



EVERYTHING BELONGS

The First Half of Life
with Erin Sanzero

Paul Swanson: “The bewildering and divine blessing of aging has been that redirection yields insights that transcend binary notions.” This dazzling quote comes to us from Erin Sanzero’s article, *Midlife Musings*, in CAC’s publication, *Oneing*, that thematically focused on *Falling Upward*. The precision of Erin’s words articulates a wondrous gift that composts itself into generativity when received and recognized. When we sit with Richard in his living room, we talk a lot about aging, the gifts and the challenges of it. Whenever we are on that theme it is natural for the framework of *Falling Upward* to come up as a structure malleable enough to reflect on the trajectory of our lives. In today’s episode, we do just that. Mike and I begin by opening up our conversation with Richard on the conditions that help us grow up and when we do so how our participation is both a catalyst for the expansion of ourselves as well as the traditions that we participate in.

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: All right. Richard, thanks again for having us here at your house, your hermitage, to talk about chapter three from *Falling Upward*, *The First Half of Life*. There’s this quote that I find very useful for thinking about the first half of life and being in conversation with friends. And where you write that we ironically need limit situations and boundaries to grow up. How does the landscape of laws and rules, which you call limit situations, I think, impact what we call container building in the first half of life?

Richard Rohr: Without hitting up against boundaries or limits, the ego becomes imperial, it just keeps, “I have a right to this. I have a right to that.” We see this in a lot of people in our country. We had a staff member you won’t remember anymore, but he actually told me once, “I have rights.” And I said, “And are those balanced by responsibilities?” He said, “No.” I said, “Are you serious?” He said, “No, I don’t have any responsibilities toward the center, I just have rights.”

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Richard Rohr: He said that. I said, “Say it one more time,” because I can’t believe any human being would be that naive to think you have rights without... But see, here’s where we critique culture.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That’s American entitlement.

Paul Swanson: Have you heard Viktor Frankl in *Man’s Search for Meaning*?

Richard Rohr: I read it several times in college. What’s your point?

Paul Swanson: He talks about the beauty of the Statue of Liberty on the east coast and he recommend that we have a statue of responsibility on the west coast.

Richard Rohr: Is that right?

Paul Swanson: To balance out your point right there.

Richard Rohr: Oh, wow. That's good. Yeah. Without boundaries the ego is out of control because it thinks everything is new land for me to discover and own and use. Marriage itself is set up to take away at least 50% of your ego, 50% of the time at least I got to let her be right. But I think that's the meaning of the 10 Commandments. You're not the center of the world. You cannot steal from other people. Sorry. You cannot lie to other people. So 10 Commandments are the boundary-making of the first half of life. They aren't holiness. They're just tilling the field, growing the crops in rows whereby they could be irrigated and get proper sun. But without that container, you have no fruitful plants. Does that make sense?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Yeah.

Mike Petrow: The order is helpful for stability and foundation.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Yeah. Uh-huh.

Paul Swanson: Or maybe the second half of life, you're in the wilds of the forest where you haven't necessarily ordered it, but you see the fruits and the bounty that's already just present in nature.

Richard Rohr: Uh-huh. You see the patterns in the wildness of nature.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: And then you have the best of both worlds. You're sitting alone in the forest and you still see order. You still see ecosystems at work. You still see bees pollinating flowers, the co-relationship of things. That's what makes it so beautiful that you love the wild and you love the patterns inside of the wild too. They're both true. That's the second half of life, realization. Someone who stays too long in the first half just keeps my patterns, my patterns, my patterns and not any universal pattern.

Mike Petrow: Love that. There's a Jungian, named Eugene Pascal, and in one of his books he says that the reason that we have law and dharma that we study early on is because we have to learn to use the powers of the soul safely.

Richard Rohr: Hm, very good.

Mike Petrow: Which is the definition I've always liked and it's always reminded me of Falling Upward.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: Because there this notion that there are the boundary conditions and there is the safety, but it is revealing to us the power contained within.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: And the wildness and the potential.

Richard Rohr: Very good. You get it.

Mike Petrow: I really like that.

Richard Rohr: Young people, you're still reveling in being a rebel. Now you're allowed to do that 'til maybe even early twenties. Remember, we had a presidential candidate, I won't name who it was, a generation or so back, who just kept calling herself a maverick. "I'm a maverick." I want to say, "You're a fifty-year-old woman. Your maverick days are behind you." It just was sad because she didn't know how to be a creative maverick, because she had her freedom to be rich and to be powerful and to be right, but didn't know how to protect it in the least of the brothers and sisters. The genius of Jesus is he sees the patterns, but he uses them for the guys at the bottom, not the aggrandizement of the people at the top. That's what I mean by an ego set wild, set loose. It's no good.

Mike Petrow: Must be why Jesus was a four. It's an interesting thing when you talk about that. And I'm thinking about the value of it and then the transition through it. So you and I have talked in the past about this. I told you I had these series of dreams and in the dream I would always be going through boot camp and I would be learning how to be a soldier. And then at the end of the dream I'd be sent off to war and I'd realize I don't support the war that I'm being sent off to and what do I do?

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Mike Petrow: And you've talked to me about discharging the loyal soldier, discharging the loyal soldier-

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: ... discharging the loyal soldier.

Richard Rohr: It's a good phrase.

Mike Petrow: It's so great. What can you tell us about discharging the loyal soldier in the second half of life and what that transition is like?

Richard Rohr: You only do it well if you confront one single personal issue, the classic truth as I understood it doesn't work. It's not always true. The one at forefront today is gender, of course, that gay people are inherently sinful or bad. You have to meet one gay person, maybe your own child, maybe a friend who... That bland absolute statement, "I know it's not true because this man, this woman is a wonderful human being." That helps it to fall apart. But if you don't get outside of your homogeneous world, you'll never see that. We had a president recently who even went so far as to make fun, publicly, of handicapped people. Just that among the thousand other ridiculous things he said should have disqualified him as president. Publicly made fun of a handicapped person. He's never been outside of his world of power and success and money and thinks it's his freedom to mock another child of God who should be loved because of what he suffers instead of mocked. That's how far we've gone.

