



EVERYTHING BELONGS

Tips for the Road

Paul Swanson: Everyone, welcome to another episode of Everything Belongs. Been such a joy to be in conversation with Richard and Mike and some of the other CAC staff. As we begin this series of living the teachings of Richard Rohr forward, in this miniseries, we're really trying to open the curtains and pull back the veil about how we've been creating this podcast and what are the reasons behind it. We often start at Richard's house where we tee up our time where Mike and I are in his living room and Corey's there and, of course, Opie's there. We have these conversations with Richard that try to anchor the direction of where that episode is going. This is going to be true as we continue this podcast in future seasons.

In the first season of Everything Belongs, we're going to focus on Falling Upward. That'll be the book in focus, the one we center on. We're going to invite all of us listening, all of us participate in these conversations, to consider how we live the teachings of Richard Rohr forward, particularly through the lens of this book. We know that context determines things. We know that relationships and time. So, part of our intention with this podcast is to consider how does this teaching and this work live in our lives depending on where we are on that journey.

So I'm here right now with Corey Wayne and Mike Petrow on the CAC campus in our little makeshift studio where we record the voiceovers, where we record conversations like this, and also conversations with our guests. So welcome fellas. It's great to be in this room with you.

Corey Wayne: Good to be with you.

Mike Petrow: Howdy, howdy.

Paul Swanson: And as we pull back this curtain, Corey, I'd love to kick it off with you first to talk about the production. How do we get to this point and this journey of this podcast, Everything Belongs? How did it start and what are some of the things that you think would be of interest for those listening of the shape of this program?

Corey Wayne: I think it's important when thinking about this project to remember that we started this back in 2019. At that point in time, we actually thought this show was going to be an archival podcast of Richard's where we would pull stuff from the archive by topic and work in tandem with the daily meditations. That was the original thought process.

And then, as we moved through the pandemic, we entered 2021, we started this founder transition project because Richard was moving from the center to the circumference of the organization, so to speak, and so we started refining programs and projects. And then, along the way, this show always continually was being developed and what I lovingly refer to as Uriah's R&D lab, but we ended up shelving it for almost a year. And then when it came time to do it, Mike had been saying this phrase over and over in CAC meetings of "living the teachings forward."

So I went back to the drawing board and thought, what if we make a dynamic immersive experience through Richard's teachings of living these teachings from the context of our own lives? Because many of us are emerging from a global pandemic, there's no way of going back to what we thought was normal. So all of us are collectively trying to live into a new normal. I see that reflected in all of the questions that I see coming in from all the other shows. They

love this Christian contemplative path, but they're also asking, "How do I apply this into the context of my own life?" So thus came the setup we have now.

Mike Petrow: Nice.

Paul Swanson: And I love the way you just named the evolving nature of this as well. I feel like that's very much at the heartbeat of this show is, how are Richard's teachings also evolving? I think listeners hear that in our conversations about things that have been nuanced since then. That's just built into the DNA of this podcast and will continue to evolve as we go through the different books of Richard's throughout this. Thank you for that, Corey, and for the evolutionary partnership on this podcast. It's been such a joy. And Mike, I would love to hear your own sense about the evolution of this podcast, the questions that animate this process for why we anchor down on certain conversation points, and what the direction is for the future.

Mike Petrow: Gosh, I love that, Paul, and I love that you specifically highlighted the questions. It was interesting. Last episode we talked about these questions that sort of guide how we do teaching here at CAC and build content. What do we want to know? How do we want to grow? How do we want to show up in the world? But to look at it at the most basic level, it is about the questions.

Curiosity is such a crucial aspect of the contemplative engaged Christian tradition, right? What has been amazing, I had this moment when we were recording the other day with Richard. We were having a great conversation that'll show up in one of the episodes about putting a new wine and new wine skins, and all these things. It doesn't matter. There was a moment where we were talking and I had this overwhelming experience and I almost started to cry where I realized how much it has legitimately changed me to just go and hang out with Richard on Tuesday afternoons.

Actually, I think this is what the idea of living the teachings forward was born out of. How many of us on this team, how many of us listening have read a book by Richard or heard a podcast by Richard, or taken a course, or been a part of The Living School and we hear him say something that's so brilliant and we feel a deep yes inside our heart? It makes us feel not crazy. It invites us home. It gives us a new way to imagine spirituality and Christianity in the world and transformation. And, of course, immediately we have so many questions because then we want to know, "Okay, how do I apply that at my job? How do I apply that as a parent? What does that mean about X, Y, or Z?"

The chance that we've had for the last few years to ask Richard those questions to go, "I love what you're saying here. I love what you're saying about how everything belongs. And Richard, if everything belongs, why does it have to hurt so bad?" And then listen to him take those questions and nuance them and work that through with us. It's amazing and it's such a gift to do that in community, which is a part of what this podcast is about. It's such a gift for us to bring people into that ongoing conversation with Richard and hear him invite us to carry the work forward, and to let us ask new questions of his teaching, and continue to be curious and wrestle with those things. What an awesome invitation.

Paul Swanson: Well said. That's so well said and that is so much the spirit of this show. In this episode,

you're going to get a taste of what future seasons are going to look like. We're calling this episode Tips for the Road, so you'll get a sense of how we intend to work through chapter by chapter, and maybe sometimes we'll take a couple chapters on, through one of Richard's books. We'll anchor in the question of, what do we want to know? We'll engage Richard with the deepening and circling questions that dig deeper for the context of our lives. And of course all of those listening

Mike Petrow: From the Center for Action and Contemplation, I'm Mike Petrow.

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Corey Wayne: And I'm Corey Wayne.

Mike Petrow: And this is Everything Belongs. So Richard, talking about Falling Upward, one of the things I love about the book is how well you use mythology to craft the arc of it. So I'm super curious, what myths or stories have helped you make sense of your journey?

Richard Rohr: Wow. Well, I have to say, even though it never sold that, well, my book Quest for the Grail-

Mike Petrow: I love that book.

Richard Rohr: ... it's all in there. It was the classic hero's journey of the West and after that it'd be... I'm afraid I'm an old Catholic... lives of the saints that I grew up on, idealizing saints, Francis in particular. Is there any other that I read it and I said I want to be like that? If there is one, it isn't jumping out at me.

Mike Petrow: Well, the Parzival myth, the Holy Grail myth, is such a foundation of Western culture. It's so powerful because it's not a story of the hero doing everything right and winning victory after victory. Right?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. That's why I like it. Holy fool Parsifal probably means. It's the German version I do like the best more than the English. The English is too much upper class, the Arthurian legends. The French is too, forgive me, French.

Mike Petrow: That's the Eschenbach version?

Paul Swanson: You just lost all the listeners in France.

Richard Rohr: It's all sweet and sophisticated, but it's good, but in that book I mainly do the German, Wolfram von Eschenbach.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, it's my favorite as well.

Richard Rohr: What is it that makes it... Well, you said it already. You know how to read my mind. It's that he isn't a superhero like we create today for American action movies. American action movies are not in the great tradition of Superman who could fly through the sky and they're Icarus who falls from the sky. So we're not in the tradition of great literature. We really aren't. except when we occasionally created anti-hero like... Who was that that Tom Hanks played? Come on.

Paul Swanson: Oh, Forrest Gump?

Richard Rohr: Forrest Gump. There is an anti-hero.

Mike Petrow: That makes a lot of sense with the theme of Falling Upward or failing forward. Right?

Richard Rohr: Failing forward, very good.

Mike Petrow: "Our wounds lead us," and that's Parzival, so many wounds.

