



EVERYTHING BELONGS

The Tragic Sense of Life
with Kate Bowler

Paul Swanson: Life is hard. It doesn't take too many breaths as a conscious living being in this world to recognize this. We feel our lifeline get taut when we bear the cruelty and unfairness of our institutions and systems, or when we bump into the limitations of possibilities, and most certainly when we fall into tragedy.

The tragic sense of life can hover and trail our every step. And yet there is hope amongst this. Richard emphasizes that the tragic sense of life is not about wallowing in sadness, but about being honest about the reality of the suffering in the world, and being conversant with the tragic sense of life, and how that opens up us to deeper compassion and deeper understanding.

In today's conversation, we find ourselves back in Richard's Hermitage to talk about the themes of chapter four, the Tragic Sense of Life. In our time together, we sought to open ourselves to the full embrace of this reality. And Richard is quick to note that the personal acceptance, forgiveness, and love can also be received in this process.

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.

Richard, one of my favorite memories with you and I is that you tell me that I smile too much to be an Enneagram 4, and I-

Richard Rohr: You did, but in the classroom you sat there with a permanent smile on your face.

Mike Petrow: I know. And when you asked me what Enneagram number was, I said a four. And you said it's not possible because you smile too much.

Richard Rohr: I did.

Mike Petrow: But I told you it's because I'm thinking about sadness and it makes me so happy.

Richard Rohr: God, that is a different kind of human being. Explain to us why that's true.

Mike Petrow: It's such an interesting thing. We're going to talk about chapter four of Falling Upward, the Tragic Sense of Life. And I wonder if there are some people... Victor Hugo talks about melancholy as the joy of being sad, the joy of sadness, something like this. I wonder if there are some people who are just a little bit more in touch with how joy and sadness go together.

Richard Rohr: Undoubtedly. See, real sustained sadness is empathy with the pain of others. It's not about your own. It's really how much the world is suffering, how many people are broken-hearted. So real sadness is not egocentric, it's the opposite. It's caring for *lacrimae rerum*, the tears of things. That's the inside of Lamentation, of the prophets. What they first are angry at, they learn to be sad about. And there's certain people who make an art form of that. Fours on the Enneagram. They really do. And when you'll ask them and they'll say, "I'm not really melancholy for myself. It's just why is everything dying? Why is everybody suffering?" This is just a universal melancholy that I identified with. And that's a virtue, because now the

strength is solidarity with, not judgment of.

Mike Petrow: I had a spiritual mentor once you told me that grief equips us to love because it carves out a wide open space in our heart that lets us hold more sadness, lets us hold the sadness of the world, but also lets us hold more love and joy.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Paul Swanson: I've never been accused of being a four, but I do think that... I didn't mean that as derogatory as the way it sounded, but there's this-

Mike Petrow: Just one more thing to be sad about, Paul.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, one more thing. The phrase like sad songs make me happy is something that I often will think about because-

Richard Rohr: That is, that's a song, isn't it?

Paul Swanson: And there are songs called that as well, but I think that the sadness that is often portrayed in art is this deep empathetic connector that I do feel like fours definitely are tapped into. But it is the foundation, I think that so much art draws from that does connect us, where art from across the world can connect at this very deep level because it is the portrayal of sadness, of loss of the trail, of the tragedy of life. And that no matter where you come from on the wheel of the Enneagram, that it's a point of reflection and connection. And fours often, they get there first and they kind of point it out or they're the ones that tend to create it.

Richard Rohr: Well put. Yes. Just to use an image we're all familiar with, Picasso's Guernica. How can you look at that and not feel some deep empathy for the evil of war and what it puts people through. You just look at it and it's one gestalt of sadness.

Mike Petrow: It's interesting, to come at it from a different angle, I know how so much of contemporary spirituality we want to bring ourselves to a place of just feeling happy. And I think even Richard, with your love of nature documentaries, this is something we talk about, you love the octopus, the giraffe, the things that show up. And yet when you really look at nature, it's very complex. Belden Lane says, "When we look at nature, we can't pick and choose reckoning only with daisies and lovable black labs. Nature at its nicest. The entirety of a wild and wondrous world confronts us out there both predator and prey."

And so I'm curious for you with your love of nature and nature documentaries, what does even that show us about the tragic reality of life?

Richard Rohr: It shows us that tragedy teaches. So another nature show, they're trying to figure out why the Serengeti plain just keeps producing so many animals and so much fruitfulness in this one part of Tanzania and Kenya. I've been there. And a discovery that just has been going on all the time, get ready for this, maybe it explains why the Egyptians or scarab pins, but the dung beetle. And talk about a lowly name. 20% of the Serengeti is continually re-fertilized. Dung beetles make their little ball of dung and then they roll it sometimes like 60, 80 yards until they find the perfect little patch of earth to bury it in.

Now you have 20% of the Serengeti fertilized by dung beetles. It just keeps producing plants and bushes and trees that animals can eat. It's contributed to the proliferation of an utterly ugly animal, I would say, the wildebeest. They're getting so many of them because they eat the kind of bushes that grow from that kind of earth and we can't stop their growth now because the dung beetle is so successful.

I just saw that on a nature show. Now, who would think you could learn something from a creation as lowly as the dung beetle who creates balls of manure and rolls them around?

Mike Petrow: You're really challenging me to think about where I plant my ball of dung as contributing to the healing world.

Paul Swanson: Oh my gosh.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, that's a great metaphor.

Richard Rohr: And their life is totally hidden. It's been going on for millennia. But that's what keeps the Serengeti plains endlessly fruitful. Isn't that mind-blowing? So I hope that's an answer to your question in a little way. Be ready to be surprised about what is success and what is tragedy, what is good and what is bad, in other words.

Paul Swanson: As we look at reality and the binary judgmental mind jumps to what is good or bad, you write in *Falling Upward* that every time God forgives us, God is saying that God's own rules do not matter.

Richard Rohr: Well, thank you for remembering that.

Paul Swanson: Yes. As much as the relationship that God wants to create with us. So taking this dung beetle, taking what you just said here, what does this say about God, and how should we be emulating this more in our own lives as we approach and live in the tragic reality of life, tragic sense of reality?

Richard Rohr: Well, first, it should reveal to us that our idea of a fairytale being "and they lived happily ever after" is not a good storyline. The genius of Dante naming his *Divine Comedy*, a comedy is this point, that he sees the tragedy of the inferno and the purgatorial. He finally gets to the Paradiso, but it's simply the inferno transformed. It's not the inferno avoided. I had to study it for six months. You got to go through hell and through purgatory and then you get to Paradiso. We just want to be saved and go to Paradiso. It's not good wisdom. It's not true. It doesn't work. You have to long for justice and peace and work for it and miss it or you don't know what it is, I don't think.