And that 40% of the population doesn't see that, they must be in the same place. You mock handicapped people or at least you think it's okay? Well, I don't know

what they'd say. We're in trouble. Do you see how I'm trying to be like the prophets of Jesus critiquing the collective mindset that allows us to mock handicapped people or gay people or anybody, really. Pope Francis is fighting this in Rome at the Synod. He usually doesn't respond to critics, but just when the Synod started a few days ago he took it upon himself to answer all the critiques of these arch-conservative cardinals who want him to condemn homosexuality. And he listed... And he's got a new mantra, maybe you've heard it, he ends his remarks in Italian, "[foreign language 00:11:15]." That means everybody. "What kind of everybody don't you understand? Christ welcomes [foreign language 00:11:24]." And in Spanish, then he says, "[foreign language 00:11:27]. What part of [foreign language 00:11:30] don't you understand?"

God, this guy's a genius. He just has such courage. And once you hear it that way, if God doesn't love [foreign language 00:11:42], who does he love? Because we're all an exception in one area.

Paul Swanson: You've definitely touched on the necessity of... It's kind of the more nefarious side of the loyal soldier, but wouldn't you also say the positive side of the loyal soldier is it protects you-

Richard Rohr: Oh.

Paul Swanson: ... earlier in life. Sometimes it creates a stability-

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Paul Swanson: ... so that you can actually grow up.

Richard Rohr: That -

Paul Swanson: And I'm not talking about the things that you've just named about making fun of disabled people in any way or shape or form, but the ways in which one can get self-protective. And it's this loyal soldier limiting risk so that you can have a sense of safety in your life. Can you speak more to the positive side of that?

Richard Rohr: Thank you for making me say that because that's so true. I carried all the teacher's favor in grade school because I was always on time. I always kept my desk clean. Such a sick one-

Paul Swanson: Hard to believe.

Richard Rohr: Looking at my house now.

Paul Swanson: No, I kid.

Richard Rohr: That sense of order told the nuns, the teachers, little Dicky Rohr can be trusted, he'll be responsible. Soon I was walking a whole group of classmates the eight blocks to school because they knew they could trust me. That was good at that age and I prided myself on being so responsible and being considered responsible. I would serve mass

at six in the morning, ride my little bike, leaving home in the dark at five-thirty. I was just a hero in my own... But do you see how if I'd stayed there it would've made me a smug prig? I don't know what definition of prig is.

Paul Swanson: I don't either, but I like it.

Richard Rohr: But it isn't nice. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. You don't get to hear that word anymore either.

Richard Rohr: And yet, it served me well up to grade seven or eight, little Mr. Responsible. Wow. That's where I learned all this stuff. What was good at one stage is bad at another stage.

Paul Swanson: Well said. And this leads us into our last question and following up where you quote Gregory of Nyssa, "Sin happens whenever we refuse to keep growing." Can you make some more connection points between sin and refusing to grow up? Like you said, if you stayed on that path of you become that smug prig.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And then how does refusing to grow up connect to maybe how we look at sin?

Richard Rohr: When you refuse to grow up, you refuse to let God grow up too. God has to be understood the way I first understood God, as a judge and as a rule maker, not as a lover. I'm ensure even you adult men would say your first love affairs were undoubtedly more about lust than love. That's all you're capable of as a sixteen-year-old, a seventeen-year-old. It's the same with God, your love of God, it's not really love of God, it's trying to curry favor with a God who might be hateful or angry or punishing. So people who keep growing let God keep growing, God get bigger, bigger, always bigger, always bigger. And we're living in a time with the Hubb telescope, Webb telescope. Hubble was the former one. Where that metaphor really works, just be honest about the universe, your God better get a lot bigger than just a Palestinian Jew or a European Catholic. It's reality that God loves and that includes all kind of exceptions. We cannot deal with exception.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Richard Rohr: We can't.

Mike Petrow: It reminds me of Origen who says that when we read scripture, we have to recognize... You say this so well, that God is growing us up.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: So there's a point in our development-

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Mike Petrow: ... where it's appropriate to think of God as a parent who we want to please.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: But we have to outgrow that.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: And I love that because what it does for me is it gives me a little bit of mercy to turn that around and relate to the folks I know who are still thinking about God in that way of-

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: ... reward versus punishment. But it reminds me we need to be always outgrowing it and growing beyond it.

Richard Rohr: Always. Yes, because we create another comfortable God-

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: ... who won't critique our egocentricity.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Very good.

Mike Petrow: Well, and I love that Hubble telescope example. You started with this question with Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nyssa says that we transform forever. It never stops, right?

Richard Rohr: Does he?

Mike Petrow: Yeah. We just grow.

Richard Rohr: God, he was ahead of his-

Mike Petrow: Forever. Yeah. And when he's building on Origen saying this life is a hospital and a classroom and we're always healing-

Richard Rohr: Wonderful.

Mike Petrow: ... and we're always growing and it never stops.

Paul Swanson: Here's a question for personal application, do you think that those areas where we still see God or as a limiting parent, that's the indicator of where we need further growth? If I look at my life, there's aspects of my own relationship with divine, right, some of those old stories of the parental figure or the judge will come into play.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Yes. Yes.

Paul Swanson: Could I begin to look at that as an indication of where in my life I still need to grow up?

Richard Rohr: I think so. Yes. Is that what you mean?

Paul Swanson: That's what I meant. That's what I'm wondering about.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Yeah. I think so. Why have I suddenly reverted to a punishing God who is so petty that I do one little human thing and he turns me off? How am I supposed to learn how to love from this character? You learn how to judge not love. It's going to take another generation or two to learn this. We can't be greater than God and you and I have both met people who love the unlovable, people in the missions, I met them so much. They always go to the missions to make Christians out of the Black people or whatever. Then they come back to America and say, "You know what? I'm met better Christians in Africa than we have here in Minnesota." Forgive me, Minnesota.

That's reverse mission, when you see that the people you thought you were converting are converting you, that they love better than I do. It's a necessary change. The turnaround. "My God, this one I thought I had to save is saving me by the way he or she loves or forgives or is patient. I'm so impatient." And you see people who just... They've had to learn it to survive. They're not going to change the world.

Mike Petrow: I think that reminds me of how much hope I take from every time you remind us that Christianity as a religion is still growing and it's helpful.

Richard Rohr: Early stage.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. That collectively, right, it's still growing up. We haven't quite grown into our own revelation.

Richard Rohr: That our own revelation that we claim is absolute and then we don't follow it. If it's so absolute, why aren't we like God? More infinitely loving, more infinitely forgiving, accepting of this always partial reality. Always. You get a piece of it, now manage that. Get another piece of it. How are you going to manage that? And Jesus takes it to the end point by teaching us that we must love our enemies. Oh my God. Those who are actually fighting you. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: What a great point to end on of our growing up helps Christianity grow up if we identify as Christian.

