



# **EVERYTHING BELONGS**

The Two Halves of Life  
with Brené Brown

Paul Swanson: The poet Jim Harrison says, “In a life properly lived, you’re a river. You touch things lightly or deeply. You move along because life or self moves and you can’t stop it. You can’t figure out a banal game plan applicable to all situations. You just have to go with the beingness of life, as Rilke would have it.” The art of life is learning to see what forms the bends, the turns, the eddies, the patterns that are shared, yet diverse, across human experiences.

Father Richard has noted this through his study of spirituality, literature, myth, Jungian Psychology and archetypes, which resulted in his book *Falling Upward*. The subtitle for the book, *A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, provides a framework for these teachings. The first half for building our identity, who we hope to become in the world and in this life. And the second half, a reckoning with letting go, turning inward to contemplation, mystery and no longer living life on our terms, but in service to life itself. And befriending the paradoxes of these events, which is not necessarily sequential or linear in time.

Today, we’re beginning a chapter by chapter Journey through *Falling Upward*, originally published in 2011 and reissued in 2023 with a brand new foreword by researcher, storyteller, and our guest today, Brené Brown. But first, we’re stopping by Richard’s hermitage to catch up with him, to hear his reflections on the themes of chapter one, *The Two Halves of Life*, and how he sees it from his perspective today, more than a decade removed from when he originally wrote it.

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

Paul Swanson: I’m Paul Swanson.

Mike Petrow: And this is *Everything Belongs*.

Paul Swanson: Richard, I want to begin as we talk about your chapter one of *Falling Upward*. You named the following questions as container questions that you say they’re essential for the first half of life, so I’m going to read them and they are: what makes me significant? How can I support myself? And who will go with me?

Richard Rohr: Who will go with me..

Paul Swanson: Now looking back on your own life, do you remember how you approached or discerned them when you were young, and did that go into consideration as you wrote *Falling Upward* when you were thinking about your own first half of life and knowing that there’s a lot of folks in their first half of life who will be listening to this. How else did you...? Were you also thinking about that as a way to support yourself? And who will go with me, that you were joining this band of brothers, the Franciscans? Or how do those container questions, how do you even suggest folks think about that who are listening to this in their own first half of life?

Richard Rohr: My main point was I had a grand capacity to fool myself. I thought, “Now I’m giving up a job.” Well, I was letting other people pay my way. Who’s going to support me? I thought, “I’m not going to try to succeed at that game. I want to be a poor Franciscan.” What am I saying to people who might be listening? You’ve got to have those heroic ideas though, I’m sure you all wanted to be special young men. Who’s going to go with you? I thought it was going to be the brotherhood. And I can’t say to this day my super closest friends are Franciscans. They’re more from new Jerusalem and CAC than the friars, but they’ve been

the background support system. I don't know what advice I'd give people? I'd still agree with what am I going to do and who's going to go with me? You can't avoid those, although more and more people are avoiding the who's going to go with me? That's true.

Mike Petrow: I have an off script question. Richard, I love how you lay out these two containers of life and we do try to answer what makes me significant? How can I support myself? Who will go with me? I'm curious what your thoughts are after having written this book and now worked with people for years. What about young people who very early have some kind of atom bomb that goes off in their life that sort of blows the container up before it normally happens?

Richard Rohr: Positive, or negative?

Mike Petrow: Negative. Death of a parent-

Richard Rohr: Negative.

Mike Petrow: ... an accident-

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah.

Mike Petrow: ... an illness that happens early and disrupts that process. So they're sort of in the second half of life while still in the first half of life.

Richard Rohr: I think that's much more common than we realize. I think of young people who have told me and the very expression in their face, "My mother died when I was four." It just upset the apple cart. Life is not beautiful. I was able to sustain life is beautiful an awfully long time. To today I think, even though I know for most people that isn't true. It can either work for you or against you. Can it? Some people take that and ask the deeper questions. They become sober real early, maybe too early.

Others just create a cynical, "Everything's going to disappoint me." People will speak of having abandonment issues. "My real mother abandoned me, so I'm just waiting for every lover to abandon me." A lot of people. That's very real. It's all the storyline that you give to your narrative, and this is why the gospel was meant to give you a storyline that would make you indestructible. The true gospel gives you that. You're infinitely beloved, objectively so, but less and less people hear that it seems they don't...

Mike Petrow: Would you say more about that? About how the gospel makes you indestructible?

Richard Rohr: The true gospel is telling you you are by nature, a son of God, a daughter of God, a beloved of God. By your very nature. It is not attained by any exercise, performance, fasting, praying. It is your nature. Your true nature is God's nature. Now, if you can find a way to rest in that already as a little child, however a child understands things, you've just got a huge head start. You don't have to pander for praise, for notice. You enjoy it when it comes, but you don't need it.

Paul Swanson: That's a powerful line, your true nature is God's nature.

Richard Rohr: I think so. I think that's what the gospel is supposed to say to every human being. You're already one. But you have to go into extreme separateness and re-choose it for yourself. Maybe not extreme, but separateness. The trouble with the modern and post-modern world is we make that separateness so entertaining. You understand? Yeah, I can go to a concert tonight, and go hiking tomorrow, so we enjoy being out there doing our thing. And I think God lets us enjoy that. He enjoys it with us in fact, it's okay. Don't waste time in guilt or shame, but we do.

Paul Swanson: If I'm hearing you correctly, when you say our true nature is God's nature, it's almost too much to bear. So we have to build some sort of container to separate until we're-

Richard Rohr: That's good.

Paul Swanson: ... able to allow that container to burst out and we just have-

Richard Rohr: That's good.

