And that's what it was to me.
- Barbara Holmes: And you offer us a lens that few people can get. We all want to know what was Thomas Merton like as a person?
- James Finley: When you know somebody personally, you can say, "Tell me what your friend is like." You go, "Well.., But my sense was this, first of all, I knew that he had written all these books. A lot of the monk from the monastery because they had read his books. So I knew he was an internationally known teacher. I also saw that he held the lineage of the mystical traditions of the Christian faith, that when I was in his presence, I was in the presence of a lineage holder. That the mystic down to the age is down to Christ spending whole nights in prayer to say sometimes when you're in the presence of an awakened person, you know your heart has not deceived you because you center in the presence of someone in whom has been realized.
- James Finley: And so it was that... So I was so amazed that I could be with him really. And what he was with me really, he was very kind to me because all this trauma and a story that I tell is because of my trauma, I was so moved by going to see him. I couldn't talk, I'd hyperventilate. I had a hard time breathing and he asked me what was going on. And I said, "I'm scared because you're Thomas Merton." And I worked at the pig barn at the time, there was a big farm operation there. And this was a brilliant intervention. This is characteristic of him. He said, "Every day under obedience, I want you to end afternoon work early. And before vespers, I want you to come here, knock on my door

and tell me just one thing that happened at the pig barn that day.”

James Finley: And as soon as he said it, I remember feeling inside I can do that. And it leveled the playing field. And we would talk and made joke about the pigs and all of that. And that created the venue for me to open up my heart about these longing for God that came to the monastery. And he told me, he said, “Once in a while, you’ll find somebody with whom you can talk about this, but they’re hard to find.” And he taught me to be radical in it. See, he said, “This is a place, a providential place where you can give yourself completely to God really.” And I took it to heart and lift it.

James Finley: So it was this lovely combination between this kind of wisdom of compassionate empathy that cleared the way for this depth dimension of the love that shines out through it. And I think later on after I had left, it really gave me a sense of psychotherapy too, that you meet people where they are you so that you know they’re not alone. And you sit with them in such a way that it helps them get in touch with the depth dimension of their own heart in God. So they can start growing from it for their healing work. So those are some of the things that affected me I think.

James Finley: I should add also when I left and got married, my first marriage ended into a divorce and this own tragic story of mine. And then as I left, I met Maurine and shared this deep spirituality through her Irish Catholicism and through AA. AA saved her life really. And we became therapists together and spiritual directors. We lived here in this house for almost 28 years together. And I say there were deeply template to Irish athletes with Buddhist tendencies. And we found in each other a bliss really, but it was the bliss of vulnerable simplicity like the holiness of circling around each other, like what’s mystical marriage? How has marriage had built right into it? Or how does parenting?

James Finley: Merton once said in the monastery, he said, “We should all get down on our knees right now and thank God we can’t live the way we want to.” God doesn’t let us get away with it. He said, “you can’t love and live on your own terms.” And so I think we have to grow where we’re planted. See, how can, all things considered, what’s the most loving thing I can do right now for my body, my mind, this person these children? All things considered, how could I walk that walk of love? And the depth dimension of that love is the contemplative way.

Donny Bryant: You mentioned earlier that this idea of the mystical connection or the mystical union or reconnection with God. And would you say that this is the ultimate concern, not only this becoming one or awakening to that oneness that already exists, but also reflection of that oneness with humanity and all kind... Almost is the ultimate concern becoming one or recognizing this oneness and also recognizing that oneness with each other?

James Finley: Yes, this is one way helps me to understand this. I put it this way. Let’s say that in our life on this earth, our experience and understanding of God is mediated to us through our faith. So we hear God loves us. And through the power of the spirit who dwells in our hearts, we know that God does love us. And so God touches our hearts and energizes our insights. With the truth of God in our heart, we open the scriptures

and there's that. We also know God is mediated to us through our emotions, through consolations. My heart's strangely warmed, Wesley's. And so there are these mediations of God's oneness with us on this earth, efficacious under holiness. See, and that's how we walk our walk of discipleship with and for each other.