Richard Rohr: I don't think a Western person main line would know how to write a book like that anymore. We are so win-lose success conscious.

Paul Swanson: Richard, teasing it out even further, there's this classic line in Falling Upward.

Mike Petrow: What is it?

Paul Swanson: Where you say we grow spiritually much more by doing it wrong and by doing it right. Oh, go ahead.

Mike Petrow: No, I say I think Bono actually quotes that in his memoir.

Paul Swanson: Right, yes.

Richard Rohr: Bono quotes that?

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Oh.

Paul Swanson: Why do you think that's such an important line for this framework of Falling Upward? Why is that necessary?

Richard Rohr: Well, I got to credit Jesus, and that's what Jesus taught. It's how we've in a primary, fundamental way, misinterpreted Jesus. He says to eat with sinners, to prefer the least. How do we get him into a winner script? Victory chapel. Come on. I know there's a correct way to understand victory, but it's not that way of succeeding.

We have an American version that we prefer, which is about being pure and holy and righteous, and the holier than thou and we miss all the social sins. It's all private purity codes. I don't drink. I don't gamble. I don't dance, so I'm pure. How did we do that? There is no evidence, none, in Jesus. You just have to say, "Well, I believe Jesus was the first non-dual teacher of the West, and the West just doesn't understand paradoxical thinking." He doesn't even like it.

Paul Swanson: One thing I appreciate you saying about Jesus modeling that is that there never seems or appears to be this grand strategy of-

Richard Rohr: In Jesus.

Paul Swanson: In Jesus. Here's the success that this will look like of seven virtues of someone who follows me, but it's the embracing of the journey itself.

Richard Rohr: It's so true.

Paul Swanson: And then the totality of life and that's why he is always saying, "Follow me, come and see." There's not like, "If you do this, then this will happen."

Richard Rohr: He doesn't praise a list of virtues that are all puritanical. America is still puritanical. It really is. Their religion is about being pure in a diet way, a workout way. Saying that to three men in good shape, I'm embarrassed, but that's not what it's about.

Mike Petrow: Well, it's interesting. You know I'm a good originist and I think about how much we think that it's our strengths that get us there, like you said, and it's our virtues of course that get us there, right?

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: Origin says that, "For the soul to know itself is beautiful, it has to be threatened." He says that our wounds turn into health-bestowing wounds. So it's our wounds that lead us to wisdom and our losses that lead us to love, not our strengths, but what does that look like in practical life for you? What does it look like to live that reality?

Richard Rohr: I got to turn it off.

Paul Swanson: Is that Jesus calling?

Richard Rohr: Let me lead into that. One of my disappointments in that book *Quest for the Grail* is that I couldn't find it anyway. I was looking for it. In one of the versions, when the fool or the protagonist meets the king, his first word to the king is supposed to be, "What ails you?" That isn't in the book, is it?

Mike Petrow: Gosh. I've read the book, but I've read so much about the *Quest for the Grail*. I don't remember, but I do know that, "What ails you, [inaudible 00:15:24]" is-

Richard Rohr: Well I can't remember and I the book.

Paul Swanson: So you're off the hook.

Richard Rohr: But do see what that is saying?

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That the first thing he's supposed to ask the king assumes the king is wounded and telling the higher up one, "Join the club until you get vulnerable, the whole thing can't happen." That is just brilliant. "What ails you king?" I would think most kings today will say, "Nothing ails me. I am fit." Now, that came to my mind when you asked the question. What's the question again?

Mike Petrow: What does it look like to actually... Well, to answer that question, "what ails you" or to "let

our wounds become healthy-bestowing wounds” or “let them lead us to wisdom,” how do we do that in a day to day?

Richard Rohr: You have to suffer the daily humiliations that are being given to you all the time, and you don't resist them. Don't fight them. Don't oppose them. Don't disagree with them. Agree with them, not in a self-defeating way, but just a, “Yep, I'm a little shit. That's okay.” Then you're free. So it has to do with practically... Well, Paul puts it in Corinthians, “Do not take offense. Love takes no offense.” You've heard me say this before, but for years I really watched when I'm offended because the staff doesn't respect me like you two.

Mike Petrow: Sorry about that.

Paul Swanson: Glad you're getting my text about that.

Richard Rohr: I just think that is a tremendous opportunity to choose being wrong. Let's assume they're right, that what they don't like before is me. I don't know if in me that just creates a great big open space for God to fill when I refuse to fill it up myself with, “Aren't I wonderful?”

Mike Petrow: Well, I want to ask you this, Richard. You've talked about praying to God for one humiliation today.

Richard Rohr: One a day.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, one humiliation a day. I have to say, in this season of your life, you've become so much fun, so I also see in the humor. Is there something about humor that lets us not take ourselves so seriously

Richard Rohr: Central. It really is central. When you cannot laugh at yourself, you're egoic. You are something that has to be respected. Why do I have to be respected? I want it, but I don't have to be, and I probably would learn a lot more. Would I recognize... If even what this person said is 10% true, I want to learn it. It's a disadvantage of being now well-known that people project all kind of high-minded motives on you and, “Oh no, Richard wouldn't do that.” Yes, he would and admitting that to myself is very good for me. I can walk more lightly on the earth.

Mike Petrow: Is that why you make fun of me to help me be more...

Richard Rohr: I've been trying, but it hasn't had the desired effect.

Paul Swanson: You might have to double down.

Richard Rohr: Double down I think, yes.

Paul Swanson: Using your language, the two halves of life, this is something that came in the second half of life. What guidance do you offer those in the first half of life who are still seeking some of these ways of perfection to try to-

Richard Rohr: Almost always.

Paul Swanson: ... improves oneself, whether it's spiritually, relationally?

Richard Rohr: See, if you're not trying real hard to be a hero, I'd be disappointed in you. It's the boys who go out and get like you three all did, a good education and played sports, and whatever else you did, they're the ones who can suffer a humiliation because they've been on the other side. They've been praised and lauded, but they know it doesn't mean anything. A guy who's really been beat down... I remember a young man at New Jersey, Lewis from inner city Cincinnati. I'd given one of my heroic talks on poverty of spirit, and he came up to me so sincerely and said, "Richard, I don't think Jesus-"

Siri: I found this on the web.

Paul Swanson: What did he say?

Richard Rohr: "I don't think Jesus wanted us to... Poverty isn't good. It's terrible. I grew up with it." He was so sincere. "Why do you say that's good?" And I realized it isn't good for him. He heard it where he had to hear it - a lower middle class family growing up without much. Yeah. So you got to be careful how you say it because there are people who need their jolt of positive mirroring before they can take the truth of negative mirroring. You need both. You really do, but you need enough of the positive to absorb the negative. You can't tell people at the bottom they're at the bottom, or that it's so wonderful being down there where you are at the bottom. No, that's not good. I don't know if I answered your question. Go ahead. Go ahead.

Paul Swanson: No, I think you did. I think you talked about the nuances of what that looks like if one sees himself in the first half of life versus the second, and how even in the first half of life that could be unique and different depending on the context that you're living, and being raised in, and your own personal experiences that are out of your control; what you need in that time versus how that will hopefully be balanced out as time goes by having both the positive and negative mirroring effect.

Richard Rohr: Yes. But let's take a 15-year-old boy. My God, to tell him to be humble. He wants to be for once a hero on the field. Who wouldn't? You're looking at your girlfriend and your parents and, "Are they smiling at me? Am I wonderful?" You cannot take that away.

I think Jesus said it. "Whoever ruins one of these little ones, I really will be upset with him," because you can't take humiliation until you've taken praise. That's the advantage of being given our spiritual identity by God from the beginning. Now we don't know it, but we who are preachers of the good news should be telling people that. "You've got it already; you don't need to work for it," even if you're not the captain of the team.