Paul Swanson: ... the contents of that.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And this feels connected to at least for how I'm understanding, not that it's always linear to your point or sequential that the first two halves of life, but that they sometimes happen in tandem, but when we talk about them in these kind of frameworks, we lay them out linearly.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. Well, it's interesting too, because I think a huge portion of our listenership are folks who have experienced some degree of not helpful, dare I even say toxic religion and then deconstructed it. And a lot of us have the double whammy of unhelpful religious beliefs and maybe a family of origin that does not teach us that we are infinitely lovable and worthy of love, and so we spend the first half of our life trying to prove that we're worthy of love.

Richard Rohr: Yes, that's so true. The new thing, I think when I was growing up, a lot of us had very unhealthy religion, but we didn't know it. We thought that was religion. So we have made an advance that people are able to recognize there is such a thing as toxic religion that makes you narcissistic, clawing, needy, a cult of innocence. How can I prove that I'm innocent? What a wasted journey when I see the extent people go to prove they're not guilty. See, why do you need to do that? God loves you in your guilt once you see it.

Paul Swanson: I love the way that we've brought Jesus into this conversation around Falling Upward.

Richard Rohr: I hope so.

Paul Swanson: And there's this metaphor that you use in this chapter that Jesus uses of the new wineskins. Why do you think that is distinctly appropriate for how we talk about the two halves of life? What is it about that metaphor that really speaks?

Richard Rohr: He seems to be saying that the container that holds your wine has to be symmetrical with what it contains. And as the wine gets richer and older and fermented, you need a different holder. You can't just keep the old, "The old is good enough," he puts in one translation. You know my order, disorder, reorder. The amount of people who confuse high level Christianity with the first stage, order, that's people who love the first container they got, which is almost necessarily childish almost by definition. How else could you understand it as a 6-year-old except with a 6-year-old mind?

So for me, the new wineskins is a wonderful permission that Jesus gives us to change. Pope Francis is saying this so much, and the right wing is just hating him for it. "No, the Catholic Church cannot change." He just says, "Where did you get that? Certainly not from the four gospels. There's no philosophy of non-change. Quite the contrary." I'm glad you brought that up. I like that image of new wine, new wine skins, new depth of appreciation. I mean, I don't read The Office anymore. I hope that doesn't shock anybody, but a priest is supposed to read The Office every day. That's the Psalms.

Mike Petrow: Do you prefer the American or the British version?

Richard Rohr: And I love the Psalms more than ever before. I have no doubt they're inspired, but Lord, I chanted them for 13 years in Latin and then English and I love them, but that's not my spirituality anymore, to chant Psalms.

Mike Petrow: It's interesting. I really like this question a lot, Paul and Richard. I like what you're saying a lot because for me, when I think about just in the context of the conversation we're having right now, new wine and old wine skins, so many of us in the religious systems that we grew up in and in our personal lives, built containers to prove our worthiness. Right? We don't know-

Richard Rohr: That's the cult of innocence.

Mike Petrow: ... Right. We don't know that we're-

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Mike Petrow: ... loved or that we are love incarnate. And so we build ways to try to prove that we're worthy. And then when you pour the revelation of our infinite worth and our infinite worthiness into those old containers, they could just feed our narcissism if the container doesn't get blown up somehow?

Richard Rohr: Mm-hmm.

Mike Petrow: Does that make sense? What do you think?

Richard Rohr: It has to fail you.

Mike Petrow: Okay.

Richard Rohr: It has to disappoint you. It has to show that this is not making me love God or

neighbor. If it's not helping me love God or neighbor, you don't need it at that point in your life. God, I think of the heroic deeds we thought up every Ash Wednesday. "How can I," just as you said, "... get God to love me this Lent?" But even that God smiles at, "Well, he's still a little boy. He's still my little boy. I love him, but he's got a lot of years of life. I'll let him live till 80 until he finally gets it." Yeah. What else you got?

Paul Swanson: This has been wonderful. This has been a wonderful conversation.

Richard Rohr: Has it?

Paul Swanson: This chapter.

Richard Rohr: I feel so haphazard.

Paul Swanson: Well, we'll get some new wine and we'll-

Richard Rohr: New wine.

Mike Petrow: Oh, that's a good idea.

Paul Swanson: ... Let's clink glasses and toast to this conversation.

Mike Petrow: No, I just want to say to both of you, Paul and Richard, I really appreciate this. I'm going to be thinking very, very deeply about the wine and the wineskins and just our infinite identity as being loved and being love and how the container that carries that, whether it's a religious institution or our personal psychology, if it even can, right? And maybe the revelation itself breaks the container. That's just, I'm going to think about that one for a while. Thank you. I really appreciate that.

Richard Rohr: You're good students, all of you. Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Richard.

Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

Today we're joined by Dr. Brené Brown. Brené is a research professor at the University of Houston where she holds the Huffington Foundation Endowed Chair at the Graduate College of Social Work. She also holds the position of Visiting Professor and management at the University of Texas at Austin McCombs School of Business. Brené has spent the past few decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy. She's the author of six number one New York Times bestsellers, and is the host of two award-winning podcasts, *Unlocking Us* and *Dare to Lead*. She lives in Houston, Texas with her husband, Steve. They have two children, Ellen and Charlie, and a weird Bichon named Lucy.

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh. Brené, thank you so much for being here with us today. Richard, thank you again for joining us. It's been so much fun through the experience of being a podcast listener to first hear Brené talk about you, Richard, with Bono. And then to watch that lead, I remember telling you about it and how excited we were, and then to have that lead to this invitation to the two episodes of *Unlocking Us* remotely, and then two more in person. And what's been such a gift for us who get to just sit and take this in has been watching the two

of you become friends. It's been a real joy.