Richard Rohr: Very good. Good.

Paul Swanson: That we're a part of this larger body-

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: ... doing so.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: I love that. And Gregory of Nyssa said that all of humanity is still in the sixth day of creation. We're all still growing into the image of God.

Richard Rohr: Ain't that good? Wow.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Wow. What a good note to end on. Let's keep enjoying the sixth day of creation.

Richard Rohr: All right.

Mike Petrow: Amen and amen. Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

Paul Swanson: Today we're joined by Erin Sanzero in conversation on the themes of chapter three, The First Half of Life. Erin calls herself geriatric millennial who has worn a lot of different hats in her career. From opera singer to entrepreneur to pastoral ministry. Erin is an alumna from the CAC's Living School. Erin authored the article, Midlife Musings, in CAC's publication, Oneing. It's our biannual journal which focus on the reflections of Falling Upward. You can read Midlife Musings in full by accessing it in the show notes for this episode.

Welcome, Erin, to Everything Belongs, a podcast that focuses on the work of Father Richard Rohr and how we can move it forward. In this season, we're going to be talking about Falling Upward and we're thrilled to have you joining us because one of the things we do certainly know about you is you wrote an incredibly powerful article in Oneing, which is a CAC publication that comes out twice a year, and the latest one was on Falling Upward, to match the publication of... Well, I guess it's the second publication or reissue of Falling Upward that Richard put out.

Mike Petrow: And I have to say, Erin, we're not supposed to have favorites, but your article was by far and away my favorite piece of writing in that. I love, love, love, love how you capture the tension of living in the wisdom of both the first and the second half of life. I love how you talk about how navigating that pulls us beyond our binaries and also asks so much of us. It's really, really poignant. Usually we start the episode off by asking how someone first encountered the book Falling Upward. And we're going to ask you that in a second, but could I ask you to read those two paragraphs from the article where you first mentioned encountering the book?

Erin Sanzero: Absolutely. And thank you for those really sweet words. "Falling Upward entered my life when I was in my thirties during a series of knock-you-to-your-knees life events, the kind you realize you've exited your hard charging youth and along the way have also lost your orientation, your inner compass. I could not quiet the gnawing suspicion that the ladder I was diligently climbing might very well be on the wrong wall. My rough and tumble twenties resembled the Bluesmobile car chase scene from the Blues Brothers movie. The script I'd visualized from my life slowly evaporated before my eyes. What I thought was going to be was not, what I thought might happen did not, and my life had veered utterly off my aspired path. I was disordered and encumbered with heavy emotional baggage. My first container, the flimsy, frail foundations, infinitudes of what I could control and what I thought I understood had cracked and ruptured. I had lost my inner and outer sense of home."

Mike Petrow: That's so great. I so appreciate that. It reminds me of some of my favorite penned words that say, "Midway in our life's journey, I went astray from the straight road and woke to find myself alone in a dark wood."

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Mike Petrow: From the beginning of Dante's Divine Comedy. Erin, could you tell us a little bit more about what was going on in your life at that time? What that experience was like and what it was like to encounter Richard's book?

Erin Sanzero: Yeah. So I had grown up first and foremost as a performer. So I had an entire world that I think was really about how do you want me to show up? How do I show up to get hired, to get the job to please my parents, to please my teachers? And that career had begun to shape-shift into something different. I had burned through a marriage and there was a lot of what I thought my life would look like, really unintentionally moving into very different space. And I think simply put, I was having a very, "What's it all about, Alfie?" reality and beginning to ask myself, "How do I want to show up in spaces? How does Erin want to show up for Erin or in relationship with other people?" And I don't think that those were questions I had even considered until I was well into my thirties.

And so Falling Upward was the result of me really seeking out a spiritual direction, a soul friend, to help me process all of this and make sense and interrogate so many of the patterns about how I related to myself, my sense of worthiness in my relationship with God, deep abandonment issues in my relationships. And really wanting to interrogate what's vulnerability, what's weakness? And this is where Falling Upward entered where my wonderful soul friend offered it to me and I think I was positioned to then have life implode even more and start at the Living School, which means I was right on time because they say you start the Living School right when everything implodes.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It's funny because it's true, right?

Mike Petrow: That was my experience for sure.

Paul Swanson: And I love hearing what you're teasing up here of Falling Upward, this book falling into your hands and then the impact it has on you and then as you step in the Living School. Can you say more about how did that journey unfurl from maybe the impetus of Falling Upward, but then how are those themes resonant throughout the Living School?

Erin Sanzero: Yeah. I had read other work of Father Richard's prior to Falling Upward, but as... I think we talk a lot about how you think you fallen and then you fall some more. And so that was very much my own experience. So I think these things were there and what I'm so grateful about Falling Upward explicitly is that it was there for me as a guide. I had been teed up to have eldership in my soul friend and through this book and then that led me to the Living School where I could continue to consider what these models of faithful alternative orthodoxy, ways of leaning in to the process of Falling Upward versus saying, "Oh, I don't know what to do with this and it's terrifying. I got to run in the opposite direction." So I think I had a little bit of a roadmap from it.

Paul Swanson: That makes so much... I feel like I've heard that so many times and you articulate so well this map that allows, as you deepen into your own Falling Upward journey, that there can be less fear that the falling won't end necessarily. But that as you have a foot in both, that you can begin to take the gifts from one and then bring them into the other and they all become this embodied experience that is uniquely you as you walk through this life.

Mike Petrow: It's so wild. I appreciate, Erin, what you said about having a map and Paul, what you said

about having a foot in both. And I think we're going to circle back around to that, especially given the topic of your article, Erin. But I do really want to appreciate also what you said about you fall and then you fall again. I had a similar experience when I started the Living School I had already been through a really intense dark night of the soul. I'd lost my mom and my brother and Richard was doing a teaching on seasons of the spiritual life. And he said something at some point where he goes, "Unfortunately for a lot of us, it takes a really, really intense loss to get to this place of maturity."

And I knew I wasn't at that place of maturity yet. And I remember I said to my circle group, "If I am looking at another loss to get there, then I'm dropping out of the program and I'm not coming back because I don't want to experience anymore. I've punched my ticket, I paid my dues." And then the funny thing is my life immediately blew up after that. So Erin, what was it like to go through that program or really to sit with this teaching and to have a map for the season of your life where there is no map and to be learning about it while you're also experiencing it? That sounds like a lot.