James Finley: The idea though, here is that when we die, when we pass through the veil of deaths, we'll cross into unmediated, infinite union with the infinite love of God. We'll know God with God's own knowledge of God, and will love God with God's own love of God. We'll be as much God as God is God in our eternal nothingness without God. And the order of grace and love is ultimate divinization of the life and glory.

James Finley: Now, here's the thing I think. Most of us, we walk our walk mediated on this way through faith, a sincere discipleship, sincerely lived and shared. I would put one more step. I think also in our life, there are certain moments from time to time where grace with an unexplainable sense of oneness. Thomas Merton uses some examples in nature. He says, "You're out walking and you turn to see a flock of birds descending. And as if out of the corner of your eye, you sense in their descend something primordial vast and true divine." And it isn't as if you center in the presence of God, but somehow you sense the infinite presence of God is presenting itself and completely giving itself away as the intimate you see your very presence.

James Finley: It's like an unexplainable sense of oneness. And when that's actually occurring, you realize like what a fool I am to worry so the way I sometimes do like this? See, Thomas Merton says the world in time or the dance of the Lord in emptiness, the silence of the spheres it's the music of a wedding feast. And we don't have to go very far to see that dancing when we are alone on a starlet night in the presence of the beloved reading a child good night story, the pause bring lines of a poem, flashes forth and gives itself to us.

James Finley: I think everyone has these. Sometimes they're very tense actually, but they're often extremely subtle. Like if you weren't careful, you would've missed it. And what happens when it passes, it energizes our faith life. It gives vibrancy to this mystical dimension of the ordinariness of everything. But what happens for some people is God places in their heart a longing not to wait until they're dead to live God's life. Like a foreshadowing of the celestial life where this requires that die to everything less than infinite union with God as the sole basis for their security and identity.

James Finley: So what it is in such people, it's a longing they don't understand, for oneness they don't understand, but they know it's real because they tasted it. See, I will not break faith of my awakened heart and my most childlike, there was a granting and where can I find someone well seasoned in such things to guide me? Because then when such a person discovers the mystics, the poetic elegance of their voice goes right to your heart. You can tell they're talking about what you've tasted and they offer guidance like contemplate to spiritual direction.

James Finley: So I think this, we're to walk our walk as it's given to us to do so, efficacious under holiness. And when we cross over into God, that's our life of glory. I go to prepare a place for you. So where I am, you might also be is our destiny. And we know that



we go there. And the one that we're journeying towards is already inside of us, the kingdom of heaven is within you, and we walk it. But for some people there's this mystical intonation. See, how can I in the unresolved matters of my heart, surrender myself over to this wordless communion and let it have its way with me, so I might be transformed by God, into God, to love. And then incarnate that in the way I'm present to each person that I'm with in the way I see the sun moving across the sky. And that's my sense of it for me.

Barbara Holmes: There's a quote in one of your videos. And you say, when you risk sharing, what hurts? In the presence of a person who will not invade or abandon you, then you can learn not to invade or abandon yourself. That really struck a note with me. It really did.

James Finley: Yeah, so I'm going to respond to that and then take it one more step too. Let's say that trauma, especially if it happened to you as a child, especially if it was repeated, especially if the perpetrator showed no remorse, and if there was no rescue, it soaks into you and you're hypervigilant because you're still in the timeless world of the unconscious, those traumatized aspects if you still live in there.

James Finley: And so with therapy is you can't go back and undo what was done, but you can be reparented in love by sitting with a person who treats you with the respect that you deserve to be treated from the day you were born. And so they do not invade you with sermons and answers and whatever. They're very respectful and they don't abandon you. As you learned to be in their presence, that you learn that it arcs over and you learn to treat yourself that way. You can learn not to invade or abandon yourself and you can grieve your walk and walk your walk and understand it and taste it and walk through it and own it and sift it out. And that's the journey I think really.

James Finley: There's one more piece to it I think, what Jesus called a person found a treasure of great price in a field, "The Pearl of Great Price," he says. And what happens in therapy, I've seen this happen so often, you're going along in this process and you unexpectedly come upon within yourself, the Pearl of great price, the invincible preciousness of yourself shining out through your tears. See, it's an extraordinary experience. And sometimes I would say to people, sometimes it's so subtle they're not used to it. Sometimes you can tell when you were in the presence when that's happening.