Brené Brown: Just an unexpected gift in my life.

Richard Rohr: So true for my life. Thank you.

Mike Petrow: It's so delightful, Brené. You should hear how much warmth, appreciation, respect, and enjoyment Richard has when he talks about you, and the value he has for the connection the two of you have formed. So to start, Richard, can I ask you to say a little bit for our listeners, how much enjoyed encountering Brené, her work and everything she brings into the world as a person and as a light to the rest of us?

Richard Rohr: Well, the answer that first comes to mind is going to reveal my intense narcissism. When I first read you and heard you, I said, "Well, she thinks just like me." Isn't that terrible?

Brené Brown: No.

Richard Rohr: No, but it's true. I just could tell there was a coherent worldview on human nature, and divine nature, and life, and relationship. And those words like relationship itself and vulnerability and shame that I just think are central to understanding what we're supposed to mean, we involved in the world of religion, what we're supposed to mean by salvation. And you come at it in a way that just pleases me very much because it fills a gap that people who have too much theology, they don't seem to get there. They act as if we're talking about a metaphysics on a higher level, and you make physics and metaphysics one, which I love. It has to be one because it's one reality, it's one God, it's one world. So I find it easy to listen to you. Thank you.

Brené Brown: I should have gone first because now I'm going to start crying. I won't be able to go next.

Paul Swanson: In that same spirit, Brené, as Mike had mentioned, your conversation with Bono, where you guys talked about Falling Upward, and we always love to hear the origin stories about what was it about that book, what was going on in your life at the time when you first picked it up? So if you can recall back to that time, which it was published first about 10 years ago, so what was the context? What was the backdrop of your life when Falling Upward came into your life and how did it hit you?

Brené Brown: Yeah, so I just have to make a quick, I think Richard and I will both be probably not great at this, but I have to tell him a side story. The Bono moment was insane, and I still talk to people who were in that audience who say that there was electricity on the stage when we were talking about Father Richard, because Bono brought it up. And I had notes in my hand and he had no idea that when he brought it up, I had two pages of quotes from Father Rohr on my notes, and I said, "Will you look at this?" And he goes, "Oh my God." And we both got the shivers, just that kind of very thin place moment.

And it was very interesting too, because before I started that conversation with Bono, I told a friend of mine, "I'm going to talk about God." And he said, "Oh no, why?" And he's like, "I thought you of all people would talk about rock and roll." And I thought, "There's no one more rock and roll than God. I mean, He, like, come on, I don't get the separation. I'm not seeing the separation." And he looked at me and he goes, "Oh, that's so Richard Rohr of you

to say.”

And so I think when I picked up *Falling Upward* for the first time, I hated it even more than I did the second time I read it. I was so angry reading it because it was messing with my first half of life container that was, I thought sturdy, but was very fragile. And it was calling things into question that a deeper part of me wanted to talk about, but a fearful part of me did not want to even acknowledge that it existed. So I was really upset with the first time I read it, I thought in one second I thought, “This is terrible. This is the truest thing I’ve ever read. I hate this book. I’m going to sleep with it under my pillow.” I just, I had all the feelings about it, but couldn’t quite get there because it was too scary. And I knew it was true. And the truth is so scary and the first half of life is so perfect for running from it.

Paul Swanson: The terrible nature of truth. I think that rings for a lot of us. Richard, how does that land for you when you hear Brené’s experience of having that book land in the terrible nature of truth, not hiding anything.

Richard Rohr: It’s very humbling because you know you’re being heard at a very deep level or you wouldn’t make those connections she’s already made. So it’s saying more about her than me. But it’s still humbling that somehow I was a little instrument in her hearing is very gratifying, because I respect what you’re doing in our culture and it’s so needed. I want to do whatever I can to support it.

Brené Brown: Thank you. It’s hard because I’ve always experienced your work as, even when I read the daily things that come on my email, you manage somehow, and this is probably narcissistic on my part because someone told me this about my work, but I didn’t understand what they meant until I thought about your work. But it’s like a warm hug and a punch to the gut at the same time.

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Brené Brown: It’s like, “I love you and you need to hear this.”

Richard Rohr: I have to say I understand that way of thinking, yes. Great truth has that capacity, has that impact. Thank you.

Brené Brown: There’s warmth in it, and there’s a little hurt in it.

Richard Rohr: A little push. Forgive me God.

Brené Brown: Yeah, a little push.

Paul Swanson: And that same hurt and that little push, 10 years had passed since that first book, the first edition was published, and Brené, you were so kind to offer the gift of writing the foreword for the second edition of *Falling Upward*. And as you said-

Richard Rohr: A beautiful foreword.

Paul Swanson: ... Wasn’t it beautiful?

Richard Rohr: On homesickness. Yes.



Paul Swanson: Yeah. We want to dig into that. As you were prompted to reread it after writing that foreword or maybe before, what stuck out differently? How did you hate it differently this go-around than the first time? How has it felt as a warm hug with the punch in the gut?

Brené Brown: It felt like it saved my life. It felt like, I'll be really honest about what happened. I was actually talking to my therapist and I was in so much pain about a lot of things going on in my life, confusion. I'm a terrible, terrible public person. I don't enjoy being a public person. I don't like being told that I can't talk about God because I'm talking about science and I can't talk about this because... I'm not easily categorized. I'm not filed away easily. My mom was sick and I was having a really hard time. And I said, "And then on top of it, I'm really off because now I've got to reread this book because it's written by someone important to me and I've got to write the foreword and I'm under a lot of pressure and I can't do that right now because I'm soul-searching right now. I'm busy soul-searching."