We upper middle class white folks don't feel the pain of slavery. You just see the look on the face of a Black person when the word slavery is mentioned and a white person. It never cost us anything. So the idea of reparations, that's absurd.

Did you see on news last night, there are two old Black ladies, one 107, one 109 from Tulsa, and the only two remaining people from the massacre in Tulsa in 1921, I think

it was. Two ladies still alive. And most of us never heard about the Tulsa massacre because America decided this was not a story worth telling. It showed us in a bad light.

So this is why we say that the four have a head start. The excluded, let's use that word, have a head start. When you're excluded from the system, you know what the system really worships, what it really idealizes. And those who are the ideal, so-called, don't know that. They don't know that America worships money, so they're free to do it. Once you see it's a false God and makes you unloving, you can't un-know that. You know that. So I think the Gospel invites us to identify with some excluded somebody somewhere or you just don't know.

Now that's an alternative orthodoxy. That's an absolutely alternative. If you go to Assisi, you'll see how Francis would down the hill and lived in the leper colony, from Upper Assisi where he and Clare were born. It was a change of location, not just a change of partially compelling ideas. And then you had to keep learning it.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, not just a change of theory, but it's how do you actually live into that embody incarnate.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, that's right.

Paul Swanson: I love that image of Francis and Clare going down. Just even that momentum and movement shows how we live into.

Richard Rohr: You haven't been to Assisi yet, have you?

Paul Swanson: I haven't. Not yet.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, it's a steep hill. You go down on the plain, it must be three miles to the leper colony, and that's where our foundation house is. Not up in the city, but down in the plain. And Clare is right outside the walls at San Damiano, and she was upper class girl too.

I love it when I go to Assisi and you see all these little Clare pictures and Francis dolls and icons and you say here are these two dropouts who rejected the culture of consumerism now keep Assisi in money. Everybody keeps coming and it's just overrun with pilgrims each day because it's so pretty. But I don't know how many people get the point.

Mike Petrow: Well, I love that image of them leaving behind their wealth and status. It reminds me even of Siddhartha Buddha, leaving behind his princely station.

Richard Rohr: That's where we started the other day. That's the mono myth. Leave home. There's no great hero who doesn't leave home.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Richard Rohr: The Buddha, the Hindu gods, there's always a story of leaving home.

Mike Petrow: There's this passage I love from this chapter where you say, and it just to me feels like it connects with everything from the dung beetle to walking down the hill to leaving home. You write, "It's those creatures and those humans who are on the edge of what we define as normal, proper, or good, who have the most to teach us."

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Mike Petrow: "They tend to reveal the shadow and the mysterious side of things. Such constant exceptions make us revisit the so-called rule in what we call normal, and recalibrate. And the exceptions keep us humble and searching, not rushing towards resolution to relay our anxiety." And I love this idea.

Richard Rohr: Did I write that?

Mike Petrow: That's you. Yeah, that's pretty good.

Richard Rohr: Hallelujah. Richard, you wrote something good. I was about to say that sounds true.

Mike Petrow: It's a pretty solid, not bad.

Richard Rohr: Thank you. Yeah. I forget everything I write.

Mike Petrow: But I love the idea of leaving the home of what we think we know.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Mike Petrow: And letting ourselves be called-

Richard Rohr: And what we know for certain it isn't true.

Mike Petrow: And letting ourselves be taught by the unfamiliar and the mysterious and even the taboo. Right?

Richard Rohr: There you go. You get it. See, you all left Minnesota and Pennsylvania and Missouri, and here you are in New Mexico. See, you didn't know you were following the hero's journey.

Now you could make a mistake and then idealize this as your new way of being superior, successful spiritually. Oh, yeah. Did you see that T-shirt that I sent out?

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: I read Richard Rohr's books before it was cool. There's actually some people who wear this shirt.

Mike Petrow: It's amazing.

Richard Rohr: I told them to stop it. But you see they're laughing at themselves. But it's temptation to make this style cool, to think this way.

Mike Petrow: It would be like having Richard on vinyl or having one of those old audio cassettes.

Richard Rohr: Vinyl. Right.

Mike Petrow: That's a real thing, right? You had audio cassette teachings that circulated years ago?

Paul Swanson: Well, it's idealizing the new home and then that becomes the new home you have to leave, right?

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Paul Swanson: It's just a wayfarer.

Richard Rohr: Forgive me, I'm not trying to be anti-Protestant, but we learned that from observing the evolution of the Protestant reformation, that so many of them, not all, but became the same thing as Catholic on a smaller scale. Because it's the human ego still at work. Why would it not be that way?

Mike Petrow: It's interesting. We're almost at time, but I have to admit in this chapter my favorite statement.

Richard Rohr: What is it?

Mike Petrow: It is when you write, "I do not think you should get rid of your sin until you've learned what it has to teach you." Which I do want to point out does sound a little bit like Martin Luther's saying sin boldly. So it sounds like a little bit of a Protestant influence there.

But you go on, "Otherwise it'll return in new forms, as Jesus says the unclean spirit that returns to the house all swept and tidied. Then he rightly and courageously says the last state of the house will be worse than the first."

So I want to connect this with the idea, the Jungian idea you quote about what we resist persists. But even with what you just said about the Protestant reformation, they set out to do everything differently and then they ended up right back in the same boat.

Richard Rohr: Just different symbols.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. What does it mean to stay with our sin, to not get rid of our sin until we really learned what it has to teach us so we don't try to be good and end up back in the same spot?

Richard Rohr: When I first started using that phrase was my first community, New Jerusalem. And I would tell these young people who are so trying to be virtuous and holy and get the stigmata. That's what little Catholic kids hope for that. They're going to get the stigmata. That even that desire to be virtuous, which has got to be good, but it's dangerous because it's not seeking God, it's seeking yourself.

God, the ego just takes endless disguises. And if you don't recognize that, you'll fall into them. Another disguise, another disguise.

Mike Petrow: So how do we safely hold onto our sin and let it teach us? Or what's a different way to say that? Could we say hang onto our weaknesses?

Richard Rohr: We don't judge them from above, from a position of well, I've conquered that. We observe them from within. That's what changes. I'm a victim of that, that has kept me from loving, that has wounded me, my sin. It's not now made me superior, it's made me newly sympathetic, newly empathetic.