Erin Sanzero: I think in the best way it was a companion. I also was working with somebody navigating incarceration at the time, so I did Falling Upward with them. And to be holding space, right, for the ways that this iterates for each individual person, and particularly in the Living School, I came into Brian's teaching in Faith After Doubt, where he breaks the two halves of life into four stages, right? Which upon first encountering that I remember stiff-arming that thinking, "Oh, no. It's stage one, it's stage two. This is overly complex and difficult." And I think sitting with it over time and being able to talk about it in community with other students, I've really come to appreciate that added layer of, I think, relationality and nuance that his offering of the four stages gives us because he details really specifically how circumstances and people can push and pull us in and out of those spaces.

So I might be in stage two, complexity, but this elder I'm in conversation with helps me envision stage three and gives me some tools for my toolkit to step into stage three in certain moments. And then that person, my parent, my sibling, whatever, a fight with my spouse that triggers my deep fear of abandonment, boom, that pulls me right back down into one. And I think that really speaks beautifully to what one experiences in midlife and as you're navigating the fall that it isn't any one thing all at once. It's this wonderful dumpster fire and you're just trying to find a North Star and stay focused on where it is.

Paul Swanson: I love the dumpster fire with the North Star. I think it's a very relatable image and I can even smell the wafts from that dumpster. Mike tells me that you are another person who has lived just a lot of lives. So how have the ideas of Falling Upward been real in your career, your professional work and studies, especially as a clergy person and a seminary student?

Erin Sanzero: I think a lot of the fall and Falling Upward and that invitation into the second half of life is about wanting answers and those answers don't exist, or at least simple ones don't. But God gives us something better than that. God gives us people, God gives us each other. And I think that it is in relationship that this work is done. And so I think with myself in relationship with my family and my spouse and even in seminary and in a church context, there is no church where every single person is a cradle X, cradle Catholic, cradle Presbyterian, cradle non-denom, right? You always have a mix of different ways of being. And so learning how to navigate being in relationship faithfully with each other is ultimately,

I think, how we move into second half more fully.

Mike Petrow: It's really, really good. I appreciate that. Erin, in your article you reference... I think it's Abba Moses who has this great quote. Abba Moses being one of the desert elders from early Christian contemplation. And Abba Moses says, "Sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything." And then Erin, you throw this phrase out that I absolutely love, which is... I believe you say, "It's the cell of relational contemplation." And this notion of shifting from thinking about this journey from the first half of life to the second half of life is just my journey that I'm taking and instead thinking of it through the lens of relationships really, really shifts the reality of the whole thing. You talk about this a bunch in your article. Can I ask you to say a little bit more about how that's been real for you?

Erin Sanzero: Yeah. I think it's very easy to think about... And it's an important part of the process to think about our relationship with self and God. And the rubber meets the road in relationship, right? My ability to be eager to love with the people who are hardest to love and we hurt most of the ones we love. So I think I really want to lift up the work of Dr. Gabor Maté and his work around attachment and authenticity because I think that the cell of relational contemplation, that's what I'm talking about. How to do that healing work of showing up authentically, trusting that the people around you can hold who you are, that you can be honest with who you are, and they will give you nurturance and care. That I don't have to suppress who I am and what I need to earn your love to be worthy. That, for me, first container of life was defined, I think, by suppressing authenticity to get nurturance and care. Whether that was pleasing my parents or getting hired to sing somewhere, it was all about what people needed to see and I needed to shove down whatever I needed or wanted.

And I think a lot of this gentle parenting, contemplative parenting is letting people be who they are, behave how they behave, and showing up gently to that, lovingly. Just choosing to be eager to love.

Paul Swanson: I would love to hear more. I can't wait for us to get to the professional side of things too, but you just mentioned family and gentle parenting and contemplative parenting. And taking that phrase, the cell of relational contemplation, when I hear that that is, in my mind, the way in which second half of life wisdom apply to what we might call a first half of life task, like parenting. How do you see that alive and nourishing in your family?

Erin Sanzero: So I spent several days between Christmas and New Year's in this cell in the home of my parents with my little nephews. And one evening I had greased my little nephew up from top to bottom in cocoa butter for his skin. And it was time to put our pajamas on. He's little four, 4-year-old and he was bereft and irate that his onesie was not here to wear, he wanted to wear his onesie that was at my sister's house. And he was so angry and he was kicking and he was yelling in my face because he was so mad about this situation, but I couldn't let him go because he was covered in cocoa butter. So he wanted to run to the couch. And I sat with him and I just held him and I just told him, "I know you're really mad at me right now. You're really upset about it."

And I was just simply present and it was such a beautiful moment for how to show up. The temptation how I was raised would've been spanking or sending him to his room until he could behave better and ultimately telling him, "You being like this is not acceptable, get

out.” And instead how healing it was for me and for my parents, for all of us to do this work of learning to say, “I see you. I validate and I affirm your emotions. How can we get on the other side of this together?” And then modeling for him how to emotionally self-regulate. And a little weather that flew in and flew out like a thought that we don’t want in the middle of our contemplative sit, his behavior rolled in and rolled out. We put on our pajamas and we moved right on with our evening. And it was that easy, but it just took being present to who he was and not needing to control or suppress it.

Paul Swanson: Love that. Thank you for sharing that. I feel like that’s such a perfect telling how one can integrate that cell of relational contemplation into the present moment, into a situation where a lot of people just react more than see an impasse at hand, pause, be present to it, what’s coming up. So that’s really, really beautiful. Thank you for sharing that.

Mike Petrow: I love this. And thinking about the cell of contemplative relationality and even sitting in your cell and your cell will teach you everything. We so often think of that cell as the monk’s cell, this solitary experience alone. But the cell is really a home. Erin, I love the first paragraph of your article. Would you be willing to read that for us as well?

Erin Sanzero: Sure. “In the musical *The Wiz* Dorothy sings, ‘When I think of home I think of a place where there’s love overflowing.’ Dorothy’s odyssey through Oz taught her many things, raising questions, bringing changes and perspectives, and ultimately affirming her longing to return home. The driving force behind all human story dwells in the theme of *Nostos*, of what it means to journey home. According to scholar philosopher Shoshana Zuboff, we yearn for a place which life has been known to flourish, where we know and where we are known, where we love and are beloved. Home is mastery, voice, relationship and sanctuary, part freedom, part flourishing, part refuge. Finding sanctuary, finding home is a central part of our lives. There is no place like home. Like the life we lose to find, home and our journey to find it seems to be both alpha and omega.”