And she said, "Who's the book by?" And I said, "Richard Rohr." And she goes, "Man, God makes it easy for some people.". And I was like, "What do you mean? That's so rude?" And she just said, "Read the book." And I read the book and I was like, "Oh, oh, I am grieving. I'm lost. I'm in a liminal space between the first stage of life and the second stage of life, and I'm afraid to close the door and even more afraid to open, walk through the next one even though I'm pulled to it." And so I did want to ask, I really wanted to ask you actually, Father Richard, is there a space between the first half and the second half that's really scary?

Richard Rohr: No one's ever asked me that. I'm sure I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to say I know, or there is or there isn't. But I can say there can be for sure. There can be. That'd be what we mean by liminal space, threshold.

Brené Brown: Oh.

Richard Rohr: Where you're neither in or out and that's where all change happens. So probably it's likely, because you don't just jump both feet into the second half of life, you slowly find yourself there.

Brené Brown: But it makes awareness of that. Awareness of it is painful. I know I'm in the threshold. I know I'm in the liminal space and I'm not drawn to going back at all. Even though I did the first half, I really knew how to nail that. I could do that, but I don't want to turn around. But I'm also scared to,... I am keeping one leg back, one foot back in the threshold as I'm going through. I'm scared. I really am scared, I'm fearful.

Richard Rohr: A metaphor that again comes to mind listening to you is one I used at a wedding sermon I gave a few weeks ago, and it keeps recurring. I'm calling it walking the plank. And I'm seeing more and more things that matter, the fruit of walking the plank. You as a married woman, a faithful married woman, you had to walk a plank and fall into something. It had to be scary. I think true love always is. And if that's true of human love, why not divine love? And each time you surrender to a new situation or person, it's walking the plank. I think if we'd given people a metaphor like that instead of the word faith, which is now so destroyed by religious connotations, we might've helped people a lot more. So you're walking the plank again, it sounds like. Great people always do, it's their whole life.

Brené Brown: It's so hard to walk a plank when you've spent the first half of your life building what you

thought was the perfect ship.

Richard Rohr: Very good. That's a good response.

Brené Brown: Do you know what I mean?

Richard Rohr: Which shouldn't demand a plank.

Brené Brown: Yes.

Richard Rohr: Yes. Let's just stay on this perfect ship. In my case being male, Catholic, and American. And that was supposed to make me human. I really wish it were that simple. And most people do, and they think the work is done. Just keep being more Catholic, more American, and more gender bound. Yeah.

Brené Brown: It's funny too because if I built that ship, I built the plank too. So it's part of me that's probably connected to God knew I'd have to walk it someday, but I'm comfortable in my ship. It's custom-built. It's got all the amenities of, all the trappings of first half of life's success that just mean very little to me at this point. And so it is walking the plank. That is so beautiful.

Richard Rohr: You're so honest. Thank you. I agree.

Brené Brown: Can I ask another question?

Richard Rohr: Of course.

Brené Brown: This is going to be a weird question.

Richard Rohr: I bet it won't be.

Brené Brown: I bet it will be. So I am like a very number one Enneagram wing two, and one of the things I think I'm scared about is I understand the rules and I understand the game in the first half of life, which is very important to me as a one. I need to know all the rules so that I can win.

Richard Rohr: Oh, I know that. I'm a one also. That's why you and I can talk so easily.

Brené Brown: About other people. Just kidding. So what happens? It doesn't seem like a lot of my oneness means very much in the second half of life.

Richard Rohr: I hope that's true.

Brené Brown: Oh God, that's right.

Richard Rohr: One has a lot to move beyond. The ship we build is too good. It's too ego-inflating, too satisfying, too domineering without looking that way. We look so polite, and civil, and humane. And we are, but we aren't, because we want it the way we want it. I understand that game. It only gets really sour if you don't move to the second half of life. For us, it's very clear. A one who stays in the first half becomes rigid, legalistic, unbending, judgmental. Judgmental most of all.

Brené Brown: Resentful?

Richard Rohr: Resentful, yes. And we don't let anybody see our resentments, which makes them even more lethal. They're there at work in our soul, but we try to look real polite. Like these two guys interviewing us, they come over and visit me and I treat them very polite. Well, no, I really don't. [inaudible 00:38:05]. That didn't work. I guess I let my one out on them.

Mike Petrow: I would say quite the contrary, Richard. I think what's been really fun in this season of your life has been watching the playful, gentle side of your personality come out.

Richard Rohr: I hope so.

Mike Petrow: It's been really nice. If I can ask the two of you another question, one of the things, Brené, you'll appreciate this. We've recorded a bunch of conversations with Richard looking back on *Falling Upward*. And one of the themes that's come out in almost every single conversation has been this idea that the longing and the quest for home, the nostos is such a huge part of human experience, and that it might be the beating heart of western myth, mysticism and meaning making.

So then when we finally received your foreword and we got to read this nostos and elga returning home in the second half of life, it was so moving. I cried when I read it. When you say spiritual homesickness has been a constant in my life, for me, and I think a lot of our readers and a lot of listeners, this is very grounding and it's very sanity-making. It's heartbreaking, and heart-making. And just I think such a profound part of so many of our experiences.