I remember meeting this, especially in a lot of inner city nuns. Our stereotype of nuns is these pure virgins who must be naive, and yet they weren't. The two nuns who helped me get involved in jail ministry here in Albuquerque, they were not shocked about anything. They heard it all. They identified with all of it. They saw it from within the sin, not from outside. Prostitution, masturbation, pick anything. They didn't bat an eye. You know what I mean? It's like they knew the human wound and it's we purists, oh, we don't talk about that.

Mike Petrow: It's funny, growing up evangelical, we used to use the term worldly as an insult. You'd say, "Oh, that person's so worldly."

Richard Rohr: Very worldly. We did too.

Mike Petrow: But what was interesting for me was the first time I heard it used as a compliment when someone said, "Oh, that person's very worldly," in the sense of they're very experienced. They're in touch with the reality of things.

Richard Rohr: We'd say incarnational, and that redeems it.

Mike Petrow: That's beautiful. I love that.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: That's beautiful.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. So again to repeat, it's reading reality from living inside of it. Not, remember when it says the elder brother looked down on the prodigal, and Rembrandt's painting has that. He's sitting in a white light on his face, condescending to his brother, and Jesus says, "Which one was truly the son of the Father? One kept it, did it right." I don't know how we missed the point. That story couldn't make it any clearer. Because the prodigal did screw up. Yeah. And the older one, and he says, "The prodigal goes home justified." It's a different kind of justice, not the justice of knowing I succeeded, but the truth of knowing I didn't succeed and that's okay. I mean, we have a-

I mean, we have a former president who hates the word losers. He says so, "I hate losers." He's just representing America at its worst. We hate losers. We like winners. And of course, the underlying judgment is, we're not a loser. I'm not like them.

Just look deeper. Look deeper. And you'll see that you're afraid of losing too, which makes you a loser, again. But who cares? I'm calling this the third half of life, which I know doesn't make sense. But when I talk with Jim Finley, we're both 80 now, 80 and a half, and we both agree it really doesn't matter. It's just floating, doing the back float on the rest of our life, and being able to find God in everything, todos, todos, todos, even the things we used to try to separate ourselves from.

Paul Swanson: I do like that you and Jim have a loophole to the two halves of life, with the third half of life.

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah.

Paul Swanson: It's a nice troubling of the system, what feels like a healthy way. But you were going to say, to close it out?

Mike Petrow: No, what a great way to wrap it all up. Richard, I love when you say that we come to God not by getting it right, but by getting it wrong. And to think about the fact that we've learn to love-

Richard Rohr: I believe that with all my heart.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: And that's not a justification for doing it wrong. It's just a sympathy with the human situation. Who does God love? If God only loves people who get it right, God has no one left to love. This whole humanity, is going to hell in a handbag, as they used to say. This is what God incarnates in. Oh-

Mike Petrow: I love that.

Richard Rohr: I don't want to live in any other world. But that is, that's third half of life, where it's really okay. And without thinking, oh, you're just fighting sin. No, that's the first half of life response. I'm not just fighting sin, I'm just fighting mercy, which is who God is.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, that's beautiful. And it helps me re-understand, your one humiliation today, as just being in touch with my own vulnerability.

Richard Rohr: Yes, very good.

Mike Petrow: And weakness, so I can be in touch with others.

Richard Rohr: Thank you. Thank you.

Mike Petrow: Fantastic way to bring this conversation to a close.

Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

Today we're joined by Kate Bowler, a four-time New York Times bestselling author, an award-winning podcast host, and professor at Duke University.

Jenna Keiper: I'd like to take a second. I would love to invite, if Richard, Mike, or Paul, I'll press record, and if you want to start us with just a little intentional practice to get us in our bodies, and together in the virtual space, and then start in on the conversation?

Richard Rohr: Let's try to be where we usually aren't, in this boring now, made less boring because of such lovely people, but let's enjoy them, and allow them to enjoy us, and even dare to think we could enjoy God, in this ordinary now. Take a deep breath, take life in, and give it back.

Kate Bowler: Amen.

Richard Rohr: Amen.

Paul Swanson: Amen. Thank you, Richard. Well, thank you so much, Kate for being here today and everything Belongs. We're excited to get kicked off here. And what we've found is that there's usually a story that goes along with how someone discovered Falling Upward. There's something going on in their life. So we'd like to kick it off with what was going on in your life that compelled you to first pick up this book by Richard, which I know is one of your favorites by Richard, of Falling Upward? What happened there?

Kate Bowler: I live and work in a culture with a lot of formal language for God. I remember the first time I prayed informally in a faculty meeting, at the seminary where I work. And I looked over and someone just looked unbearably disappointed in me for not having the Trinitarian roundout at the end. And I was like, "Oh boy."

And scripted language for God has been so useful for me in practicing telling a more refined truth. But then it also, the more scripted it got, it also made me feel sort of alien from my own honesty and familiarity. So that's where Father Rohr has come in. He has such a original and wondering love, which makes me, it feels like someone started a fire and you want to just get close to it.

Paul Swanson: I love that image. And Richard, I remember the first time that you met Kate, I think it was online, maybe for a podcast, but you shared how impressed you were by this historian out of Canada. What was it about Kate that made such an impression on you?

Richard Rohr: Her freshness, her easy smile. I don't smile easily. I'm a one on the Enneagram. And so people who do, I'm just so envious, why can't I be that way? And you're probably told this a thousand times, but you're very clever sense of humor.

Kate Bowler: That's so nice.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Kate Bowler: And Canadian, and therefore terrible at receiving compliments. But I will try to tuck that in my heart.

Paul Swanson: As a Minnesotan, I can resonate with that. I feel like we're part of Southern Canada, so I understand that the hardness of receiving any good word or kind word.

Kate Bowler: That's right.

Mike Petrow: Kate, I'm going to be honest, I'm a tiny bit starstruck that we're having this conversation, and I hope that's okay to say.

Kate Bowler: Aw.

Mike Petrow: I actually know your work from before Richard's. And Richard, I don't want that to be insulting or offensive to you, but it's true. I am the child of a Prosperity Gospel preacher.

Kate Bowler: Oh my God.

Mike Petrow: And at one point, there were five people in my nuclear family, my dad, my mom, my brother and I, were all preachers.

Kate Bowler: Oh, wow.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. And so at 19, I had a friend who was killed, and I started studying comparative religions and psychology. So I deconstructed early, but they stayed in the Prosperity Gospel. It's such a huge part of my life. And so my first thank you is, and I really mean this from the bottom of my heart, thank you so much for treating this social phenomena seriously and bringing it to cultural awareness.