Even if you're not the captain of the team, one member of the staff, you'll figure out who it is, but he's beautifully spiritual.

I said, "When did you play on the lacrosse team?" He said, "I was always captain of lacrosse." And he was, but a boy needs that, to be captain of the lacrosse team. And then, now I can make fun of him and he doesn't mind it at all.

So yeah, you need positive mirroring, and some rare people get it from God himself. A lot of our saints did. Little kids, they're already in love with God. What are you pointing to? Oh, a question. I thought you were ...

Paul Swanson: Oh. I thought you had to finish this one.

Richard Rohr: Well, you were pointing to your screen. I thought you were pointing to Opie, okay.

Paul Swanson: Oh, no, no.

Richard Rohr: Go ahead, go ahead.

Mike Petrow: No, you can probably cut this, but I wanted to share a poem with you that Paul and I heard this week ...

Richard Rohr: Oh, do, do.

Mike Petrow: It feels relevant to what we're talking about when you talk about getting that positive mirroring. This came to us from a colleague, a poem from Chelan Harkin, and listen to this. It says, "If you think the eccentric God who made the octopus is going to judge you for your sins, I'm afraid you've missed the mark."

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Mike Petrow: "If you think this wild God that spins galaxies as a pastime cares to get fussy about your mistakes, or has ever made anything that wasn't born perfect and luminous, you might need to repent. If you can't yet admit how lovable and infinitely worthy the fullness of your human nature is, and if you think what God wants to do anything but perpetually pour an abundance of love gifts upon you. Well, my dear friend, your soul just might need to go to confession."

Richard Rohr: Wow. Who's the poet?

Mike Petrow: Chelan Harkin, I believe.

Richard Rohr: Never heard of that name.

Mike Petrow: I don't know if I'm pronouncing that ... Yeah, it's a good one, huh?

Richard Rohr: I love the octopus thing.

Mike Petrow: I figured you would.

Richard Rohr: Because talk about a strange animal. Why would God ... Its head just falls over.

Mike Petrow: Well, speaking of heads falling over, did we do it?

Paul Swanson: Yeah, we're at 20 minutes. But did we want to wrap it up with ... Do you want to just ask that last question about homecoming?

Mike Petrow: Oh, yeah, sure.

Paul Swanson: Just because I think that will tie it all together.

Mike Petrow: 100%.

Richard Rohr: Thank you for the poem, thank you.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. So Richard, we've just about come to the end of our conversation. And so, to bring it all home, a very appropriate question; you're talking about mythology and the Parsifal myth and all these things. When I think about nostos, pothos, the myth of homecoming seems to be the foundation of so many of these stories, right? We're longing to return to a home that we've never found, and yet we are always searching for. How is *Falling Upward* a book about homecoming, about coming home?

Richard Rohr: One of the self-revelatory things I say in the new book on the prophets, maybe I've told you before. But the time when I almost always cried, did it once this week, is when people are reunited after a long absence, family members especially. I just choke up and I ask, "Why am I choking up? I don't know these people." But homecoming reunion. And I never had, I don't think, any abandonment issues, but thank you for saying it.

I do think, in the giant metaphor of life, it's about coming back to where you started. And as I approach death, I'm thinking that so much. Well, the best way to say this is not, "I'm dying." I don't know what that means, but, "I'm finally going home. Finally." I don't know what it's like yet, but I can really trust, in my age, that it's home. I don't know where that trust came from or even what home is like. But I'm not going to someplace new; it's to all the places I've known deeply. They're pointing me to the big deep, the big real.

Thank you, that's a great question. I do think homecoming is what it's about. Now I know why I cry at homecoming. Thank you.

Paul Swanson: I'm so struck by ... For me, it feels like every healthy spiritual path is that journey of homecoming. That's the journey of return, of going out first and then the return.

Richard Rohr: Going out first. And coming back.

Paul Swanson: How does that directly relate to *Falling Upward* as a framework, do you think?

Richard Rohr: Well, the creating of the ego, which is a necessary creating, is also the creating of a separation. It's taking myself as central, and you probably got to do that almost 'til 40 maybe, I don't know. It used to be 15 but it's pushed back. And then to allow what you've created to be uncreated. I was a great basketball player; that's gone now. I was good-looking, that's gone now.

And when you can say "Yes" to that and still be happy, you've done the work. Because now, yourself, your true self is in God and not in what you've created. Even though what you've created gave you a nice trail to walk on, gave you something to do each day, but it isn't me. It isn't me. It's just my ... What was the phrase we used to use? It's just my job description? No.

Mike Petrow: Vocation?

Richard Rohr: What did Bill Plotkin use? He had a good phrase. I'll think of it later.

Mike Petrow: Persona?

Richard Rohr: Darn, it's gone.

Mike Petrow: I love this idea, though, what you're saying of coming home to God, coming home to the true self, what you said earlier, coming back to places that you already knew, knowing them differently. It reminds me of that great line from T.S. Eliot, right? "We shall not cease from exploration."

Richard Rohr: Oh, perfect, go ahead. Yes.

Mike Petrow: We shall not cease from exploration. At the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.

Richard Rohr: That's beautiful. He was a true contemplative. In all his poems you see it.

Paul Swanson: But thank you, Richard. We really appreciate your time.

Richard Rohr: You're welcome.

Paul Swanson: This theme of the introduction.

Mike Petrow: Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

How do I get to sound like Paul Swanson? Would I need to do a serious voiceover, ambient music?

Paul Swanson: It's called the Swanson swoon. Welcome back everybody. From the high desert, welcome back.

Mike Petrow: We wish you peace.

Paul Swanson: All right. Welcome back everybody To Everything Belongs. I hope you enjoyed your time with all of us in Richard's hermitage. We're now going to be pivoting to the next segment of the show, and that's usually where we'll be having a guest.

So, I thought to kick this off, I would pivot to the both of you, why the guest that we have for this episode and why guests at all? So, we're pivoting to what is going to be a guest section. And the idea, on a production standpoint for this section, is to have somebody that's living these teachings forward from the context of their own life. So, today's guest is none other than our faculty, Dr. James Finley.

Mike Petrow: You know what's crazy? For years, I had friends who read Richard's work. I had mentors who recommended his work to me, and I just never got into it. And then what happened was I was actually listening to Pete Holmes podcast.

Paul Swanson: The comedian.

Mike Petrow: The comedian, Pete Holmes. The podcast, which at that point was You Made It Weird, it might still be. And he would talk about this Franciscan friar who'd written a book called Falling Upward and how just the introduction to Falling Upward had changed his life and was worth reading. And then eventually I heard him interview Richard, and it sort of blew

my mind and brought me into the conversation.

But one of the things I love about Richard's books is they've influenced so many people and they've generated so much conversation, and Richard loves that. One of the things he always says to us is that he loves how we ask him new questions and we invite him into thinking about his own teaching material in new ways. And so, when we bring these extra voices into the conversation, it really does live the teachings forward. We not only see the influence of Richard's book, but we see how other people influence his teaching by bringing it into new places of thought, which is why I'm so excited about the guests that we have this week.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, we're thrilled that we have Dr. James Finley, CAC core faculty member, with us to talk about the introduction of *Falling Upward*. And Jim really exemplifies why we're bringing guests on the podcast, because through his training as a therapist, through his own life experience as a monk, through his own lived experience as a partner and as a parent, he really brings his own nuanced way of approaching some of the themes of *Falling Upward*.