Mike Petrow: It’s so beautiful. And I love this notion that the journey home is alpha and omega. And I’m just synthesizing everything we’ve talked about up to this point. One of the things I love about your article is the way that you talk about how wrestling with the realities of building the container in the first half of life and how genuinely hard that is. And then coming to midlife when we’re still building and rebuilding and also taking these second half of life considerations in. It moves us beyond our binaries, it moves us beyond a lot of our maps and our thinking. But I think what I’m wondering about is this notion of building and rebuilding. You mentioned your life blew up, you started the Living School and then you went deeper into even more complexities. And I’d invite you to share more about that if you want to.

But yeah. How is it real for you and how can we share with our audience the reality of how hard this first half of life is and what means to be building a container and rebuilding a container and rebuilding a container? Does that question make sense?

Erin Sanzero: I think it does. I want to be gentle with defining now. And the great work of midlife to locating it too singularly in this historic moment, but we are living in a time of real foment and change. So the prevalence of first marriages and divorces, of blended families, of 1099 work. I absolutely have had multiple lives and done... I’m in my Taylor Swift era of X,

right? That that's a much more normal thing for us where pensions and retirement and life extension are all really different. So I do think we're looking more at how to build better first containers. I think that's very much an important consideration. I think that's where contemplative or gentle parenting does really critical work to think about how we can steward better futures for our children with how to do the fall in a better place farther down the road from us.

And I think, just like you said, it isn't a moment. The fall isn't this single event we would love for it to be, but it's typically a season that we live in. And I feel very much like I'm somewhere past the first sandbar, but very much in this delta of the mixing of the two halves of life where the dumpster fire North Star is that as these falls happen and continue to happen, each time being clear on that impetus to love and letting that be the North Star and the litmus of, "I just want to... What's the most loving response to this?" And taking that holy pause to let whatever has been said or happen happen. And in the space between that stimulus and the response, what is just the most loving thing that I can do? And I really do think, at least for myself, that journey in that middle space is really defined by that right there, learning to do that and for that to become ultimately unconscious competence, that that just becomes the reaction. But for a long season, it's an intentional response that needs more conscious stewardship.

Paul Swanson: That image is so strong. I just think about you going beyond the sandbar, the dumpster fire maybe is now like a floating garbage pile in the ocean. And this impetus of love as the North Star. And just building that muscle, not knowing we're going to get to the next resting place, but the habituation of love as a North Star.

It's wild to me that we think this should be a natural practice because we don't really learn how to love except by doing it and doing it poorly and doing it well and learning to forgive ourselves and forgive others. That's part of why I've been so struck you as you've been sharing about the reclamation of falling, getting back up, falling and getting back up. And then just the seasonality of that, that there's these seasons where we can really lean into the mystery of what's either drawing us forward or a container that we have to let go of and to have one... It always sounds overly simple, but to have love, the most complex engagement in this world that I know of, be that North Star. How do you see love guiding you right now in this phase or this season of your life?

Erin Sanzero: Yeah. I think that I can't overstate the importance of relationality and relationship in doing the work because so much of the habituation is in recognizing the pattern and recognizing the needs that are driving the behavior to stop and step back and interrogate, "Why did I respond that way or what was going on with the meaning-making that I'm doing here?" And to then, I think, when I reflect on that swim out to the first sandbar, a lot of the earlier episodes of working what it is to find love in the sky is getting halfway through behavior I'm not proud of and realizing, "Oh, we're doing this script where I say this and then you say that and then I do this." And you don't probably do much more than see it fast in the rearview mirror. And then with time you see it and stop it halfway through. And then with time you're able to see it coming and stop it. And I think that's how we do that work stewarding better.

But in this season of midlife I feel love really drawing me towards presence. I think that

the great burden and the great gift of midlife is the fullness of it. There is so much to do and be done and there is such an awareness of the ephemeral nature of so much of it. Little baby voices that are going away, cuddles that they won't want, animals that will give to God. Parents wear where every visit is one of your last. And I think just being really present in those moments and prioritizing saying, "I love you," making the loving choice, being patient, unplugging, prioritizing Sabbath time to be together. That's really hard work, but it feels to me like work in the rearview mirror I will be so, so grateful that I chose. And it's also instructive, in a way it's helpful to have that sense of what's guiding me here? And love and loving presence, attentive, loving, full presence.

Mike Petrow: Erin, before we jump into... I really want to talk to you about your experience as a clergy person and then get into some of a bit more of your article. But there's so much rich conversation around the role of love and relationship as a cauldron of transformation in how we move from the first half of life and the second half of life. And I'm sure for a lot of folks who've read your article, one of the most powerful pieces is when you talk about the church of your marriage. You say, "The church of my marriage has been my greatest teacher, mirror, and transformative experience. My spouse's gender transition burst binaries and invited me to embrace both halves of life at the same time. After nearly a decade of marriage we grew to trust, to start talking about deep inner truths that need fallow time to grow. This level of shape-shifting and unbecoming was terrifying and ultimately transformational."

We talk about contemplation as a laboratory of transformation. And I hear you talking about this relationship as a contemplative laboratory of transformation. Are you willing to share anything more about that with us and what you learned in the cell of relationship?

Erin Sanzero: Yeah. Absolutely. I think it also iterates really beautifully a double fall in a way because there's coming out or calling people in, sharing your own queerness, sharing that in my case with a congregation, which was its own gauntlet. And then my spouse's transition was... My initial reaction, on many levels, was like, "Oh my God. Now I have to do this with the congregation and explain this to all of my friends and family?" It's like you saying, "I've punched the ticket, I've done the thing, we're done here." And then there's the opera has another act and you think, "Oh my, can I do this?" But I think love leads us where we have to go. And I don't mean that glibly. I think that the gift of all of the work that we do sitting with the mystery and how do I love and say yes to what I don't understand?

And I think the thing about CJ's transition for me is that it really invited me and forced me to really sit with my sense of how control expresses itself in relationship. If I know who you are and how you are and what you are, then I know who I am and how I am and what I am. So my stability is derived from your stability. But if you are changing, if you are becoming, then it's about me. Which is a real interesting commentary on ego and the need for security and control. So I think at its core, I had to release CJ to be who they are and trust that it would be okay and that love would help us find a way. And I can't tell you how easy and natural it was when... as soon, I should say, as I was willing to not need to be the one steering the ship. And when I could just show up and say, "Yes, I love you, we'll figure it out." And we did and we have. And it's just been incredibly destabilizing and incredibly life-giving all at the same time.