There's a few of us who have passed around your doctoral dissertation, and talked about it, a few of us who are PKs, and survivors of the Prosperity Gospel, and we've talked about it a bunch. Before we get into the Prosperity Gospel and how it fits into the two halves of life, can I ask you, for our listeners who have no idea what I'm talking about, how would you define the Prosperity Gospel? How did you get interested in it? And why do you think it's important to talk about in the moment that we're in?

Kate Bowler: Oh my gosh. Well, and Mike, what an honor. That is a perfect compliment, because that is really the thing that felt most important to me, is I kind of stumbled upon the Prosperity Gospel the way a lot of outsiders do, which is like a, "What? I'm sorry. Can you explain what's happening here?" And it's fundamentally the belief that God wants to give you health, wealth, and an overarching sense of victory.

And I got to know the Prosperity Gospel when... So I'm from the middle of Canada and we really only have one fast road. And so when someone puts a light on your only fast road, there's a rage that builds inside of your heart. And so I was at the stoplight, and it was Sunday morning, and then I thought a factory was emptying out. And it turns out it was Canada's largest mega church built on the outskirts of town, and that there was a pastor who was actually just celebrating Pastors Appreciation Day by having received a motorcycle and was driving it around on stage.

Mike Petrow: Oh my God, you're so describing my childhood right now. Thank you.

Kate Bowler: I was. And I had two strong reactions, which was, "Absolutely not, that is for Americans." I was very keen on that point. And the second is, I grew up Mennonite, and this was largely Mennonites that were going. And these cheese eating sweet pacifists of the prairies were now very interested in the idea that God wanted more for them.

And so the riddle of it is what lodged itself in my brain and heart, which is, one, how did the Prosperity Gospel become so compelling that even Canadians, and even Mennonite Canadians, could contribute to the motorcycle fund. But then if that's true, how do I move that from being a sort of indictment of something someone else does, and actually much closer to home, which is how do these impulses reflect so many of the temptations of my own faith?

And so that's been, I spent 10 years researching, interviewing televangelists and interviewing

mega church pastors. And I think it has shaped my worldview more than anything else. Curious, compassionate, genuine wonder, how is this in all of us?

Mike Petrow: Wow, I so appreciate that. And to ask that question, how is this in all of us? And we're going to bring you in, in a second, Richard, to this. Don't worry. I think every time I hear you say you're about to have your best life now, it always unclenches something in my heart, because I go, "Oh my God, she just nailed it in one sentence."

And growing up always hearing, "God wants you to be healed. God wants you bless. It's about to happen. You're almost there. Just keep tithing, just keep working, just keep spending, just keep investing." And then to hear it jump the fence into secular culture, and my other spiritual friends, who to this day are like, "Mike, you really just need to manifest. You just need to manifest what you want. And if you just manifest, the life you think you deserve is right around the corner." Why do you think this is so appealing?

Kate Bowler: Yeah. Well, I think we can see the confluence of a number of historical trends sort of come together I think in this. And one is that neo-pentecostalism lost most of its sectarian quality, and it started to seem more and more mainstream because it sounded very similar to stories about the American Dream. It sounded very similar to ideas about positive words, creating positive realities, that had really been in the water for about a hundred years, before we figured it out.

And then also, I think the rise of our therapeutic culture really wants our feelings to be able to have a modicum of control. And so it really perfectly encapsulates the idea that there's a beautiful life waiting for you and you have inside of you the ability to make it true. It's so tempting and so very accessible for even people who think that this is not a religious infrastructure.

Paul Swanson: It's really fun to witness the two of you who have been steeped in study or in life in the Prosperity Gospel. And can I have to just share, I worked at Canadian Mennonite University for a year.

Richard Rohr: Did you really?

Kate Bowler: Did you meet my ex-boyfriend's dad, Paul Friesen the librarian?

Paul Swanson: Maybe. Maybe by happenstance.

Kate Bowler: Thanks, I just felt that was important to bring in now.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, I'm glad you brought that in.

Kate Bowler: Yeah, it just feels important that everybody know, as he's a really nice guy. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: As we talk about this, Richard, I know that you are well aware of the impacts of different cultural movements within Christianity, and Prosperity Gospel, and charismatic movements, not to equate the two as the same.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: But when you hear this conversation on Prosperity Gospel, it seems to fit quite rightly in line with first half of life religion. How would you respond to that?

Richard Rohr: Yeah, that would be true, with no knowledge that there is even a second half. That's what makes it scary and sad. As a Franciscan, it just seems like the antithesis of our worldview, where we love the poor Christ, the humble Christ, the crucified Christ, and the crucified people. And so to idealize the wealthy, it's like, how could we have gotten there from the gospel? It's sort of unbelievable.

I don't mean to sound righteous or arrogant, but it's hard to imagine. And yet I know it's true. We have the same megachurches here in New Mexico, but we speak a very different language. But I want to add one caveat. At least they're honest about it. I do think a lot of us social justice Catholics and CACers really are, in our own hidden denied way, into success and prosperity too. You know what Peter Drucker said, correct me if I'm wrong, "Strategy eats religion for lunch"?

Paul Swanson: I think culture for breakfast.

Richard Rohr: Oh.

Mike Petrow: Culture eats religion for breakfast? Or culture eats ideology for breakfast?

Richard Rohr: Well, I made it my own. I made it into religion, because that was my field. That culture always wins. And I say that after traveling the world for 40 years. You go, and this is culture. It's not Catholicism or Evangelicalism. But it's especially disappointing to me Kate, to hear that you Canadians are imitating America. I always thought you were a little moral high ground.

Kate Bowler: Yeah. Well...

Richard Rohr: Not entirely.

Kate Bowler: And we're decidedly middle class.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Kate Bowler: Slash slightly lower middle class culture, with a lot of social leveling devices, which is lovely, things that equalize us, which is lovely. But I do think that part of the reason why any of these success narratives thrived in America, particularly in the late 19th century, is just as a result of the rise of cities. Is you put people up close to each other and we just take out the measuring stick. Why is one person succeeding and another failing? We want an explanation. And I think it feels almost like the same question as, "Well, is God fair?" And then all of a sudden we've had a whole, now we're playing out our theodicies with other people's bank accounts.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, it's such an interesting thing to ponder. I think this notion that you can build the life that you want probably does serve first half of life thinking in some way, right? Again, first half of life, we're talking about falling upward. First half of life, we're trying to build a container and build a life. And the notion that you can. Or even moving the notion that

God's boot is against your neck and you're not allowed to have good things, I think is really good. But this is what I've so appreciated about your work. This is my second thank you.