James Finley: And sometimes I would say something like this to the person. The way you are with me right now, this is what your father didn't see or he wouldn't have done to you what he did to you. This is what your husband doesn't see or they wouldn't do what they did to you. And I know sometimes we can get so internalized with all the pain we get buried under the rubble of our own trauma and we lose our way. But look at you now shining bright like this pretty amazing really.

James Finley: And I got good news and bad news. The good news, this is real. This is real. The bad, it's not bad news, but it's sobering. By the time you get halfway home, it'll all come in again. Because the internalized patterns of trauma are strong, but you can take this moment like a bookmark in your heart. And by coming here little by little by little, it can become more and more habitual.

James Finley: So instead of it just happening with us, it can happen at home. And I give them exercises at home to do. And the more stabilized you get in the Pearl of great price, which is God infinitely in love with you through and through and through and through in all your wayward ways. The more you're established in that, the more you'll find the courage to face what you need to face, to walk through what you need to walk through at your own pace so you don't get retraumatized. Because if you go too fast, you'll get flooded again. But if you don't get near enough to touch it with love, you'll never heal it.

James Finley: And so this is the subtlety of the path being courageously patient with ourself, backing off, approaching it again. And it's experiential self-knowledge to a transforming process and you come out the others by different, like a deeply wounded unexplainably, precious, loved person in the world. And then your woundedness is your empathy with the suffering of all of humanity. That your suffering doesn't belong to you. We're all woven together and interconnected with each other. So what can I do to become someone in whose presence others are better able to get in touch with the Pearl within themselves? By the way, I listen to them or I'm real with them or honest with them and loving towards them. And that's how we pass on the contagious energy of transformation in the world, I think.

Donny Bryant: Speaking in reference to the journey or the pathway to healing, you mentioned earlier that Thomas Merton Was also a holder of the legacy of mysticism. One of the mystics that I would like to maybe glean from is Guigo II in his work *The Ladder of Monks*. You speak about this in depth in some of your work and your talks. Could you help us make the connection with some of the practices and the principles that Guigo discusses and help us to understand how spiritual practice, spiritual discipline that is elaborated on by Guigo can help us in spiritual transformation, particularly in the area of healing?

James Finley: I think Guigo in the turning to the mystic series when we go through, he's like Teresa of Ávila in this sense, they both start at the beginning. The other mystics I assume you've done your homework in psychological spiritual maturity and discipleship and they start talking about the touch. But Theresa and Guigo, they start at the very beginning. And so in short, what Guigo says is basically. He speaks of a ladder to heaven and there are four rungs of the ladder. Each rung of the ladder is a gray state of consciousness.

James Finley: And so the first rung of the ladder is *Lectio Divina*, which is an actual act. In other words, it's an actual act. And what *Lectio* is this, is you open up the scripture, say the words of Jesus, "Fear not I'm with you always." And when you read it, even before you think about it, your heart recognizes that it's true. *Lectio Divina* is sustained receptivity to being intimately accessed by the beauty of God's presence like this. And T.S. Eliot says in *Four Quartets*, "If you hope too soon, you hope for the wrong thing. And if you think too soon, you think with the wrong thing." And we have to practice holding in the bands our opinions about that. We have to practice a kind of sustained receptivity of being accessed that way so it stabilizes.

James Finley: He said, "Then the next step you touch your heart with this, is *meditatio*." In this

context means discursive meditation. You then reflect on it in an inner dialogue between you and God on how is this personally true for you? See, talk to God about this? Like where are you at with this? Or what questions does it raise in your mind? And what does it lead you to sit with? And so you own it in your minds that this is the mind alumin by what was intimately received in childlike silent love, infused faith. See, so it's the intellect infused with this depth dimension of this reflective mind. Like the theologian is the one who prays is that reflective thinking.

James Finley: Next is prayer and prayer is the heart, from the heart center, help me with this. See, I can't do this without you. See, help me with this. Out of the depths, I cry to the oh Lord, oh Lord, hear my voice. And those are the three rungs of the ladder is our way to... And then each time you finish, you ask God not to break the thread of that when you go through your day. How can you have an underlying Lectio sensitivity of being receptively open to God's presence in each person you meet, in each event? How's Lectio. How can you see things?