And if you'll allow me, I want to hold up for families who are navigating this, how beautiful

doing this work in my family has been, for my family, for both of our families, to navigate from Boomers down to little children, navigating name changes, pronoun use, church, meaning of life. We've had incredibly loving conversations. And I really think that Falling Upward has been a helpful piece for my parents to navigate this, which we may leave this out, but that comes into my own parents' life as a way of making meaning in their season of Falling Upward. And ultimately when love is your litmus and when you seek to be... I think to embody what Jesus was trying to do and flipping the epistemology by saying, "Hey, it's about relationship, it's about finding a way to love and privileging grace." It's really easy to get there. If you're sure that it needs to be right and you need to be able to understand every last detail of it, then you're going to crash into those limits all day long every day. But you get to be right if that's what you want.

Mike Petrow: I really appreciate you sharing that because, once again, it highlights the relational aspect of the Falling Upward journey. And to think that some of our listeners are going to be older and they're going to be comfortably situated in the second half of life, but as their kids and as folks that they mentor are making containers and breaking containers, we are all always being asked to let go of our scripts and to move beyond heteronormative or cultural normative scripts of what the container is supposed to be, to let it be what it is. So appreciate, Erin, also you highlighting the letting go of control.

We talked to Brené Brown recently and she talked about how in the first half of life... My close approximation of what she said, in the first half of life love for her was about getting love and being worthy of love and earning love. And in the second half of life it just became about, "Am I loving well?" I'm not saying it as well as she did. But it seems like there's such a continual invitation and prolonged relationship to let go of control and to let go of script.

Erin Sanzero: I think you really nailed it or she nailed it, that I think so much of our understandings initially of love are meritocratic. Are they worthy of this love? Am I worthy of this love? And I think the big pivotal seat shift is that that's the wrong question. The answer is always yes. When I came out to my father, he put his face in his hands and he said, "What did I do?" Hello, ego talk, right? It's always about us. And speaking to the seasonality of things, there was a season where he struggled with that. He grew... And I want to share that years later my father said, "Are you guys going to have children because you would be great parents." And for me the answer to that question is irrelevant. What was the full circle moment was this man going from seeing this thing as problematic and a horrible commentary on him, to thinking that we should procreate, that we should be stewarding new beautiful lives into the world. That took time, that took falls and falls and it took being and staying in relationship together. And it's been such a gift.

God, I'm glad I didn't stay in the closet. God, I'm glad we've told my parents about who CJ is and we've asked them to meet us in that space. It has so been worth it. It has been hard. I wouldn't trade it. I wouldn't do it differently.

Paul Swanson: This image came to my mind, just as you were talking about that... You remember that old cliché of, "Do you want to be right or do you want to be in a relationship?"

Mike Petrow: Yes.

Paul Swanson: But then playing that with the language of the cell that you're saying, the image of someone who just wants to be right. It's a cell where you're self-enclosed, where there's no doorway out. Where I think of a cell of relationality is where there's connections, there's ways to be in communion to one another. And that's the thing that I'm taking away from your stories, the way that love really just broke some of those boundaries and the ripples effects just keep going. And I just love how love is the anchor, but it's also the ripple itself. And there's so much to take away from that. But how we show up, how are we're trying to control, where our security lie. And the gift of the hardship of going into the unknown. So thank you very much, Erin. I appreciate that.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. I am so moved by that and it leads me to reflect. So the topic of this episode, we're talking about the chapter, The First Half of Life, right? And amongst other things, the first half of life is when we build the container. In our conversation with Richard we highlighted on how it's a season for boundaries and guidelines. Jungian that I like, named Eugene Pascal, says it's about learning how to use the powers of the soul safely. And I am reflecting on this conversation up to this point, asking the question, "Do we want to build a container that we're told we're supposed to build or do we want to build a container that we can actually live in and that allows love to flourish?"

Erin, with your journey, with your experience as a clergy person, with your experience as a seminarian, with your experience as someone who's sat with these teachings and written about them, how do you think we build containers well that teach us to use the powers of the soul safely, but are also flexible enough? I think we invest so much thought in the breaking of containers, but for some of us who are parenting, for some of us who are guiding congregations or younger people, what does it look like to do the first half of life well? What does it look like to build good containers? What do you think?

Erin Sanzero: I think first and foremost, we really do need to be in intentional community. I think that's really critical to be in conversation with other people around what do we value? What does that look like? And so I say all the time that people do not darken the door of church. When I see somebody I haven't seen in a while or for the very first time, they are usually not there because they got a bonus at work. Seriously though, when I have a member who I haven't seen in three years or suddenly show up at 8:45 on a Sunday morning something has happened. And usually that something is a fall of some sort, and they are there because they are confronted with unanswerable, with existential questions and they come full circle back to what's it all about? What do I do? What do I keep? What do I throw away? How do I reconstruct this?

They're in disorientation. And I think that's really where faith community is a critical space to meet them and have those conversations. Whether that's in a small group, that's worship settings, but being able to do that work in community. And then, I think, really I'm committed to anti-clericalism, but I also highly prize church systems that have good healthy governance so that the theology that's being taught is affirming, frankly, is inclusive, is really thinking about building good containers and is healthy psychologically and spiritually and creating space for resources for people as they need it, whatever that may be. 12-Step groups.

Mike Petrow: I appreciate that. It's interesting. I think in a lot of our conversations, especially when we think about the two halves of life and construction, deconstruction, reconstruction, order,

disorder, reorder. We tend to think of church as a place that people leave and not a place that people go back to as a refuge when they're in difficulty. And if it's okay for me to point this out, I know that for both of you, Paul and Erin, church is a meaningful part of your life, which I think is absolutely fascinating and encouraging. Could I ask either of you to say just one more word about what it looks like, not just to have good containers, but to have healthy spiritual community that's actually a resource?

Erin Sanzero: I think it's so important, particularly since we focused on children and midlife, having adults who care about you and your children who aren't your family. Having chosen family is... That's the village. I think that's really critical having those support systems. And I think that's true for parents. I think that's true for children to have adults in their lives who care about them, who love them, who are trusted, those that are done well, those are their very first elders. And that's them getting an opportunity to see the road ahead.

When we baptize children, one of the things that we say as we walk them around the sanctuary, is that these people are your community. That we are bringing you into this community and they will be your babysitters, your teachers, your friends. They are your people. And we make a commitment to that child, to that person to be faithful in that way to them as they are to us. We say yes to each other. It's a covenant relationship. And I think when we don't have those, we are all islands floating along trying to figure it out, but we don't have that space, that cell to do that work of figuring out how to navigate relationship.