So the question I have for the two of you is what really is this longing for home? I know it gets hooked and expressed in nostalgia in the search for an ideal partner or church or career. I know it gets theologized as the desire to go back to Eden or forward to heaven. It gets psychologized as a longing for the womb or the ideal childhood or the Jungian self. But I can't help but wonder, is it all of them? Is it none of them? In your lived experience for both of you, and I'll say this last little part, in listening to you talk to Richard today, Brené, I hear this longing for home as that which calls us back to the first half of life, but also calls us forward. And so I'd love to hear the two of you talk. Brené, you first, if you would just tell us how has this been real for you?

Brené Brown: I think I wrote this in the foreword. I don't think... In moments where I've left the first half of life, I've walked the plank, I've fallen, and I'm in that second half and I'm in a different place and I'm not visiting God. God's in me and I know it. And among me and between me and the people I'm with, and I've never been homesick during those periods of time in my life for the first half of life, I've never said, "Let me get back." Fear has driven me back. Not homesickness. Fear. Fear, fear that I don't know what to do or how to be good or right in this new space. I think it's a blessing, but it's also hard. I know when I am spiritually aligned with God, I know, I know in my bones I can feel it. I know it. And when I leave that place, usually for some pursuit, first life pursuit, it drives a terrible physical yearning in me to return to myself where God lives.

And my capacity to be outside of my relationship with God now has completely diminished at my age. This is the threshold. This is the plank. I just got to go because I really, it doesn't

matter how nice the ship is, I can't build a ship and drive it to God. I have to jump off. And that's the really hard part. That's the scary hard part for me. But to me, and I was able to, I don't know, what do they call those things in Avengers, a symbol? Portals. I was able to create a lot of portals my entire life to get to God. Mostly through music, or prayer, or communion, reading a Richard Rohr book. And then I would just shut it and go back. And I don't want to do that anymore. I don't want to visit, I want to live there now. And that's the homesickness for me.

Mike Petrow: Wow. I'm just taking that in. Wow. Thank you.

Brené Brown: But I hope you don't have to be dead to do that.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. That's where we, the Christian Church have sold people short, giving us the whole impression that all the rewards were in the next world, or the next life, or after death. That was a major misplacement of attention and concern. "Do these moral things right and you'll get to be whole later." Darn it.

Brené Brown: That's not true?

Richard Rohr: No, that's not true. I mean, I'm not saying we achieve perfect wholeness here, but enough to enjoy it, enough to take delight in it, enough to let others enjoy you.

Mike Petrow: Richard, can I ask you to say just a minute if you would, you've already talked about joking with Jim Finley about living in the third half of life, but in this season of your life, what does it feel like to find your own place in the home of your connection with the divine?

Richard Rohr: Well, first I have to say I don't fully know how to live there. I'm used to living out of after 80 years of building an education, a persona, a reputation, a career. You've worked at those things so long on a certain level, no, a very real level, you don't know how to live without them. But thank God they're taken away from you. I mean, I can't travel that much anymore. I'm just finishing this book on the prophets, and this will be my last one because this was much harder. My mind just doesn't work like I thought it once did. So God slows you down, I think necessarily, or you won't fall into the true self.

And you guys know that my understanding of the second half of life is mostly homesickness for the true self, not hometown. I don't want to go back to Kansas, nothing against Kansas, but I don't want to go back to my little boyhood, and I had a good one, but I want to learn to be who God really created me to be. And that's all I think God wants me to be, is who I really am. It sounds like such a cliché, but it's true. And so many people I work with, especially with emotional or mental illness, their family or their church or their culture never gave them permission and freedom to be who they really are with joy. That's the sin, doing that to another human being. And of course, culture and church and family don't know they're doing that, so you got to even forgive them. They don't know. They did it to themselves, which is what has kept them small. I'm just babbling now. Please go ahead, ask Brené something.

Brené Brown: No, I'm taking notes on every word you're saying. I have a whole, look at this, I have a whole page of notes on everything you're saying.

Richard Rohr: You're so humble.

Brené Brown: Now it makes sense to me.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Well, a quote came to me as you were sharing Richard, from a recent conversation that the poet Christian Wiman had on Terry Gross's Fresh Air.

Richard Rohr: He is so good.

Paul Swanson: So good.

Richard Rohr: And from Texas too.

Paul Swanson: There you go. Well we'll chalk that up to another Texan worth being in conversation with. But he said in that show, he said, "Most of what Christianity ought to be is a poetic religion that teaches a way, that gives us models of experiencing the world and not directions for how to be in the world." And there's such an expansiveness to what that poetic sense of what Christianity could be. And as I heard you, Richard, talk about those who have been kept small, who haven't been enjoyed or enjoy, that is the domineering of how to be in the world versus the expansive model of experiencing the world. And I think one of the gifts of the way that you talk about the second half of life is that you model it in this humility, and I think Brené's doing the exact same thing, from your location as you talk about that liminal space, how does that land with you? Just the sense of a poetic way of Christianity rather than a directive.

Richard Rohr: Using the word poetic is really brilliant, because spirituality and religion are the difference between poetry and prose. Poetry is spirituality. It's indirect. It's subtle. It's not hide bound to one definition. Now most people's religion is, and that's what keeps them religious, but not spiritual. And maybe the single most liberating thing that's happened in our lifetime is the amount of people, especially in the last 15 years, who call themselves spiritual, but not religious. They're more into poetry, while not throwing out prose. They're more into spirituality, without needing to react against religion. And the previous groups, you just get tired of this reacting against religion. You just say, "Oh, come on," it's a waste of your energy. You've only got one life.

It meant well, just like you mean well, and your mother meant well and everybody means well. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Give religion the benefit of the doubt. It made a lot of mistakes, mostly in the area of verbalization. It didn't know how to verbalize mystery. And so it gave two rigid categories. And then people reacted against our verbalizations.