James Finley: It isn't just what would Jesus do in this situation, but how would Jesus understand this situation, what would Jesus' attitude be towards this situation? What would Jesus say in the light of this situation that might be helpful? And then you come back each day to your rendezvous and you deepen it go on, go on.

James Finley: The fourth run of the latter is contemplation. This the mystical part. He says, "What happens," Guigo says is that you're you're in this desire, you're on this ladder. You're in your prayer time. What happens is the longing for God gets deeper. As a matter of fact, the longing for God gets so deep. It doesn't lie within your finite powers to consummate it. See, and you cry out to God. See, and God's the one who's the author of that love. God's doing a number on you. See, time you on. And then he says, you're crying out to God and then he puts it and God cut you off mid-sentence and comes across as a boundary crossing and grants the oneness and takes you to himself unexplainably in this ecstatic moment, see, a oneness.

James Finley: Then Guigo says when the moment passes, I'm summarizing here (laughs), how I put it when it's over, it's like falling backwards in slow motion. And what do you fall back down to? The Lectio. You're sitting there with the scriptures on your lap, the tear stain page. If you're not, I'm with you always, but now it's different. Because you know at any moment the work can catch fire. You meditate as always, but now it's different because now you know the inner workings of an insight can suddenly break open and a divine knowledge beyond with thought can grasp. And you know that your heart's longings without warning can be unexpectedly consummated by this infinite love that's transforming you into itself unexplainably. And you learn to live like that. See, and by the way, you're still just yourself. You're just trying to get through another day. You're just going, you're just a human being. But that's the point. This is incarnate infinity. This is Christ's consciousness intimately realized and lived. Yeah.

Barbara Holmes: That's just amazing, Jim. I think one of the most delightful exercises that you do with the living school students is the exercise I'll be God and you be you. And each of us holds this spark of divinity. So the God in you addresses with such love, such depth of love that we are almost as we're listening to you speak to us as God transported

from where we are sitting in our seats, attentive and wanting to learn and we're just transported in that moment. I don't know if that moves you at this moment, but...

James Finley: Let me share some. This is big really I think. When I left the monastery, Dan Walsh's taught me medieval philosophy there, Augustine and Aquinas and Bonaventure and metaphysics had a deep effect on me. And when I wrote Merton's Palace of Nowhere and people were asking me to give retreats, Dan Walsh was still living at the monastery. He was living as a hermit at the time I think.

James Finley: I said, how can I communicate this to people out here? That we subsist in God like light subsist in flame, this true cell. And he wrote back, he said, you cannot communicate it. It will communicate itself through you if you're convinced in what you say. And if you are what you say. And you know it'll communicate itself because there'll be a response in the listener. The depth from which the words are coming up from the speaker, but through the speaker, access that same depth with the listener and they know something very deep inside of them knows its being addressed. Something that matters very much and a union takes place in the room. Merton called the spiritual communication takes place in the room.

James Finley: And don't you think that's true in your own lives is teaching or preaching? You can tell when you're in the flow of grace. You can tell you can't make it happen. It's God's voice speaking through us and are surrendered to God as a living word, touching the hearts of people like that. And so it's always meant so much to me when I teach. I just feel, I just try to, I don't know how to explain it really. I just try to just... Because I think I'm trying to respond to the sincerity of the desire of the one who's seeking. And I think that's what elicits this from me.

James Finley: And by the way, that thing that I did with thing I shared here too, I'll say I'll be God talking. Okay. And let's say you're on the spiritual path, you're walking your walk. And so this is God talking, I think it's so wonderful how you and I are becoming so one with each other. I hope this is as good for you as it is for me because I'm really into you. We're an item. I'm quite smitten by you really. See, because when I created you, I created you in the image and likeness of me. You remind me of me. Wasn't to like really? This is really something.

James Finley: And what's good about it is I've always been one with you, but you've not nearly been so one with me. But I want to make you an offer. You don't need to accept the offer seriously. It'll no way I understand. How would you like to not wait until you're dead to realize that when you're dead, it won't be like this for you anymore? See, because now on this earth, we're one with each other on your terms. I know it's on my terms you believe in me. I appreciate that you want to do my will, but it's on my terms on your terms. This is me and your beliefs. This is me and your convictions, this is me and your aspirations, this is... I get it. I created it. I understand it.