And we get into some of those mystical elements that he just kneads so well into the dough of life. This is part of why we're doing guests, is because we know that these teachings can be applicable, all places, and sometimes they're most applicable when you push back, or challenge, or re-contextualize, or add a different texture to them to get a different sense of how one can live this out in their life.

And so, we're thrilled to know that, as we begin that first season focused on *Falling Upward*, we're going to talk to a whole host of folks, some who are well-known teachers, some CAC core faculty, and some everyday folks who have just had their own unique perspective of how they live this forward. And so, that is the thrill of this, is the exchange in this contemplative conversation, where we know that Richard will say this. Sometimes we'll ask him a question and he'll say something and say, "Well, I've never thought about it that way." And that is the juice of contemplative conversation, is seeing what arises when folks who are living this in their own context come together and wrestle with ideas. New ideas emerge. Or as we were talking about earlier, new wine and new wine skins.

Mike Petrow: Spoiler alert. One of the things I love about the conversation that's coming up with Jim is that he really demonstrates, like Richard, someone who lives in the first and the second half of life at the same time. Really integrated, just like Richard. Jim has this childlike quality of wonder where his eyes sparkle and he smiles real big and he gets so excited about talking about healing and transformation and the mystical path.

And yet he has this gravitas, this big Gandalf energy where he feels 10,000 years old and as wise as the roots of the mountain. And he just makes all that real for us and helps us experience the teaching in three dimensions.

Paul Swanson: Beautiful. Yeah, his poetic voice through all of that just carries us to the depths of what is possible, I think, in *Falling Upwards*, and seeing it from a whole another angle. Your description, the Gandalf description with the roots, I think, carries the day when I'm thinking about Jim. It really, really fits.

Mike Petrow: Especially with that Hobbit hair and beard.

Paul Swanson: The new beard.

Mike Petrow: The new beard is one of my favorite things.

Paul Swanson: Oh, it sounds like Mike's got a soundtrack for us.

Mike Petrow: This is my music for Jim.

Paul Swanson: This is the Gandalf.

Mike Petrow: Oh, it's so good. Every time I see him, I hear this in the back of my mind. Sorry.

Paul Swanson: Okay. So with that, we hope you enjoy this interview with Dr. Jim Finley. We don't say Dr. Jim. With Jim Finley. Affectionately known as Uncle Jim.

Mike Petrow: Uncle Jim.

Paul Swanson: I like that.

Mike Petrow: Good synergy.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, that was perfect. Jim, welcome. We are so happy to have you be a part of this conversation on Richard's book, *Falling Upward*.

And I love the unique perspective that you bring to this theme, this idea of the two halves of life. I'm wondering if you wouldn't mind just sharing how you bring your own mystical sensibilities and contemplative perspective to how you look at the themes of *Falling Upward* of the two halves of life.

Jim Finley: Yes. Yeah, my sense is this. First of all, it's typical of Richard, he's so insightful, to help us be more conscious of the transformational shift that happens between the first and second half. And how, in the first half, it's kind of an ascent, of getting needs met and finding one's place in the world and working through challenges and all of that, and the complexities of the challenges of it and so on.

Then as the wave crests midpoint, you start coming down the other side. There's a qualitative shift toward gratitude, toward presence, toward being, toward wisdom, toward kind of internalizing the wisdom of the journey and so on. And there's the grace. Faith illumines both halves, so the person who is a faith-filled person in the first half is illumined by their faith in the first half, and as the first half of light person is illumined. And the person in the second half is illumined by faith as the second half is a illumined.

So that's the gestalt thing. My sense is this, and it helped me to put this together in the next issue of wanting, on my take on it. And I'll show the opening scene first and we'll dialogue a bit about it.

Years ago, I was leading a silent weekend retreat, and this elderly woman, she was in her 80s at the time, told me that as she was sitting in the silence of the retreat, there washed over her a vivid memory of herself as a 10-year-old girl growing up on the family farm. And she said that in this memory, she went out one summer afternoon into the orchard of the farm, and

she laid down in the tall grass of the orchard looking at the clouds go by slowly overhead.

And she said the memory was ... And this is why she wanted to tell me this. She said, as she was lying there in the tall grass of the orchard, it became very vivid to her in a way she can't explain that she was lying there in God, this experience, like that. So, I started exploring that. And my thought is this, the first insight I would have, that she was a 10-year-old girl, the first half of life, but in the moment, the awakening event of lying there in God was actually occurring. She wasn't in time; she wasn't young, she was in eternity. She was in eternity.

And in that moment then, we're looking at this closer and closer as we go through these reflections here together, is kind of tasting the upwelling of the eternity of God, of manifesting itself incarnate in and as the passage of time. It's the upwelling of the depth dimension that never passes away, a ribbon through all that is perpetually passing away, intimately realized.

And so, when the moment passed, she doesn't remember what she did next, like if she ran in to tell her parents. And we would hope that they'd be supportive of that. Maybe she didn't say a word; sometimes children have these experiences and they don't say anything, they don't know what the words are for it.

And so then, the fact that, in her 80s, what happens though, with some people, it plants a seed of longing, to follow that path. And the very fact that she was drawn in her 80s to come to a silent retreat suggested that awakening led her on that path, which is what led her to the retreat. So, while she was sitting there in the silence of the retreat where this memory washed over her, and the moment that it was washing over her, she wasn't old, she wasn't in time, she wasn't in the second half. She was in eternity. She was in the eternity of the vertical depth dimension of the divine, washing up through and giving itself in a moment of time, the passage-less passage of time, this way.

So, that's the insight, like this. But then as the moment passed, she reflected upon it, interiorly, as an old woman. And therefore we have to say that, in reflective consciousness, her ability as an old woman to reflect in time on the transcendence of time was qualitatively richer than when she was 10 years old, when she reflected on the passage of time. So, that's my initial insight at this.

Paul Swanson: Wow. That's a lot to just let soak in and saturate, because so much of what I hear you saying in this is that the way we understand, or the way that you're expressing the two halves of life is the way that eternity is just the upwelling. And we use linear time as a way to experience. Otherwise it's just too much to take all at once.

Jim Finley: Yes.

Paul Swanson: Is that fair to say?

Jim Finley: Yes. I want to say first, in the depth dimension first, and then experientially, for how we experience it. One insight is, I think there's a book, Tresmontant, A Study of Hebrew Thought. And one of the ideas is that to know that for God, the moment God ... The first words of Genesis, of the Torah, "Let there be light." "In the beginning God said, let there be

light.”

For God, the moment in which God said, “Let there be light,” in the beginning, manifested reality. And the moment that we’re in right now having this conversation, for God, it’s the same moment, because that’s eternity. It’s a non-sequential plenitude, this way. And so, the non-sequential plenitude of eternity is welling up and giving itself, incarnate, in and as now.

So, we notice that it’s always now. I mean, even now it’s now. But in time, our temporal self, we have a memory, a past. It unfolds through time, and over time, which is the contemplative depth dimension, there’s a sensitivity to the eternity of the passage of time, passing away. And this is why I think, too, is the symbolism of Jesus rising and ascending into heaven with his wounds. So, it’s the eternity of suffering, in glory, see, conquered by love this way.

And so, as we go through day by day, we have our daily schedule, we’re in time. But we can be sensitized to this and sense that this fleeting moment, watering the houseplants, whatever, is forever.

Another way to put it is this way. I put it in one of my essays, is that we don’t really understand human nature until we understand why a small child on a merry-go-round will wave at his parents every time around and they always wave back. Like death and resurrection, death and resurrection, death and resurrection. Things only seem to go away, but nothing ever really goes away, because everything real is forever.