So I had a friend who, for years, another one of my fellow PK Prosperity Gospel survivors, he always used to say, "Everything happens for a reason, and sometimes the reason is that you are dumb and you make bad choices." And he said that for years. And so when your Everything Happens For a Reason, what is it, And other Lies That I've Loved, came on the scene, he was so excited. And we would reference it constantly in our debates with our Prosperity Gospel families and Prosperity Gospel survivors.

This is the long question I promised I would ask, I'm so sorry. So I'm a Jungian, and Carl Jung says, "The soul desperately needs a meaning for its suffering." But there's a Jungian in the last few years named Don Kalshed, and he said, "The soul so desperately clings for a meaning that it will grab a toxic meaning and a meaning that causes self-harm over no meaning."

And so for me, with this Prosperity Gospel family, I ended up losing my brother Prosperity Gospel preacher to suicide. And then six months later, my mother Prosperity Gospel preacher died from cancer that no one knew that she had. And so what I saw this do to their congregations, of people spiraling into trying to invent a meaning for it, whether the meaning was, "Oh, they must have been in sin," or the meaning was, "God took them early so that something bad wouldn't happen later," or the meaning was, "This is happening to teach us all a lesson," it's wild.

I have to say thank you, thank you, thank you for helping people who walk through that initiation of suffering, to let go of the need to find a meaning for it, or to think that the universe is causing it. A career of doing this, what really would you offer people who are walking through that initiation into the tragic sense of life that we're talking about in this episode, and having to let go of that belief that they really can make their life exactly what they want it to be if they try hard enough?

Kate Bowler: Thank you for sharing that story. That is so intense. And it's intimate the way our beliefs cost us. It's such personal math we run when we think about the implications of our beliefs. And I don't think I've felt anything sadder than Prosperity Gospel funerals, when you're standing in a beautiful place with beautiful people, seeing the kind of raw edge of desperation as people are casting about for that feeling.

Or right now I'm seeing older prosperity preachers decide that they will release their lives at a particular age, the want for control. But I think too, that related thing you were talking about, about the real desire we have to make our lives meaningful, I really think about that all the time in people's, like the softer parts of people's stories at the end.

I've interviewed psychologists who talk about meaning making as one of the stages of grief, or my belief that if things are wonderfully logical, that information is not going to be accessible to me now. But I do love prayers like, Beth Moore said this the other day, where she was like, "God, none of it is going to be worth it, all this suffering, all this tragedy, but God, could you make it matter?" I thought that was a lovely distinction, in which we're trying to unclench our fingers from that feeling that we see all the math. And that's actually

something that, Father Rohr, you said to me. You said, “God’s a terrible mathematician.”

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Well, I learned that from our Catholic Saint Therese. She said, “God knows all the sciences except mathematics.” God doesn’t know how to count, because once you have an infinitely graceful, grace-filled, grace-giving God, you’re outside the realm of math. Any kind of deserving, or weighing, or measuring is useless. It gets in the way.

I’m sort of hoping the Webb telescope is going to help people try to imagine infinity. It just keeps moving out there, and we haven’t bumped up against the edge of the universe yet. So yeah, we’re getting there, I hope.

Kate Bowler: In the meaning-making piece, that’s something I’ve kind of always wanted to ask you, is because one of the most common Prosperity Gospels is the secular Prosperity Gospel of wellness.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Kate Bowler: And there’s like a \$12 billion a year industry now, particularly catered to women who believe that we’re one \$500 skincare routine away from finally experiencing perfection. And I think that the problem, it seems like, is this ache for progress, that there is a holy version under there, it’s just some account of sanctification. We all want to become, but become what?

How do you... I’ve wanted more language for that, like how to move the progress language into sanctification language, without going back to a bad math.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. What you’ve got to do is break with the ego somehow. And what we did in Western Christianity is attack the shadow, where we should have been attacking the ego. Not attacking, but revealing, the ego. And so the ego got away Scot-free.

And what we have in the Prosperity Gospel, forgive me friends, I don’t mean to be righteous, but it is a very egocentric interpretation of what is clearly a doctrine of the cross. It’s amazing we’ve been able to pull it off. We Catholics did the same thing in the Renaissance, and it was all about beautiful churches, and we found a way to lead with our ego too.

Kate Bowler: I once visited a church in Lisbon that was so gilded, it’s so heavy with gold, that they kept having to reinforce the sub-basement. And the more I looked around, the more I realized that the primary garnish that they’d add was just pineapples, just hundreds, hundreds of gold pineapples.

Mike Petrow: Amazing.

Kate Bowler: And I thought, that is-

Hundreds of gold pineapples and I thought-

Mike Petrow: Amazing.

Kate Bowler: ... that is the greatest ever Jesus-bedazzled situation. What we're really going to need is a couple thousand more of these pineapples.

Mike Petrow: Oh, my gosh.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Sad.

Mike Petrow: I think I want to permanently add Jesus-bedazzled to the lexicon around here. That's so great. I love that. One, I want to bump back real quick. I love, thank you, thank you, thank you for what you said about prosperity gospel funerals.

There were nine speakers at my brother's funeral. I was the only person who cried. And of all the things, 15 years later, people still thank me for being the one person at my brother's funeral who said, "This is sad. I wish you had made a different choice, and I'm going to miss you." And that was it, and I cried onstage. But I was the only person who could step out of the "everything is positive" narrative.

And I appreciate, Kate and Richard, the way you've reminded us both that sometimes life is hard. And I have to point out, just for a minute, that I also love that you seem to have a shared rage at traffic lights. Am I right in pointing that out?

Kate Bowler: I remember. He gets so upset in traffic.

Richard Rohr: Around here, the one on the corner here. That's all.

Kate Bowler: Yeah. It's not even trying to help us be good people. It's just unnecessary at this point.

Richard Rohr: Well put. Well put.

Mike Petrow: And Richard, can you remind us of your personal grudge against the traffic light here on Bridge?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. We live on the corner of, well, we're on it right now, it's called Five Points Road, and that's because five streets come together, which makes the traffic light interminably long. In the years when I felt it was my duty to get the mail on the other side each day and meet everybody's needs, I'm retired now, but it was just a stop in my flow, a stop in my, "The better I do, the more I do, the happier I'm going to make the world." And so I can preach that I'm not a prosperity gospel, but in my own way, I was.

And one day, I felt I heard, it wasn't audible hearing, but some kind of voice said to me, "Are you going to be any happier when that light turns green and you're going to get on the other side of the road?" And I, of course, had to answer with a resounding, "No. I won't." I call it my holy spot. I still use it as a point of meditation. If I'm not happy here, I won't be happy there. And it's true. It works.