James Finley: But when you're dead, it won't be like this anymore. From all eternity will be one with each other on my terms, not your terms. And trust me, you don't have a clue. It hasn't under the mind of man when God is prepared for those who love. I can hardly wait to see the look of surprise on your face.

- James Finley: Here's the offer. How would you like to not wait until you're dead to start now? Three things before you answer. One, in order for this to occur, you're going to have to let go of or die to the last trace of anything less than your infinite union with me as a sole basis for your security and identity. Jonathan crosses a bird held by a single thread is held just as much by a great rope if it won't break the thread.
- James Finley: The next thing, you're not able to do this. The survival instinct is too strong. You can't do this. And the third thing is I'll help you. I'll see to it that your life will become unmanageable. You can count on me to see to it. See, that it's free fall into the Abyss of my love. So what do you think? You want to try it?
- James Finley: See, and then you realize, you go, "Oh, I don't know. Let me think this over. I'll get back to you." But a certain way you realize it's already too late. It's already begun. By the very fact you're even moved by this kind of language. You can tell we're putting words to something because there's a resonance like this. So what is the path to be ever more stabilized in this so that we might share it with others day by day?
- Donny Bryant: Jim, as you described this Cosmic conversation, it made me think that this invitation from the divine is for everyone. That invitation is for all of us. And maybe some of us, the understanding of what spiritual awakening is is becoming aware of this invitation to become one. And I think that's such a beautiful way of presenting this because I think it seems to be the human journey is, in the Hebrew tradition, there's a term "teshuva," there seems to be a reconciliation of returning back to the original state of creation. And it seems that the spiritual awakening, the journey of healing, if you will, which to me is a reconciliation journey, it's really becoming aware of that invitation that you just described, that conversation, that cosmic conversation that is already being reverberated, it's already happening right now?
- James Finley: That's exactly it. That it's never anything other than the immediacy of this very present moment itself. And it's never other insofar as you're moved by such words. It bears witness to your heart. It's your own awakening heart. So we're learning to cultivate it and foster it and be open to it. Exactly. That's exactly right. We're helping people.
- James Finley: Another way I put it sometimes. If you look back at your own life all the years, how has it come to pass that you have become the man or woman who's capable of hearing such things? Capable of recognizing and being moved by them? How has it come to pass? See, is it not true that you're on a journey not of your own making and that God has begun this work and you will bring it to completion? We're always trying to get... You know what I mean, we stabilize in this ever present, calling and lean into it. Exactly
- Barbara Holmes: What a wonderful way to end this conversation. What a blessing you are to so many. You are teaching teachers to teach a contemplative pedagogy, a deepening of spirituality. Thank you, Jim.
- Donny Bryant: Thanks for listening. Would like to leave you with a reflection from our time with Jim Finley.
- Barbara Holmes: Pastor Donny, I'm still sitting with the wisdom and the deeply resonant teachings that

Jim offered during this conversation. I think the quote that struck me the most was, “All things considered, what is the most loving thing I can do right now?” I wonder if I had asked myself that question when I was in the midst of conflict, all kinds of circumstances of life, if I would’ve made better choices.

Donny Bryant: When I consider that question, what is the most loving we can do right now? I think Jim really invites us to answer that with an invitation to experience inner peace.

Barbara Holmes: Yeah, we don’t know how to do it. Most of us are still struggling with how do I pray? Nonetheless, walk with love and the mystics of world that is rife with conflict.

Donny Bryant: Yeah.

Barbara Holmes: So what gives me hope is when Jim says, “You’re on a journey not of your own making.” So that means that God is beckoning, God is inviting, God is walking with so that I don’t need to know how to do it. I need to be willing to just take that first step and walk.

Donny Bryant: It’s almost as if there is a partnership. And the reminder of that is so helpful that regardless of our choices, regardless of our mistakes, regardless of whatever has been done to us, that there is a gracious outcome that we walk in partnership with God.

Barbara Holmes: That is such an amazing hope to hold onto.