Once I was in the monastery and asked Dan Walsh in the philosophy class if we could say that, after the geographical Tokyo no longer exists, will there still be Tokyo? He said, “Yes.” He said, “Because Tokyo is in God’s mind.” So, when we die and go unto God, we’ll go into us having this conversation forever, everything. So, you learn to trust in the eternity or the fleetingness as trustworthy.

So, there’s that in us that’s born in time. It goes through time and it disappears in time. But the eternal depth dimension of the self that’s born in time and dies in time, there’s a welling up of the depth dimension, the eternity of our ourself that’s unborn. Because in exemplar causality, God knew who you were, hidden with Christ in God before the origin of the universe. And says, God has never, never, never not known who you are.

And since everything in God is God, this is the divinity of you. And likewise, the you that’s unborn, then going through time, will never, never die, because God will never, never, never not know who you are, hidden with Christ in God forever. So, what we’re trying to do in faith is we’re trying to live in the kind of luminosity of that, the sensitivity that.

And then there’s certain moments of absorption, contemplative, which I think the example of this woman having this moment, where we dropped out into the depths of the eternity in a moment of time. This is why I think, these awakening moments, sometimes they take us by surprise. But I think once we get a taste of them, because they tend to be fleeting, we can’t make them happen, but we can assume the stance that offers the least resistance to be overtaken by the abiding of the eternity, which is meditation practice.

... of the eternality, which is meditation practice. In deep meditative states and states of deep absorption, this is why when you return to ego consciousness, you have to see how much time passed because you weren't in time. Time and eternity are not dualistically other than each other. It's the alchemy of the interplay of the eternality of the passage of time that never passes away, so that's my sense.

Paul Swanson: What a gift of that interplay.

Mike Petrow: Wow, Jim, you said a lot. I actually, I don't want to be greedy here. I immediately have three follow-up questions I want to ask you. I want to start with this. We typically think of, and everything I have to say comes down to this, we think of the two halves of life as, we go through the first half of life. Maybe we build a container, things happen, then we move beyond that and we go into the second half of life. What I hear you describing is a way that, and I'll say this and then you can respond, a way that we sort of are living in both at the same time, all the time, because there's a timelessness to who we are. Go ahead.

Jim Finley: I want to respond back to that first.

Mike Petrow: Sure.

Jim Finley: Let's say that's certainly true in reflective consciousness in its passage through time. In other words, it's true as I'm speaking right now, I'm 80-years-old. Internally, in me, is the living memory of myself through time. Three-years-old, five-years-old, like this. The past lives on interiorly within me, in the temporal self, in the reflective self. Likewise, in my reflective self I have a qualitative sense of what lies ahead, because I've been here for a while. There is that reflective interior timelessness of the temporal self through memory. What we're alluding to at a more interior level than that is the eternality of God, that the transtemporality, which is when we're in a deep contemplative state, we drop into the consciousness of that which is always there.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, it's so good. I am thinking about how that translates into the container of living our day-to-day life. I'll say a really nerdy sentence, Corey, that you can cut if it's not helpful. When we were studying archetypal psychology, James Hillman, who Jim, I know you know is one of the greatest archetypal psychologists, and he would talk about, this is the nerdy part you can cut, the dyadic relationship between archetypes. He said that we talk about things like the [pu 00:50:57] air, the experience of the eternal youth, that sort of idea of the person who's always young. Then we talk about the cynics, the experience of the old man, or even the person who's an old soul. People talk about how sometimes some of their kids, you're like, gosh, they just feel like such an old soul. The insight that Hillman gave is that these two things are very often connected.

A lot of us, if we really get in touch with our depth, experience ourselves as children and as old before our time at the same time, and then we have to sort of live that reality. I feel like, Jim, a lot of our listeners and a lot of the readers of *Falling Upward* were drawn to that book because in some way it explained something they experienced moving from one half of life to another, having an existential crisis, whatever. I feel like there's a lot of folks who feel a little bit like they're in the second half of life when chronologically, they should be in the first half, or chronologically they're in the second half of life, but they have this childlike wonder

that brings it all together.

I don't know if this question makes sense, but what I'm asking you is coming from the place of that eternity, when we then turn to live our ordinary life of chores and dishes and parenting and jobs or retirement and relationship and life's transitions, how do we live both of those at the same time? How do we be the child and the wise person as much as we're able? First I should ask, does that question make sense?

Jim Finley: No, it does.

Mike Petrow: Okay.

Jim Finley: My sense is this. This could either be happening when we're living alone in solitude or having a very intimate conversation with the beloved. It also happens in the deep moments of psychotherapy, and it happens this way. I think that when we settle into a moment of being deeply present in the present moment, either in the silence and solitude or having a very intimate conversation with someone, or in the unfolding of therapy, there's a certain kind of settling into the moment where one is spontaneously expressing what arises within you. What arises within you might make you laugh. It might be very childlike. What arises within you might be the sadness. What arises within you is the weight of the accumulation of time. The point is, you're being real. You're being real.

Also, there's another level too, I think, where if you're in the process of being real with someone this way, you also intuit thoughts arise within you, but you don't say them because they'd get in the way. You're protective of a stream, of a continuum, and it goes back and forth from being playful and childlike and sad and real. But it's the consistency of being authenticity in the present as a tao, as a flowing present reality, that you're incarnating right at that moment.

I think part of wisdom or growing older, that sensitivity of perpetual authenticity can become more and more habitual, that you're more and more living out of this. There is then this passage through time and external consciousness. There's this interior sensitivity of the passage through time with these dimensions of ourself where these archetypal aspects of ourself rise and fall within us and we learn to move with the flow like this. Deeper down beyond that is the very eternity of God being infused into us in infused states of contemplation.

Mike Petrow: That's great.

Paul Swanson: That was incredible.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. Something to look forward to.

Paul Swanson: What's your next follow-up question, Mike?

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh. I don't want to be greedy. Okay. The next follow-up question-

Jim Finley: You're being authentically greedy, Mike.

Mike Petrow: Oh, that's great. I'm doing it on purpose.

Jim Finley: You're modeling for all of us.

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh.

Jim Finley: Yeah. Amazing.

Paul Swanson: How to be contemplatively greedy.

Mike Petrow: Well, so the funny thing is the other two questions, one goes in a very practical direction, and the other skews a little more back to the mystical orientation. If we were to go super practical first, Jim, one of the things that I have really appreciated about reading your memoir and getting to have conversations with you is that you have consistently reminded me that we are growing in different ways all the time at different rates.

Jim Finley: Right.

Mike Petrow: If we say first half of life we're building a container, second half of life we're asking these deep questions of meaning. When I look at your memoir, I see, and I read someone who probably because of your trauma and your training was very much living out of the second half of life very early.

Jim Finley: That's true.

Mike Petrow: In the way that you're mystically oriented. You're traveling around the country, you're teaching Merton's Palace of Nowhere and so on and so forth.

Jim Finley: That's true.

Mike Petrow: Yet in the raw honesty of sharing the difficulty of some of your life experiences, when I read about your first marriage and your second marriage, I can see where there was a container that blew up and then you did your second marriage so differently. It seems like in that area of your life, the second half of life wisdom came a little later. One of the things that you've told me personally and you've told our Living School students, is just because we can be spiritually very mature or even emotionally and psychologically very mature in one area of our life and be in the second half of life in one area of our life, it doesn't mean that we're not still healing and maturing and growing in another area that's a little bit, that's still on the way. I don't want to say less mature, let's say still growing.