Mike Petrow: It's so good, especially now that they have construction on the bridge, so it's even-

Richard Rohr: It's even-

Mike Petrow: ... even longer. And I can't help but bounce that back to what you just said, Kate, about,

prosperity gospel friends and I used to talk about this all the time, being trained to believe that the thing you want is just out of reach, like you said, just one skincare regimen away or just one new workout program away. What do you think that does to us, to live that way?

Kate Bowler: It's such a hummy middle distance. It's not quite here, and it's never there. But it's always in a state of aspirational becoming, and at first, I thought maybe all of that... What it does, of course, is it never gives us a feeling of arrival, and so we just are replaying New Year's Day-

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Kate Bowler: ... over and over and over again. And that's, as someone who always has been... And to be totally honest, when I got very sick with cancer, this really, I just got worse, because I thought, "Well, now I just have to cram all of the future into the present or else it won't be enough," which is true. It wasn't going to be enough. But knowing that, I really wore that heavily.

It's actually been really hard for me to even try to undo some of that in myself, is I have such a panicked desire to make life feel full, and I can say things like, "And beautiful, and..." But it really mostly also just looks like optimized. I think it's just something, when I see it in everyone else, I really, I see it in my own lightly panicked heart.

Mike Petrow: That's so well said. That phrase, aspirational becoming, I think about that in connection to just first half of life, thinking whether you're seeking to be married to Lady Poverty in the Franciscan way, trying to do that in the right way, or Lady Lucre in the prosperity gospel way, of that, what am I becoming?

And knowing, part of what you talk about in *Falling Upward*, Richard, is these great themes of great love and great suffering as propellers into the second half of life. And Kate, you just mentioned what you went through, stage four diagnosis cancer right when you first discovered it. How were great love and great suffering companions for you in that particular season? And how did that affect this aspirational becoming? You've touched on it, but I would love to hear a bit more.

Kate Bowler: Well, before I had a really, a pretty good plan. I was going to be a fancy historian, and my dad was a historian, and this was part of the great desire to be very close to gargoyles and enormous, and quarried stone of all kinds. And in some ways, it was the best dream I could even imagine. My dad had never gotten a tenured job his whole life, and it was a difficult thing to be close to somebody's unrealized dreams.

And so I really sprinted for it, and I gave up all of my twenties trying to become something. And then I finally stuck the landing. I'd had years of infertility, and I finally had this little baby, and I got my dream job.

And then I got a stage four cancer diagnosis, and I felt so robbed. I really did. I was so angry. I felt, I guess first, I realized I overpaid for my life. I didn't know it 'til that moment where I was like, "Oh, this is not going to go the way that I thought it would." And I was so frantically trying to climb up that ladder that I didn't realize there wasn't a platform. The whole thing could tip backwards.

In the middle, though, of... And the other reason to be so angry is I had really been turned away from doctors for so long. I'd been sent home from the ER with Pepto Bismol. I was told that it was definitely in my head. And so to find out that it was stage four when I had begged for care, I felt angry, but also, I felt worthless, honestly.

And so I'm in the hospital. Nothing I hoped for came true. And then in the middle of that, I felt so absurdly, embarrassingly loved by God, just bubble wrap, floaty, don't even want to gossip about my colleagues kind of love. I wasn't even trying to be a better person.

I was just loved, and I felt that in such a close way that it really undid whatever I thought I was doing before in shaping a Christian worldview. And I just knew that God loves the brokenhearted, and that even when things don't add up, and especially when they don't, that there is such a particularity of the way God will surround us. And I knew that in a way I'd never known that before.

It also helped, too, that my colleagues, my hospital was basically attached to the Divinity School down a couple hallways, and so these colleagues that I was so desperate to impress were suddenly there with their little anointing oils. I would sometimes wake up from a surgery, and I'd just be wearing socks that I hadn't brought. It was just a colleague who'd come and made a quilt overnight, and just such dumb, tender love that I was like, "Oh, this is not a story about me earning my place in the world anymore."

Mike Petrow: Wow. Thank you so much for sharing that with us. It just opens up so many things, I think, that I have not only found in your work and Richard's works, but just this deep ground of incarnate love and walking through that experiential salvation where sin management leaves the game, and transformation sneaks in and makes a quilt and drapes it over you. And all you can do is be present to it.

Kate Bowler: Yeah. Did you say experiential salvation?

Mike Petrow: Yeah. That's a-

Kate Bowler: That's good.

Mike Petrow: ... that's a Richard term, I believe.

Kate Bowler: Richard, well done.

Mike Petrow: He's got a bright career ahead of him.

Richard Rohr: That's all I do, is talk, talk.

Kate Bowler: If someone hasn't told you, you should write all that stuff down. It's really good.

Mike Petrow: I have so appreciated Kate and your work, Richard and your teaching, going back and listening to conversations between the two of you and then conversations we've had, Richard, in the last few weeks about Falling Upward, realizing how much great love and great suffering really come together. It seems like they are inseparable.

Kate, I've always appreciated you talking about this reality that, to put it in theological

terms, the only answer to theodicy seems to be theophany, this notion that just divine love seems to show up in the midst of suffering that has no logical explanation.

Richard, what's it been like for you in this season of your life to look back and recognize how great love and great suffering, do they become one path? Do they overlap?

Richard Rohr: They definitely become one path. When you choose to love, you will suffer. I don't know if it's a month away or six months away, but you will be called to give your life for what you've given yourself to. You who are parents, Paul, probably first understand this, that to be born into any family or any community is to be put in a position of absolute solidarity with their wellbeing. And you can't preserve that wellbeing for too long, perfectly.

Kate Bowler: Yes.

Richard Rohr: Sooner or later, it catches up, and you, "What do I believe now? What do I hope for now? What do I have a right to ask for?" Yeah. The love path leads to the suffering path. The cross is the final stages of Jesus's living a life of love.

Kate Bowler: Whenever you say that, I feel really validated in being unbelievably grouchy about bucket list completist stories about people's lives, because the way we love, no one's going to be like, "Well, I loved my kid when he was 10. That about wraps it up. Sorry for years 11 through so on." The more you love, the more you love. I don't know.

One of the most common kinds of people I meet on the road is either caregivers or someone in what I consider an emotionally expensive profession, like ministry or healthcare or education or something like that. And even just their fatigue or the hardest parts of their life is just because of love. It's webs of love. It's not usually their vices that are destroying them. It's that they're beholden to their loves. When you say it, I think, "Yeah. That really makes a lot of sense to me."