Let me give a Catholic example. We created the really philosophically based doctrine called transubstantiation, that the bread was trans-substantiated into Jesus. Now I know theologically the realism, that's the word, they're trying to protect and that's good. But we've had five centuries now of arguing about transubstantiation and we fight for something that isn't what we're really talking about.

What we're talking about is presence, how do you access presence? And that's why we call

our center a contemplative center. The contemplative mind knows how to access presence. If we would've taught that instead of trying to make people defend the philosophically categorized thing, transubstantiation, we would've served religion much better. That's my opinion, but I give that as an example. Does it work? Does that make sense?

Brené Brown: It completely makes sense.

Richard Rohr: I don't see the two boys nodding their heads.

Paul Swanson: No, I was smiling. Sorry, I was silently agreeing.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, I'm mentally taking notes and physically doing so and formulating questions. And I do have a follow-up question, but Brené, if you wanted to speak to that first. I'll hold my question for a second.

Brené Brown: No, it makes complete sense to me. As someone, I was raised Catholic, my kids went to Catholic schools, I went to a Catholic school, and if people ask me and people do all the time interviews, or for some reason there's this curiosity about my faith practice, and I'm always like, "I'm a practicing Episcopalian and I'm probably at heart a Catholic mystic, but I can't find a good Catholic mystic church around, but I just can't go to church anywhere where there's no mystery because that's the whole point out of it." If I can't find mystery at church and having been raised Catholic, it's like the mysteries of faith.

And so I get it, and that's why I think I can give religion a break, but I am in a world full of people who are not neurobiologically hardwired for uncertainty, it is very easy to pedal certainty. It is very easy to get on the certainty grift. And so I get it, and I get how the church next door is telling people exactly what to do, and people love it. So we need to tell people exactly what to do. And I get it, except I just don't want it. It doesn't reconcile with my experience of God as a... And I think that's part of the plank, the second half of life, walking off that plank that Father Richard was describing is mystery. And mystery to me is also the difference between poetry and prose.

Richard Rohr: There you go.

Brené Brown: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: The appropriate response to mystery is awe, wonder, not explanation.

Brené Brown: Yes.

Richard Rohr: To go back to my example, transubstantiation is an explanation, but it doesn't elicit wonder or awe. It pulls you back into your left brain where you like to argue and that gets you nowhere.

Mike Petrow: It's interesting. I appreciate that. One of our mantras around here is practicing exploration instead of explanation. It seems like so many of us have ideas and plans, and then these ideas and plans encounter reality. One of the themes of your book, Richard, is that sooner or later we are going to fail at something, despite our best ideas and plans, or something is going to fail us. And so I'm curious for the two of you. You are both brilliant thought leaders who

have gifted the world amazing insight, and you both seem to be really good at life. And from that place, our listeners or your readers might say, sure, okay, but also, how is failure really the beginning point of all this? What insight could you give us into this notion that at some point we have to go beyond our plans and our ideas? How's that been real for you?

Richard Rohr: Well, I don't know where to start. It seems to me we live in a culture that's made winning almost an ontological, metaphysical truth.

Brené Brown: It's true.

Richard Rohr: I mean, people's ecstasy, go to an arena or a sports field like in Texas, forgive me I just... Here too I'm just teasing you.

Brené Brown: I love it.

Richard Rohr: And the ecstatic cheering isn't worthy of a game. It really isn't. I see evangelicals raising their hands at prayer, now that at least I can see a coherence between the action and the object that supposedly we're cheering the goodness of God. Okay. But that same ecstasy and painting your face purple and jumping over anything, and well, I don't need to bemoan it. It's just the reason I and this concern is we've made the win-lose paradigm so basic that we in the world of religion have defined the gospel in terms of win-lose. It's dualistic, our words for it were heaven, hell. And the vast majority of Christians are trapped in this, in my opinion, false scenario. The real good news is that God turns our losing into winning.

Not that they're two different groups. But boy, you can't convince that to someone who goes wild over winning. They've got to frame reality in terms of win-lose, and we bemoan a lot the male of the species today. I think that's why the male is more trapped because he's even more convicted of the win-lose metaphysics, that it's substantial, that it matters and that it matters eternally. But that the good news could be even those who appear to be losing are still beloved. Why does that scare us so much? I just finished my chapter on the prophet Ezekiel this morning, and there it all is again, the dry bones. "Breathe on the dry bones and tell them live, live, live." But we don't want to do that. I don't know why? Maybe we're not that excited about life ourselves. I'm rambling now. Stop me, one of you.

Brené Brown: No, I'm at church. I will not be the good person to volunteer to stop you. I'm taking notes. I'm thinking about this. I'm rethinking my request to have you pray for the Texas Longhorn football team. But yeah, the zero-sum.

Richard Rohr: Zero-sum.

Brené Brown: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. It's so lacking in the Pope just said this week, it seems like he says something good every week. "There might be a hell, but I hope no one's there."

Brené Brown: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That's as far as he thought he could get a lot of people. "I hope no one's there."



Brené Brown: He's pushing on some good stuff.

Richard Rohr: I don't think anybody's there. Yeah, right.

Brené Brown: It's interesting when you were describing the football game, which I attend many of those. And go, Liverpool. You know what I think? You know what it reminds me of? It reminds me of Emil Durkheim and his study on collective effervescence. And this thing he observed first in churches where he saw what he almost described in the beginning as magic, this thing that happened to people when they came together in community and in braving the wilderness. I called it holding hands with strangers. Sometimes I don't know if people really care about what's going on in the field and about the winning or the losing. Sometimes what I think happens is people want to be with other people in celebration and in community.