Does that question make sense? If so, what insight can you give us for recognizing that it's not as clean and simple as we've arrived or we haven't, or someone's in the first half of life, someone's in the second half? we're all growing at different ways and different aspects all at the same time. Does that make sense?

Jim Finley: No, it does make sense. I want to say it back. Speaking of myself, reflecting on my own life, I think really my first mystical awakenings happened when I was very young, maybe four years old in a sense of, but I experienced and understood them as a 4-year-old. Then when I was in the monastery, I was 18 years old and lived in silence for six years and lived like in eternity

because there was no time, because there was no television, there was no radio, we didn't talk to each other. No one ever came in, no one ever left. The only time was liturgical time, chanting the psalms in silence. I lived in this kind of cyclic, liturgical, timeless time of that. It had a deep and lasting effect on me on the timelessness of this. At the same time that I was in that kind of gift of that awakening, I was carrying inside of me the internalized trauma that I brought from my childhood. I didn't even know it was there. When it broke open, it came out, I had a breakdown and I left.

These different levels, there's the interplay of how they intersect each other, and that's the enigmatic dimension of growth. You know what I mean? We fall back into a vestige of the past we haven't internalized and acknowledged, and it wells up unexpectedly out of an interaction. Then we're to face it and walk through it and taste it and sit with it. Then when you come out the other side of that, you come out the wiser for it because there's more internalized acceptance of these dimensions of yourself. Just as you start to get the hang of it, another unexpected thing comes welling up. Then pretty soon you learn to understand how this works and you start expecting the unexpected nature of everything and you no longer expect anything. There's a way of coming to that kind of timelessness in time, I think, which I think takes time.

Mike Petrow: That's great, that timelessness and time takes time.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I want to say this too. I want to say this is so important because this is the mystical part. The mystical part is let's say we're talking about layers of experiential knowledge for ourself as we go through time in the light of eternity. There's a certain point in the spiritual life in meditation and prayer in life where consciousness, we still can use the word consciousness, but it's no longer our consciousness. It's God's consciousness of God being passively infused into us in a profound and obscure way. None distinct, where we and God mutually disappear as other than each other. We no longer identify with the self that passes through time, but rather we identify with God identified with us eternally forever. That's the mystical dimension.

That mystical, timeless dimension is lived out in time. You're in time, but you're not subject to time. You're in time, there's a sense of the eternity of every moment. That's why you're always looking for the authentic encounter with somebody which is mercy or command. How can I be helpful? You try to meet them in such a way that they experience something of the eternity of the moment that you're together like this, where the vertical depth dimension wells up out of the... You meet each other horizontally in time, but you meet in such a way that you taste something within yourself of God that's incarnate in the encounter in time, which makes the moment memorable like that, I think.

Paul Swanson: You meet that moment without expectation.

Jim Finley: That's right.

Paul Swanson: You've kind of led up to that. You meet that moment without expectation, and so there is this authentic upwelling of momentary mysticism that you hope to permeate throughout the days and saturation of your life.

Jim Finley: Yes. I'd put it this way. You learn to live without identifying with all your ongoing

expectations. Because you always have expectations, but you know they're expectations and you know that some of them will fall away. There's nothing to it. Likewise, some of them will happen, but notice when the expectation happens. What actually happens, it isn't what you expected it to be. It's never what you thought it would be on your way there like this.

Then, although there's these constant expectations, because you're human, you disidentify with expectations because you're living in the constancy of a moment in which nothing's missing. There's nothing to expect because nothing's missing. That's the vertical depth dimension of the eternality of now, of the divinity of life and our nothing nothingness without God, which includes then the wavering ways of our expectations is incarnate. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. That's my sense of it.

Paul Swanson: This reminds me of something, a phrase that you use, and I think about it often with chronological time in the two halves of life. I think it pairs well with what you've shared so far. That phrase is the divinity of diminishment. I think folks, as they age in chronological time, there is this diminishment that happens physically, emotionally, and this could happen at any stage of life, of course. What is the eternality that gets freed up in that diminishment? Because anytime I mention this to anybody who's in elderhood or reaching elderhood, their eyes light up. That phrase seems to carry so much with it. How do you share the divinity of diminishment?

Jim Finley: Here's one way I put it, I use the image of a mother holding her newborn infant and as she holds her infant gazes into its unknowing eyes, she's just struck by how limited the infant is. The essence of limit, can't sit up, can't walk, can't talk, can't help with the chores, can't roll over by itself. It's the essence of limit. The image I use, infants have this clasping reflex, say but with the strength with which the infant clasps her extended little finger, I say like a king or queen holding a scepter. It all but carries her heart away. She knows that if she were to die in the act of saving the life of this infant, she would die in the truth, which is the limitless nature of limits.

The next point is that this infant in this moment reveals her to herself that she's even capable of that realization. She also knows the same is true of her. There is a limitless nature of her limits, but it's buried under the identifying with all of her limits and all of her attainments, but buried underneath it all. It's through a life of silence or a life of love or life of surrender that the glow of that can shine through. Then I say years later, imagine that infant grows up and the infant goes into their own autonomous adulthood. They go through life, whatever it is. Imagine that the child as an adult stays close to the mother and they're both grateful for it over time. Finally, at long last, the mother who held that infant is in a nursing home in hospice, and the child that she held is sitting next to her and the chair pulled up next to her bed.

The adult child who's now middle-aged, older is so aware of how limited the mother is. She can't see, she can't talk. She might not even remember anymore where the child is, but with the imperial strength of which the dying mother holds the adult child's extended little finger like a king or queen holding a scepter, it all but carries a person's heart away.

When you look Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' in the stages of dying in denial, bargain, death and so on, what acceptance is I think, acceptance is freedom from the tyranny of death in the midst

of death. When you look into the face of the dying loved one, it's the gate of heaven. What we're trying to do is why wait till the 11th hour to live that way? How can I learn to live in the limitless nature of my limits, in the timeless nature of time? Like the eternity of the falling away, freedom from the tyranny of time in the midst of time as a way to be radically present in the eternity of time.

Anyway. What happens is, yes, the divinity of diminishment, the dying person is a person that's dying. It's the essence of diminishment, but in the dying of the diminishment is the divinity of the person becomes incandescent, just shines out this way. Then that dying loved one reveals us to ourself. How can I realize the generosity of God? I'm worth all that God is worth in my eternal nothingness without God, and how is it even now shining out like this? How can I free myself from what hinders me from seeing that and living by it?

We can't attain it because it's already infinitely there, but we can't lose it either. If we're even capable of attaining or losing it, it's infinitely less than what we're talking about. Because if we can't attain or lose the generosity of God being poured out as this conversation, but we're talking about how do I get a taste of it, and then through a life of meditation and prayer, how do I habituate a sensitivity to this and learn to walk with it this way?

Mike Petrow: Wow. It's interesting. I'm thinking about, Jim, we had a conversation earlier with Richard about falling upward, and one of the things that came up in the conversation, we were thinking about that great line from T.S. Eliot, which I know you know, "We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be..." I'm just going to do that again. "We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

I'm thinking about going home, the idea of homecoming, that there's this calling to a home that maybe we've never known. We could get nerdy and talk about the no nostos and the pothos and Greek mythology, or how the odyssey plays such a big role in Richard's book. Really, I think my question for you is, how do you think Falling Upward is really a story about homecoming? Do you think there is something to the fact that myth and mystery and mysticism all meet in this longing of our heart for a home that it both remembers, but maybe doesn't fully know yet?