Paul Swanson: Thanks, Erin. I love your imagery. It really connects with the way my brain operates. Yeah. I'm not a very good church attender per se, but it's still a centralizing factor in our community life as a family. We are part of a Mennonite church. And that's my wife's lineage and so part of what we want to do is pass along the historical peace church and also their contemplative practice of singing four part harmony. And also a community of faith practitioners that leans towards justice, how can they show up in the world as healers? And so these are all things that we want to bring our kids into. In addition to that, I think there's layers of wisdom from the elders of the church as well, from folks who live radically different lives than I do. And I can ask questions about my own life, we can be in community and conversation that propel me to ask questions I might be a little nervous to ask on my own or to have someone hold the mirror, who's living in a way that is beyond what I would maybe feel comfortable with, at the level of simplicity or the level of generosity. But it bolsters me to make 1% change.

There's a guy in our community, Chuck Hosking, who's basically the St. Francis of Albuquerque. And I think Richard would say the same thing. And he talks about making 1% changes. And so that eventually you make a massive shift in your life, but you do it just 1% at a time. And without this church community, Chuck would've been my life. I won't have all these other folks holding up the mirror. And loving my kids too, giving these different models of expression. And folks in our community who don't believe in God and yet they're still a part of our church community. Those, to me, adds to the porous container that we want to set a container, but we want it to be porous enough that could be a little bit flexible.

Mike Petrow: I love that. And I love the, gosh, the 1% changes, creating those porous containers, letting love be our guide in this. One of the things that's emerged as a running theme in a lot of our

conversations up to this point is the reality that some of us feel a little bit like we're in both halves of life at the same time. Erin, you speak to this so well in your article. At the end, you say, "Perhaps the culmination of a life well lived is the blending of the two great archetypes, the person who's both eternally young and wise before their time. It is there in that space that elders dwell." And I feel most of the people that I tend to resonate with deeply, and I'll bet a lot of our listeners get this, it's the person who is the eternal youth and the old soul at the same time. The little kid who comes into this world and you can just tell they're an old soul immediately and the older person who has that twinkle in their eye.

And yet in midlife, Erin, your article is called *Midlife Musings*, I think we can overlook the weight of living both of those realities at the same time. I love when you say this, Erin, "In our thirties and forties we find ourselves trying to do it all. Failing and trying again. We're working. We're running businesses. We're parenting. We're attending an endless number of Zoom meetings during the day. We're sleeping in the hospital armchair at the bedside of a parent during the night. We're mentoring our junior employees and minding our children in our care, all the while also asking deep existential questions or reading spiritual books." I'm going to throw in listening to spiritual podcasts. "And squeezing out space for spiritual practice."

This is really hard and it takes a lot of time. So Erin, question for you, and then Paul, I invite you to answer as well. When we're in this midlife, all three of us are in this conversation, right? When we're in this midlife moment, Erin, you talk about the delta between the meeting of these two great rivers, the first and second half of life, the blending of the saltwater and the freshwater. My God, there's a lot to do. There's a lot to blend. How do we carry that weight and live with one foot in both realities? And where do we find the hours in the day?

Erin Sanzero: That's why we call it the great work of midlife, it is a really wonderfully big task. But I think that the answer is grace, honestly, to that. It is impossible to do it all. And we will try to do it all. And we will need to be gentle and gracious with ourselves. And that is the work, I think. That is what being in this season is, is about learning how to be gentle with yourself because you can't be right and it's not about being right. And so maybe on some level, trying to spread your fingers to hold all the things, to realize that can't, to try yet again, is the habituation of learning. It's okay.

That's what helps me to stop and do my contemplative sits, is I do not have time to sit every day. I don't. There's absolutely one more thing that I could, should, and would love and benefit from cramming into the day, no question. But what does it habituate and cultivate in me to stop, to say, "Yes. And I'm going to sit and let God do God. And I'm going to hold space for the reality that my doing my way into anything is ultimately nothing."

And I think that practice is one of the ways that I'm sowing seeds for eldership, for really knowing when I'm there. But I want to hold the holiness of what it is to be in midlife, what it is to be in first container, to have fleeting moments where you think, "Oh, maybe that was it," like the perfect golf swing. But they're very, very rare. And to name how necessary and important that time is too. That it's not about trying to speed your way or declare yourself in second container, to really be present to the season that you are in, that I am in. It is a lot and it is great in it's a-lot-ness.

Mike Petrow: That's so well said. You said this to me personally once, "How do we sanctify the moment of midlife and how do we sanctify the work of the first half of life and not see it as less than or something we're trying to skip over?" Thank you for that. That's really good. Paul?

Paul Swanson: Well, I'm just going to agree with everything that Erin just said. And I will say one of my big lessons in this midlife space is just forgiving all that I cannot do and forgiving all the mistakes that I give. And that is a practice in itself. How can I forgive myself and others for all the things that we hope to do in this sandwich time of life where I got young kids, I got parents who are aging and I'm being stretched in both ways, a community on both sides, a partnership that I value. How do we forgive one another so that love can continue to flourish in that environment?

Mike Petrow: Oh my God, that's so good.

Erin Sanzero: Can I add one more thing?

Mike Petrow: Oh, yeah.

Erin Sanzero: One of the things that I loved learning from Jim in my time at the Living School, particularly around how to sit well, was around when the idea floats through or when you're trying to sit and the dog comes or the baby comes with a need that you answer all of those things, right? That if I'm going to sit that I put that thought down like I would a baby gently. That gentleness with it and that acceptance and receiving and giving it its moment and then moving on. Or that if I'm working or doing a spiritual practice, whatever it is, that I am present to that need, I lovingly respond to it. And I assume that that need is God coming to me and I treat that just like God. And that, for me, has been so helpful to encounter the things that I don't have time for or that I do not need to crop up in my day and to see them as opportunities to commune with God in that moment. And oof, if that's not second container window, I don't know what is. What a great way to rearrange the furniture of your container and say, "Hey, stop tripping over the couch. Just go around it. Give it what it needs."