Richard Rohr: Of course, you're giving a compassionate understanding. Go ahead.

Brené Brown: Maybe. But I do think it can slip into what is more out of collective or effervescence and into very dangerous group think because bad things can happen. But I remember talking to my son who's 18, and of course, a very deep thinker about things, and we were talking about fantasy football, and I was like, "Oh my God, you're obsessed." And he's like, "Mom, this is just a way for dudes my age to be able to call each other every day and talk."

Richard Rohr: He said that.

Brené Brown: Yeah. And I was-

Richard Rohr: He's as smart as his mother. Wow.

Brené Brown: I was like, "What do you mean?" And he said, "It's just this is how we connect. This is how we..."

Richard Rohr: That's so true.

Brené Brown: And so I wonder sometimes if, because otherwise I've thought about it. I thought about what you're saying so much because I'm like, "Why would these people pay thousands and thousands of dollars for these season tickets for a losing team?" But they don't care. They just put on the same outfits-

Richard Rohr: No.

Brené Brown: ... and they break bread together and they hold hands and they sing the national anthem together and they know cheers and chants and it's-

Richard Rohr: Good for you, that's it.

Brené Brown: ... it's misplaced something. But I think we're starving to be a part of something that's bigger than us.

Richard Rohr: Of course.

Brené Brown: I don't think football is a good answer for it. But I think there's some deeper meaning. But



I do think, and I think failure, I think, I don't know. I have had a lot of failures. I mean, people see me and they think, "Oh man, she wrote all these number one New York Times bestsellers." I could wallpaper my house with rejection letters. And it has made me stronger. But I will tell you something, and this is a weird theological reference, but I was listening to a podcast with Rick Rubin, the music producer, and in my liminal walking the plank space trying to think about whether I want to chuck my career or not, just get rid of the whole thing. I'm so tired of a lot of it. And he said, "When your work is an offering to God, you don't feel that way. When your work is an evaluation-

Richard Rohr: That's true.

Brené Brown: ... of whether you're a good person or not, that's when you feel that way."

Richard Rohr: That's true.

Brené Brown: Do you think that's true?

Richard Rohr: He's wise. Yeah. Doing it for God cleans the slate.

Brené Brown: Yes.

Richard Rohr: It clarifies everything. It's what Jesus meant by a clean heart, or the Psalms speak of the clean heart. Jesus spoke of purity of heart.

Brené Brown: I'm not a good Bible reciter, but there's something in the Bible that says something like, y'all can tell me what the right one is, but my translation of it for me is whatever your work is, do it wholeheartedly and do it for God, not for man.

Richard Rohr: Of course.

Brené Brown: I don't know what that is, but I like it and it's on a sticky note on my laptop.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, you can't really be destroyed. You're doing yourself a favor if you're doing it for God, who can defeat you? Because God accepts, as He Himself even says, in Jesus, He even accepts a mustard seed. So come on, let's do it for God. You're helping yourself and everybody around you. But to do it for fame, or money, or reputation.

Brené Brown: It's empty.

Richard Rohr: Yep.

Brené Brown: That's the failure. That's dangerous. That's why people... That's the failure. People think they know, and that's why they reject failure because they think the failure they know is the ego-slammung, I'm-not-good-enough failure.

Richard Rohr: Yes, that's right.

Brené Brown: Yeah. Dangerous.

Paul Swanson: Thinking about that quote that you just shared from Rick Rubin, it's so beautiful. I love the

way that it connects from his own Buddhist perspective into the biblical text as well. I want to ask you a bit of a wandering jaunt question based on work as an offering, and you can let us know what you think about this. So in Richard's book, in *Falling Upward*, in chapter one, he says that in the first half of life, we seek answers to essential questions like what makes me significant? How can I support myself? And who will go with me? And these are of course, necessary self-referential, existential questions. And then the questions of the second half of life, and this goes back to the poetic piece, are more spacious and expansive, the one that Mary Oliver asks in her poem, *The Summer Day*, "What do you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

So for me, as an outside observer of your work, Brené and enjoy of your work, your public work, and looking at it through the lens of *Falling Upward*, I'm wondering if I'm getting this right where I see you beginning with shame and then vulnerability as the first half of life pass, which prepare the way for empathy as almost as like a trap door that opens or maybe more of a deepening is a better word, towards second half of life themes like courage and leadership while bringing in the jewels of all the lessons from the first half of life. How does that land with you? Do you feel like your published work is a reflection of that journey of the two halves of life framework?

Brené Brown: A hundred percent. A hundred percent. Not intentionally. It was like one of those movies that you watch, those mystery movies where the protagonist sees something and then with special effects, they lay a map over it and everything makes sense. When I was reading *Falling Upward* for the second time, I was like, "Oh, I'm not choosing this. This is happening to me. I think I'm much more powerful than I think. I'm on God's time here. This is a divine middle age situation we're in." Yeah. So I think definitely that's, and that's why I'm so interested and curious about the next chapter of my work, because I'm hanging off the, I'm white knuckling the plank right now, and I'm so wanting to let go to see what happens because I don't know where my work will go next, but I think you nailed it. Yes, you nailed it.

Paul Swanson: That's great. And the ocean is so big once you let go of that plank, it's a big ocean. You don't know where you're going to land. You don't know where you're going to drift. I think that metaphor, I feel like keeps working on itself and expanding.

Brené Brown: And I can just work it until we're in tears. But I will tell you that like the ocean itself, I am drawn to the water and I'm deeply fearful of it.

Richard Rohr: Well, I guess you could say you don't land. That's precisely what you don't do, you ocean. Yeah.