Jim Finley: Yeah. Here's the way it came to me when I was writing the memoir, poetically, is that if we take the moment we emerged onto the earthly plane, we showed up in the world. How I put it is that when we're born onto the earthly plane, God exhales the infinity of God onto the earthly plane as us in our passage through time from birth to death. Inhale, exhale, exhale, inhale, like this. At the end, so our first act when we're born was we let out this big scream. They swing us up by our ankles, and we take a deep breath. The last thing we do on earth is we exhale and we don't inhale. We inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale, and at the very end we exhale, but don't inhale. Instead of looking at it as a linear line, like back here was my birth, ahead of me is my death, that it forms a circle.

What I see at 80 years old, what goes around comes around. The moment I'm going to exhale and won't inhale, I'm looking at it now, it's right ahead of me. Those two touch each other. There's a certain moment where they meet and the circle completes itself, but really deeper down is that that moment where the beginning and the end, all of this is actually the

divine timeless center of every moment of time all the way around the circle. It's just that in the centrifugal force of life's demands, we spin out and away from experiential groundedness in the oneness that's eternally there like this.

It isn't just that the circle completes itself and the moment of birth and death is one, but the moment completes itself in a life filled with deep love, like radically surrendered over to love or to solitude or silence or service, or the acceptance of suffering. Therefore, you're always at home. You're always at home because although you see you waver this way and that, the infinite presence of God as an unwavering presence that permeates your wavering-

The presence of God is an unwavering presence that permeates your wavering ways. That habituated sensitivity to the unwavering presence that's incarnate in and as your wavering ways is a kind of a contemplative wisdom. That's the way I experience it for me.

Paul Swanson: That's so helpful. That's so helpful, Jim. That imagery too of that full circle, that return back to that first breath, and the mystical interpretation that one can be drawn to this, of going through that circle of the journey.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I think something else too, when we talk like this, this kind of language, when we hear it, it's not nonsense to us, but it's not explainable either. When we hear it, it bears witness to what the heart knows is true. Like Pascal, "The heart has reasons of which the mind knows nothing." It's the un-figure-out-able plenitude of what the heart knows is true. We're trying to find our way to be habitually faithful to it and live by it. It's the spiritual life, I guess.

Paul Swanson: Jim, as you're saying that about the the heart knows it's true, I'm thinking about some of our younger listeners, folks who falling upward, they're drawn to it, and maybe it hasn't become the fruit of their life yet. They haven't had enough of their own experiences that have shown them how they want to live in this kind of way that you're speaking of. I guess not just younger listeners, but anyone who wants to be on this type of path, what kind of guidance would you offer them to helping create the conditions or build a posture that bends towards mystery in this contemplative stance?

Jim Finley: Well, my sense is this, really. For years I taught high school. I taught seniors in a Jesuit high school. In one of the schools I had, every Friday we had what we called Fireside Chats with Old Mr. Finley. I wasn't really that old-

Paul Swanson: Amazing.

Jim Finley: ... to them, but to them I was old. They got a fireplace made of cardboard, a full-sized fireplace, and they got a rug and a rocking chair. I would sit in the rocking chair and I would hold a pipe. They would raise and ask questions about God or why they don't believe in God or why they do and talk. These Fireside Chats with Old Mr. Finley, it was like the highlight of the week. I thought, really, that's religion class right there.

So one thing I would do is to be encouraged by the mother or the father or the grandparent or the person that you sense holds some of this wisdom.

Another thing is, is to learn to trust in the stirrings of aspirations like this. Because if we don't have anyone to encourage us, like a stirring to paint or to draw or a courage to spend

long time alone or a courage to be drawn in a certain direction, listen to your heart and trust and see where it goes. Don't close it off, and be patient with it. Be endlessly patient and attentive with it.

Also, I think for young people to learn to trust a growing capacity, like the felt sense of something ringing true, even though you can't explain it or the felt sense that something just doesn't sit right, but I don't know why. So I'd encourage them to stabilize and growing that sensitivity and learn to be present too, and with the older people with who they sense has some sense of this.

Also, I think certain writers. There's certain poems or authors or certain movies too you can see and you're deeply moved by it. Like, whoever wrote this script knows something that I know is true as I was watching it like this. You learn to have faith in certain people whose words ... Zen master Dōgen says, "Find that person whose words awaken your heart with the desire for the great way and forget everything else. That person's your teacher." So I would suggest things like this. That's what I would urge young people to do. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Thanks, Jim.

Mike Petrow: Gosh. I'm having a moment with what you were saying earlier, Jim, about the circularity of the breaths. Can I share it, like a story? Is that okay?

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: This weekend was the 15-year anniversary of one of the more intense experiences I've ever had in my life. Your words take me there. 15 years ago, my mom was dying. I was in the hospital with her, and she was in a very, very slightly reactive coma. She was dying from a brain tumor. I remember I had this very vivid experience where I was sitting next to her as she was laying there in her hospital bed, and her eyes were open just a little bit. I remember I had my hand in her hand, and her hand squeezed on my hand just a little bit. I remember saying to myself, "Oh, she knows I'm here. Some part of her knows that I'm here with her." I leaned over and her eyes were just tiny, tiny little slits open just a little bit, and they were kind of drifting back and forth. I made eye contact with her and I got her eyes to hold my eyes. I remember thinking, "She can see me. She knows I'm here. I'm watching her take her dying breaths, really." She would only live about another week after this. She was actively dying.

Then she coughed and there was this moment of agitation. I remember a nurse leaned over to make sure she was okay. It was just this moment of connecting with her. At exactly that moment, my sister tapped me on the shoulder and she'd gotten a phone call. So I kissed my mom goodbye. We jumped in a car, we drove across town to another hospital and went into this other hospital. There was my niece who had just been born, just been born. Her father, my brother, had died five months previous. I'd lost my brother, losing my mom. There's my brand new niece. She's sitting there and her mom's holding her. I put my finger into her hand, and her tiny little hand gripped my finger really tight. I was like, "Oh my God, she knows it's me!" Her eyes were open and you know those like ... Oh, my God. I looked her in the eye, and I remember saying, "She knows I'm here. That's not just reflex." Same thing I'd said with my mom. "That's not just reflex. She knows I'm here. She knows I'm here and I

love her and I'm here for her.”

Then she gave a tiny little cough or a tiny little sneeze, and there was a nurse right there, and the nurse leaned over to make sure she was okay, the exact same way the nurse in the other hospital had leaned over to make sure my mom was okay.

My world at exactly that moment just cracked open. There was something about the symmetry of sitting there with my finger in her hand just a few minutes after sitting with my hand in my mom's hand, making that eye contact, hearing those breaths. I don't know how to explain it. It was like time and space and everything just unraveled and I saw the spiral. I don't know.

Jim, your description takes me back to that and I'd love your reaction to it and also really to ask ... So many people listening, so many of us have had moments like that. How do we live in fidelity to what is revealed to us in those moments that crack open and show us the big picture?

Jim Finley: Yeah, very good. Thanks for sharing that. Lovely.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, it's beautiful.

Jim Finley: I have some thoughts because my guess ... My first thought is this. I think often when we talk about searching for God or the experience of God as if somehow, especially when you read the mystics, there's this overwhelming thing and things like that do happen to people. They do. But I think actually more often than not, it's closer to what you're saying. They're actually extremely subtle. They're very, very subtle. What we're really doing when moments like this happen, the grace of the moment calibrates our heart to find enough scale that we tune into this divinity that's always there like this. So that's the first thing, I think.

Therefore, we know it matters. See, it's like Thomas Merton used to say, “There are certain things in life that we simply have to accept as true or we go crazy inside and they're the very things we can't explain to anybody, including ourself.” Dan Walsh used to say in the philosophy classes, “I know what I know and I know that I know it. The trouble is, it's I who know that I know it. And when I try to tell you what I know that I know, I don't know what to say. I can't explain it because I can't even explain it to myself. It's being intimately accessed by the unexplainable that I know is true.”