Mike Petrow: I'm just holding all this in as we think about this chapter, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, which that title just says it all in so many different ways. And one thing that we've talked about is the invitation to be just really honest about the reality of the world, full of the suffering, the loss, from the local to the global, and we see that in the news every day. We see it in our communities and our neighborhoods.

How does being honest about the absurd, tragic reality of life change one's relationship to life? That radical honesty, you can feel it when you're around someone who's open to it. I would love to ask this question to both of you, but Kate, if you don't mind going first, how do you feel like radical honesty to the tragic absurdity of life... And maybe just give you a second to think. That quote-

Kate Bowler: No. Yeah.

Mike Petrow: Oh, go ahead.

Kate Bowler: The very first thing I started doing was swearing, mostly because I had lacked the precious moments desired to make my faith palatable anymore. First, it was like I just wanted to run around breaking things, and that helped, honestly. That really helped. I was like, "God, I

need less performance narrative.”

And then I think it was just maybe seeing, well, I’m a historian that studies cultural scripts, so I guess I’m always obsessed with honesty, or what are the stories we tell? And aren’t they usually actually just the stories we can quote, unquote, live with, as opposed to the deeper, harder thing? Using that to get in sideways to, well, what would be a truer thing to say?

And I think it’s mostly just radically changed my prayer life. It’s more like, “Dear God, most of what I see seems like a design flaw. Wish you would take care of that.”

Mike Petrow: Yeah. How about you, Richard? What is radical honesty? How does that change your relationship or one’s relationship to life, to the absurd tragedy of it all?

Richard Rohr: Well, first, I have to say I’m not sure I’ve attained radical honesty yet. I still have my ways of protecting myself. I’m protected by reason of being a first-world empire country that I’m living in. I’m a Franciscan, but my very vow of poverty makes me totally secure because the community will take care of me ‘til I’m buried. It’s always got a, you think you’re doing an honest thing, and it reveals its other colors.

Kate Bowler: Yes. That’s such a good way of putting it. Yes.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. But if you try, well, that’s what made me write that chapter on the tragic sense of life. By the way, when you said that, I didn’t realize it. It’s been too many years since I wrote that book. But I’m writing my book on the prophets now, and I’m again talking about the tragic sense of life.

I didn’t realize I was using that phrase again, but the prophets are obsessed with it. We’re going to let you know it’s tragic. We’re going to have you feel it’s tragic. And not you making it tragic for other people. And they’re Jewish people. You, my fellow Jews, you have to feel the tragedy. Oh, my gosh. No wonder the prophets have never been popular and never will be, because they just don’t let us off the hook.

Kate Bowler: That reminds me of an interview I did recently with this actor named Rob Delaney who has a beautiful memoir called *A Heart That Works*. And so often, these kind of inspirational books are very gentle, and they have a, “And one step leads to another step,” and it’s trying to lead the reader with a lot of wildflowers along the way.

And Rob was the first person I ever interviewed, when he was talking about the tragic death of his son, he was like, “I want this to hurt you. I want it to hurt you. I want you to know how much this love meant to me.”

And I’ve never heard somebody be like, “Oh, if it hurts, it’s working.” And then that’s his, and that’s *A Heart That Works*. It reminds me of, that sounds like a prophetic sensibility.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Kate Bowler: It was funny on talk shows, though. It’s like morning talk show. You’ve got a three-minute segment. He’s like, “Hey, hope this burns going down.” I was like, “I like you so much.”

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Gee. Right.

Kate Bowler: Well done.

Mike Petrow: It's so good, though. I feel like we're, in the first half of life, we're so trained to think of love and suffering as antithetical opposites. And so hurt is different than love. And yet anyone who's ever grieved knows that hurt is the proof of love. That's so moving. Thank you for sharing that story.

I'm not sure this question makes sense, but I'm going to ask the both of you anyway. Is there something about finally accepting the tragic sense of life that allows us to not take it so personally that we're suffering?

Richard Rohr: A new idea I'm using, because I believe it, is, let's put it this way, it appeals to us who are wordsmiths, I suppose, but if you don't mythologize, all you can do is pathologize. If you have a myth, now you know how we use the word myth, it means ultimately, deeply, universally true, just the opposite of the way we use the word.

When we don't know how to put our life inside of a great, big storyline, like the hero's journey that Joseph Campbell used to talk about, the way of the cross that Jesus talked about, all you can do is talk therapeutic language about how I can get healed. It's sort of overtaken America.

And I'm glad of the many ways we've discovered to heal people, to help people, but this need to pathologize instead of to see my life in a great big pattern where I'm being led, I'm being guided, I'm being taught, I'm learning, that's what faith does for you. It gives you this capacity to live inside of a great big narrative that we called in The Apostles Creed the communion of saints, that we're on a great parade of living and dying that our ancestors already went on and our successors will go on. And that gives meaning that's larger than life, so much larger it can include death.

If you don't mythologize, find a big story that your soul is living, you'll find some little, and I do all this, some little theory of trauma to explain yourself to yourself. And it helps. It does. I'm not against it, but don't think it's ever going to take away the pain. You're still traumatized. The way the saints would've spoken is seeing that as something happening in God, in God's great trauma.

There's a book popular when I was in the early seminary called The Divine Pity by a Dominican, Gerald Vann, the Divine Pity. And he was a master at spirituality. He understood that where Jesus was trying to lead us on the cross was to live in solidarity with the divine pity, that God wasn't suffering for us, God was suffering with us.

That's a mythology, a truth, a great big truth. If you can place your suffering inside the eternal suffering of God for creation, that's indestructible. It's not negative. It isn't. It does take a big leap of trust, but that is given when you gaze upon the crucified. I think Christianity has a very healthy mythology, but it hardly knows it.

Kate Bowler: That's right.

Richard Rohr: Hardly at all. I could never slip into the prosperity gospel.

Kate Bowler: Well, I think we've seeded most of the ground now to the rise of the therapist priest. We have-

Richard Rohr: That's what I'm saying.

Kate Bowler: No, because when you put those two things, it totally, in my mind, reminds me of that Tom... You've read a lot of Tom Long, I'm sure, who has his-

Richard Rohr: No.

Kate Bowler: He's this wonderful... You would love it. But he has this beautiful account of what happens with funerals, and he's like, "The mortician's gone. The lawyers have not yet arrived, and the pastor stands there. And who in that moment will have..." And it would be, in your words, like the mythology that can bear up the weight of the truth that need to be told. When I think about that person standing there by the family, I think that's what I picture when you describe that. Who can stand there? What is worth saying?

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Kate Bowler: Did you read the, I'm sure you did, the, and I always mispronounce his last name, 1968 Triumph of the Therapeutic, Philip-

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Kate Bowler: ... Rieff? Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Rieff. Yes.