Brené Brown: Oh my God, that's so funny.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, it works, doesn't it? Yeah.

Brené Brown: Yes.

Richard Rohr: Just thought of that.

Brené Brown: That's the scary part. The whole second half of life is like letting go of the footing.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, you don't land.

Brené Brown: You don't land.

Mike Petrow: This has been so good, and one of the things that's come up in all our conversations leading up to this, and this is such a brilliant way to land in it, is as *Falling Upward* has been in the world for 10 years, and a lot of folks who are going to be listening to this podcast will be rereading it. Some folks will be reading it for the first time, but there's a lot of us who read it years ago. We might've read it in the first half of life. We might've read it in the second half of life. But once we read it and try to integrate it, we are attempting, wherever we are chronologically, to live our lives in light of both first and second half of life wisdom. And it's so wild at the beginning to listen to you, Brené, talk about being in that liminal place between the two as well.

So I think the parting question is, it's a bit of a two-parter. What advice would you give for folks who are going to be rereading this book this season, and more to the point, what guidance would each of you give us for trying to live life wherever we are chronologically in light of both wisdoms? Brené, could I ask you to go first since you've just had this experience of revisiting the book after 10 years?

Brené Brown: Yeah. I'll use something that y'all shared with me that I love is I think the book is not an explanation, the book is an exploration.

Richard Rohr: Oh, thank you.

Brené Brown: Yeah. The first time I read it, I read it, and the second time I engaged with it, I inhabited it. I got pulled into it and I lived in it and rolled around in it and wrote notes on it and threw it across the room a couple of times. But it will meet you wherever you are.

Richard Rohr: Boy. I sure hope so.

Brené Brown: Yeah, it does. It's amazing that way, Father Richard. It will meet you wherever you are.

Mike Petrow: That's really good. Richard, the book's been a part of your life now for a decade. What guidance do you have for all of us who are trying to integrate both halves of life wisdom?

Richard Rohr: Well, for sure don't read it as a textbook because it isn't. Don't read it as a recipe. I'm just thinking out loud that's all. It isn't. It's a book that hopes to, as grace does, to give you more space, more space. More space to ask really new questions. And in this time where more and more people are leaving religion for the sake of spirituality, I think it might be best as a guide for people precisely at that place. So they don't just think it means believing nothing, it still believes in an internal dynamic of growth and resurrection and renewal.

Those words are so religious, but that's what Ezekiel the prophet, "Grow..." He just starts yelling at the dry bones. He breathes on them and says, "Grow, become, become." It's a good understanding of the real work of spirituality. And when you see in our present time people narrowing the field trying to find who they do not need to love or who are not included, those transgender people, those Palestinian people, or whoever you've decided is not to be included, I think we need to hear it more than ever because we like to narrow the field

around ourselves. So silly, isn't it?

Brené Brown: Mm-hmm.

Mike Petrow: I really appreciate everything you've both said, and I want to just say the notion of grace making space is fantastic.

Richard Rohr: Oh, that's it. Sure.

Mike Petrow: Thank you for that. That's fabulous. This has been so good.

Paul Swanson: This has been so great. Thank you both for engaging in an hour long hug that's warm and then also a punch in the gut along the way.

Brené Brown: I love it.

Paul Swanson: We're facing reality together and it's easier when we can laugh and smile in the face of the absurdity of all that is happening in our world. So thank you both so much for offering your gift of wisdom and vulnerability and presence today. Can't wait for everyone to hear this as they dig in deeper to *Falling Upward* in text or audio. Thank you both so, so much.

Richard Rohr: Thank you, Paul. Thank you, Michael, and thank you Brené. You're a blessing, a delight.

Brené Brown: Thank y'all.

Mike Petrow: Paul, what an amazing conversation that was?

Paul Swanson: So good.

Mike Petrow: Just blown away. I love and was honored that Brené repeated back this mantra that we have, that when we look at the kinds of teachings we're going to be exploring in something like *Falling Upward*, it really is about exploration, not explanation. It's about dialogue, not definitions. And we see that the quest really is in the questions. I feel like Richard sets us up for that right at the beginning of the book.

Paul Swanson: He certainly does, and it sets the foundation, I feel like, of this podcast and the way that you just laid out how we're approaching it. And Richard begins the very first chapter of the book with questions. I'm just going to read a little section from page one where he says, "The task of the first half of life is to create a proper container for one's life and answer the first essential questions. What makes me significant? How can I support myself? And who will go with me?"

Now of course, as you answer those, they start to, different questions arrive in the second half of life. And one thing that we've noted in our conversations here is the helpfulness of questions on the quest. And out of that learning and gleaning, we're going to end each podcast with a question to leave for consideration to those listening as they allow this conversation we've had with Richard first in his hermitage, and then with our guests just to wash over them and see how this question soaks in and saturates and integrates into their life and how that might help them in their own unfolding path.

Mike Petrow: It's so brilliant, and I love the notion of us sitting with a question between episodes. I have to say in this conversation, the thing that struck me the most is this new idea Richard's been talking about of love being a walking of the plank. I loved listening to the two of them talk about that. Love asks us to walk the plank and step into the unknown, and that really is the journey of Falling Upward, is the courage and the willingness to step into the unknown.

So I think the question that I would like to sit with myself and leave our listeners with is what are the ways in your life right now, wherever you are, wherever you are in the journey, the first half of life, the second half of life, everything in between, what are the ways that you are being invited to walk the plank and courageously step into the unknown in your life? We look forward to walking the plank together as we continue the exploration of Falling Upward in the coming weeks.

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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, and 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.