So the first thing is a kind of a face, not to play the cynic. See, in the most childlike hour in the unexpected moment, there was a granting of something, see, that graced my life, graced my life.

The next insight is this. It's trusting that that moment that you saw, that you spoke of, it wasn't as if in that moment of birth and death synchronicity together, it isn't as if something more was given, but a curtain opened and you fleetingly tasted what every moment is. It's to trust our own heart not to play the cynic, the truth of the unexplainable, which is abyss-like and all-encompassing, unexplainable.

But also then to know that the importance of a daily rendezvous, where we slow down enough that we might be quietly overtaken by this welling up of the depth that's always

there. I think that's the commitment to the daily practice. So a daily practice is any act habitually entered into it with our whole heart that takes us to the deeper place. So it might be the quiet hour at day's end, the long slow walk to no place in particular, tending the roses in the presence of the beloved, in the presence of children, whatever it is that disarms you and unravels your ability to explain and live in it.

Then what happens then in being faithful to your practice, you ask for the grace each time the moment passes because the cell phone just went off or something. You ask God for the grace not to break the thread of that sensitivity. So little by little you connect the dots and there's less and less difference between the moments of the quickening and pouring boiling water over a tea bag. There's like an underlying subtle consistency of the divinity of ordinariness in all of it. So those are some of my thoughts.

Thanks for sharing that because I love stories like that where people will share that in therapy, or they'll say, "I haven't thought of this in a long time." They'll say it. So yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: I want a note for us to go out on. I think there's been so much that you've shared, Jim, that has come up in this conversation. Part of the through line for me is just paying attention deeply to your life, that enternality is always welling up and how can we slow down enough to pay attention? Or the practices, perspectives, elders that can help us do that.

Thank you so much for being a part of this conversation today and for really, really helping us slow down to what is welling up for us and how God is that work in our day-to-day lives.

Jim Finley: A closing note, I love that saying by Thomas Merton when it comes to these matters, "To understand is to just accept the fact that you're infinitely understood," and we rest in that and it gives itself to us. So yeah, this was a grace this conversation, so I'm glad this happened. Thank you.

Mike Petrow: As we bring our miniseries to a close, it's been amazing to have you with us, and we hope that you've really felt like you are a part of the conversation. We've talked so much about the importance of questions and the gift it is to get to interact with Richard's teaching and ask questions. So as we send you into a break for the holidays, we thought what might be interesting is for all of us to stay in the conversation together as we share with you the questions that we're going to be sitting with.

This section of the show is designed to invite all of us to carry the conversation on between episodes, by giving us contemplative prompts and questions to carry into our own deep heart and into dialogue with each other. Listening to Jim and Richard talk about falling upward and the wisdom of the two halves of life and seeing how they've integrated it, it just invites me to reflect on where I experience childlike wonder in my own life the way they do, where there's invitations for me to see the magic and the mystery in the ordinary life right in front of me.

But it also invites me to wonder and compassionately notice where there are immature places in my own life, where I'm still maybe stuck in the first half of life and I have an invitation to grow up a little bit. Yet at the same time, I can ask myself where parts of me are really demonstrating the wisdom of the second half of life, where there's a little bit of me that has

the sages of the ages speaking out, guiding me and grounding me.

With Richard and Jim asking how I can integrate all of that, to hold that childlike wonder with an awareness of all my invitations to grow and mature and playfully recognize my areas of lack. Yeah, I love those invitations to grow.

Paul Swanson: You offer such tender questions that I think get to the heart of that conversation that we just heard both first with Richard and then with Jim, and how we can take these teachings, respond with questions like this to try to live them, our responses to those questions in our daily life.

That is so much of how we're going to conclude these episodes is by acknowledging the questions or the practices or the prompts that might lead us further in to how we can live this. Because it does take mirroring back, self-examination, community practice to allow the discovery of some of our growing edges and also some of our own wisdom within, but to just hold all of that gently.

I love the way that Jim talks about creating the conditions of least resistance. I think that's how we're going to try to end these episodes is with some sort of contemplative prompt that creates those conditions of least resistance to put all of us in that mode of deepening how we live these teachings forward. If we think it's an inch deep or 12 feet deep or 1,000 feet deep, different things will hit us at different parts of our life. So the invitation there is so rich as we look to questions like this to wrap up our conversations.

Mike Petrow: That's amazing. As we send folks into the holidays with an invitation to pick up falling upward yet again, let's revisit those questions that we started out with. So we leave you with these four questions, which will be in the show notes and you can come back later and drop into your journal. But right now we invite you to just take a moment, to get quiet and let these questions drop in your heart. Wherever you are ... Of course, if you're driving, please do this in a way that's not dangerous for anyone else.

First, we invite you to find your feet. Let them ground you deeply and give you an experience of support. From there, we encourage you to find your seat. Once again, feel yourself planted wherever you are. Find your heartbeat. Drop into the easy rhythm of the wisdom of your body. As you feel your heart beating, offer a greeting to the following invitations for reflection.

First, ask yourself, where do I experience the best of the first half of life wisdom? Where am I meeting the world with childlike wonder and celebration, seeing the magic and the mystery in all the beautiful, ordinary happenings of every moment of every day? How can I lean more into that childlike celebration?

Paul Swanson: Then our second question, to look inward with a gentle gaze at the places in your life where you sense a particular type of immaturity or a place that you might see aspects of growth that are possible, to hold those places within yourself, these places that we might call first half of life. How do you see opportunities for growth to welcome the wisdom of the teachings of the Spirit, of falling upward, of yourself and your community calling you to lean in to what we might call second half of life wisdom?

Mike Petrow: Our third prompt is that even as you compassionately see that there are inevitably some areas of your life that are immature or still need a little bit of growing up, we invite you to recognize the other areas where you experience deep second half of life wisdom, where the sages of the ages in their wisdom are made real in you. Recognize your own deep wisdom and experience that like a wise loving elder or a wise loving grandparent offering you insight, putting their arm around you and telling you that you got this and it's all going to be okay.

Paul Swanson: Our fourth question, we invite you to sit with how you might be called, called forward to integrate this first half and second half of life experience and wisdom, looking at the teachers that exemplify this for you, whether they are on a stage or in your own community. How do you sense your own call towards deeper integration in your own life, in your own context?

Mike Petrow: We're so excited for you to join us in this contemplative conversation in the coming weeks and months as you reflect and in the coming seasons as we explore Richard's works together. Thank you for helping us live the teachings forward so that we can all work together for a world where everyone and everything belongs.

Corey Wayne: Thanks for listening to this podcast by the Center for Action and Contemplation, an educational nonprofit that introduces seekers to the contemplative Christian path of transformation. To learn more about our work, visit us at cac.org. Everything Belongs is made possible thanks to the generosity of our supporters and the shared work of ...

Mike Petrow: Mike Petrow.

Paul Swanson: Paul Swanson.

Talitha Baker: Talifa Baker.

McEl Chevrier:McEl Chevrier.

Izzy Spitz: Izzy Spitz.

Megan Hare: Megan Hare.

Sara Palmer: Sara Palmer.

Barb Lopez: Barb Lopez.

Brandon Strange: Brandon Strange.

Corey Wayne: And me, Corey Wayne. The music you hear is composed and provided by our friends, Hammock. We'd also like to thank Sound On Studios for all of their work in post-production. From the high desert of New Mexico, we wish you peace and every good.