Mike Petrow: I love that. And I love the invitation to see contemplative practice not as an escape from our life or our containers or responsibilities, but to see that our relationships, our responsibilities, our containers are our contemplative practice, our life is our contemplative laboratory. We need to wrap it up, but one parting question as we bring it to an end, Richard, in our conversation with him earlier, talked about Christianity as a religion that is still growing up. And in the context of everything we just talked about, Erin, with you as a clergy person, I can't help but reflect on Christianity as a religion that's in this midlife moment where in some expressions it's still very immature and very retributive and very scared and very restrictive and in other expressions it's so loving and so mature and so inviting. A parting word for us, Erin, on participating as a clergy person in a religion that is probably at best in its midlife moment and still growing up into what it could be.

Erin Sanzero: I think the lesson of the great work of midlife is to say yes to the invitation, to stay with it, to be present to it. I think when it comes to the church a lot... And I think parents probably feel this with adolescents. If I had a dollar for every time a parent said to me, "I love my child, I don't like my child," in this season. Yeah. That's part of it. That's part of the wrestle.

But I think that holding onto the idea that we don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. I think that when we talk about the church, there's this often universal and sweeping declaration that the church is dead, right? That it is an adolescent that we just want to kick out of the house because we're just done with it. And I think what the CAC and the Living School really taught me and really encourages us to hold, is that nothing is ever all or nothing, right? That's a false binary. This zero-sum, win-lose moment that we get into with the adolescents of our children, the adolescents of the church, right? That it needs to be right, wrong, win, lose, do what I say.

It just doesn't work that way. That just breaks us all. I think the church, over centuries, has always been on a good day a mixed bag. It's never been an all or nothing deal. There have always been alternative orthodoxies and pockets of authenticity within the larger institution, as corrupt as it may have been or still be. But when you say, "The church is dead," or this adolescent thing, "I'm kicking it out of the house because of X, Y, Z." Where is room for those alternative orthodoxies, for that process of becoming, for those pockets of flourishing?

So I want to call forward that a lot of the voices that are predicting the death of the church and prepping the obituary for that are coming from two places. They typically are coming from ex-Evangelicals or out of more traditional orthodox frameworks like Catholicism. I don't have conversations with a lot of people who are coming out of what I might call liberal Protestantism or the religious left. And quite frankly, the majority of people talking about this are men, they are white men. And a great majority of them are ex-Evangelical or kind of liberal Catholic post-church Catholics. I just don't hear this from women, from queer people, from people of color. So I think what's really important to distinguish is that I think what they're really calling for is an end to patriarchal religion. But because religion is so synonymous, the church is so synonymous with patriarchal religion, I don't know that they are able to see or name that distinction. That what they're decrying is a religion of domination and control, which is super first container, right? That's very first half of life.

So what I really want to hold up is that the fact that the church is in first container does not mean that the whole institution writ large is a flawed, ruined enterprise. I think the challenge is it's an invitation to see beyond, to see a further journey, a different model. Isn't maybe that what people say when they're saying, "I'm spiritual but not religious." They're trying to get there. They're like, "This isn't it, but I don't know how to get there." And I think the great work of midlife and the season that the church is in is that space of saying, "Oof, this is uncharted territory. I don't know how to work this out. What does this look like?"

But I do think that there are people who are very positioned to lead the way into this next space, right? There is so much good work being done by men and women and genderful people within the walls of the church. So I just really want to invite anybody thinking about the church to understand that we are just finally starting to see these voices get into positions of power and the pulpit and they are wonderfully, uniquely positioned to steward these new ways of being.

Mike Petrow: Can I get old school and just give that an amen? That's perfect.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: What a great note to go out on and what a beautiful invitation to the further journey. That's awesome. Erin, this has been so good.

Paul Swanson: Yes, thank you, Erin.

Mike Petrow: And so rich. Thank you for your authenticity. Thank you for sharing with us the Midlife Musings and the wisdom and the tension of living in the first half of life, in the in-between of the two, and being willing to be open and to dream what could be coming yet.

Erin Sanzero: As we finish, can I share with you all a poem that you may or may not use? It's Paul Farini's Fearing for My Life. "Meeting you, I shuddered, fearing for my life. Now I understand why, death has come in the guise of the beloved. The one I used to be is gone forever." That's it. I think that's really good for the hot mess express that is the realization of like, "Oh, snap. It's about to pop off and I'm not ready for it and I don't want it, but it's happening anyway." So thank you all.

Mike Petrow: I love that. And I love the expression, "hot mess express." What a great episode. I just loved that conversation so much. I can tell this is one that I'm going to go back and listen to a few times, just celebrating this notion of sanctifying midlife and celebrating the wisdom of the first half of life.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Erin did that so well. And it was fun to join her in that conversation. And for us to think through of what are the wisdom principles that one learns in the first half of life, even as they live with questions the second half of life and how do they play off one another? And I think, in particular, the questions that really resonate with me is how do we build good containers? How do we build good containers that can last in ways and give us that practice? And how can we build good relationships and not just containers that there's a relationality to this.

Mike Petrow: It's so good, Paul. And I think, yeah, for me too, that was one of the things that really blew my mind a little bit, was expanding my thinking of first half of life wisdom from not just building containers to building relationships. It's brilliant. And I think about our listeners, we so often get so polarized in how we think about first half of life wisdom and second half of life wisdom. And we build a container in the first half of life. And yet, I recognize that we're living in a moment in time where so many of our listeners are in the middle. We have folks who are chronologically in the second half of life, but they might be entering a new marriage, or they might be going back to school. They might be starting a new career as a spiritual director in some type of service, or just setting out on some new type of adventure and always building new containers, building new relationships. And there's a lot of our listeners who are chronologically in the first half of life, but they are asking these deep questions.

And so it feels like so much of the talk around Falling Upwards is, how can we infuse our life with this deep second half of life wisdom, even when we're young? And this episode has flipped the script for me in a really good way. Leads me wondering, what does good first half of life wisdom look like and how can we carry that forward into the second half of life and not lose it? Does that make sense?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And so well said. I think there's this misconception that we get to midlife, we turn

the page, and boy, there's all of second life wisdom just waiting now that that page has been flipped. And what you're saying around... and I think what just happened in that conversation is. How does that wisdom from the first half of life, how can that be tended to? So that could be built in such a way where we learn those skills so that wherever we are at in the linear path of life, we can lean on that skill set. So the questions we want to leave you with is how are you building life-giving containers now? How are you building life-giving relationships now in this particular season of your life, whether it be the first, middle, or second half of life? Tending to containers and relationships is a skill set and a practice that has enormous reverberations throughout the entirety and the wholeness of your life. So again, how are you building life-giving containers? How are you building life-giving relationships in this particular season of your life?

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-

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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.