Kate Bowler: Yes. When I read it, it sounds like it's two seconds ago where he's like, "Well, pastors have given up most of the ground to the therapists." And I was like, "Gosh, really? I thought that was..." But when do you think that happened? When do you think that our mythologizing gave way to pathologizing?

Richard Rohr: Well, we rightly became enamored with the brilliance of psychology and the brilliance of under-

... of psychology and the brilliance of understanding why we were wounded, the character of our woundedness, probably the 12-step program began that. That's a legitimate fascination because it's true.

But then it took over and it became the best explanation. It wasn't a healing... Well, no, I shouldn't say that. I don't want to be dualistic about this. I have so many therapeutic friends and my, most of them are doing good work. But it's just when it takes over, when there's nothing beyond my wounding story and that keeps everybody else at bay. The phrase we use is playing the victim, or blaming the victim.

Mike Petrow: Well, and I wonder, Kate, if all the gifts of therapeutic culture, but if it still hijacks that we're almost there myth, right? If I can just get my attachment issues under control, if I can just

address-

Kate Bowler: My family systems and my... There is so many framing devices that are so useful.

Richard Rohr: That's a good phrase: framing devices.

Kate Bowler: But I really am so caught up in what you're saying about... I guess I have a couple of concerns, and I am learning from you right now, Richard, when you're like, "I don't want to be dualistic. I don't want to say that these are competitive ideologies because they're not."

But there are certain moments where it can't hold all the water it needs to hold. And one of them is, I think especially in these tragic moments, one is people are most often in a paid relationship with these helpers, and who will then show up.

I mean, churches are full of free people bringing you casserole. They are full of people who plan on being in community with you over the duration of your life. They are people who can see you in a season of difficulty. And then my Sunday school teacher, Carol McPherson, wrote me in a card this last week to know who I was and who I've become, to bear witness. That's stuff that our model of the therapeutic can't and won't do. And it makes it insufficient, I think, for our life as a chronic condition.

Richard Rohr: Yeah, yeah. You say it in a very fair way. Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, I was going to say one thing that I love about church that you can't find anywhere else is you remove that exchange of money in those relationships, at least ideally, but you also don't fully choose who's going to be there.

Community is made up by those who are circling around a mystery, a practice, sacraments, and where else can I find that in life where it's not around a sports team or a common interest. It's mystery. And to me, that's the most luxurious thing about church community for me in this moment.

Kate Bowler: It's weird that you can't kick people out and it's also the best part is you wouldn't. I love that you said chosen because this is... The book that I just wrote, *Have A Beautiful, Terrible Day*, has a dedication. And it is to... When you say that, it just reminds me, it's to the person that I wouldn't have chosen if I had been divided by my algorithm and my demographic preferences and my hobbies. It was just Roger, the librarian who was in the historical division, and we shared a printer. And Roger was not endowed with the particular charisms that I would've chosen. He wasn't my personality buddy, and there was zero high-fiving in the hallway, but he was the guy who immediately volunteered to pick me up at 4:00 AM to take me to the airport to get chemo in another state.

Or he was the guy, it turns out that was organizing, having the church house unsheltered families so that they could stay together, and making churches take turns week by week. Because that was Roger. And it has totally changed my definition of, well, who are my people, but also just like who's a saint. And who's a saint? A saint is somebody who just decides their life can stay still enough or be boring enough and then turn the volume up on everybody else's life. And I am blown away by the unchosen love that I've had that honestly, I was pretty snarky about in my earlier years.

Now I'm like, "Oh, I wouldn't deserve it if I got it." Thanks, Roger.

Paul Swanson: I want to ask this question, Kate, because I feel like there's a kinship between your podcast, Everything Happens and this CAC podcast, Everything Belongs, that there is an attempt to open acceptance about the totality of reality even in our titles. And of course, your bestselling book, Everything Happens For A Reason and Other Lies I've Loved, how important was it for you to drop that piece for a reason from the title of your podcast to name the everything-ness without putting purpose or reason behind it? Does that connect for you or am I pointing out a constellation where it's actually just satellites?

Kate Bowler: Yeah, well, no, I think that's right and what is the everything-ness that you then... Because sometimes it's tragedy and living in these tragic times, and I think that's also implied in what we're describing is that if we're very fortunate, it's a sensibility. It becomes a language we learn to speak in a particular season. And then there are other seasons. There can be ones of joy and un-ironic, mountaintop yoga, and walks with friends.

And then an election season in which we feel the bracing, apocalyptic, that we kind of cycle through these different experiences with what we need to have: love, encourage, and interdependence. And so that does feel like the everything-ness of it. It's not just like bad things happen. It's like, "Yeah, no, everything happens."

Paul Swanson: Richard, do you have any thoughts about that? About the everything-ness? And I love what you said about the love and courage it takes to even just to see the totality of that, almost like a sense of allowing.

Richard Rohr: I think what God-seekers are always seeking is the bigger picture, the bigger picture, the whole picture, an inclusive picture. And that's why when you see people trying to exclude, I'm sorry, but you can't be on an authentic God search because you want to know what's the... Oh, Jesus had a word for the big picture, the kingdom of God, the reign of God. If it's Godly, it's got to include everything that God includes, which is everything. That's obvious. If it exists, God is somehow on some level at this moment saying yes to it. And all I can do is join in.

So we God-seeker people become obsessed with wholeness, with the big picture, with inclusivity. And we should if we're growing, have less and less patience with those who want to exclude. No, that is not a part. Though, no, that does not matter. No, that is not worthy. And that's almost our public image now, exclusionary people who've decided who is not worthy. It makes you want to cry that we could. Two thousand years after the incarnation is what we Christians believe at least could still be missing the point to that degree.

Yeah. Well, you say it well, Kate. We're trying to say it well here.

Kate Bowler: Oh, my gosh. I love hearing you. I love what you said about the everything-ness of the kingdom of God because I think you're exactly right. Also, I'm thinking of the movie, the Kingdom of God, and people are always thinking of these sorts of zealots and sectarians. We just want... It reminds me. I have this priest friend I call when I'm very sad and also kind of being a jerk or despairing, and it's very, very fun to be unvarnished around a priest as you know. It's a special kind of gift. And I was like, "I don't know. I don't know if I'm doing this right and I don't know if this is working." Basically, am I being good? Am I whatever?

And he said in a nice way, he is like, “Oh, Kate, I don’t care anymore.” And not like, “Oh, I don’t care about you.” I’m just like, blah. He was just trying to be like, “Everywhere you look is God, Kate.” I was like, “That’s so much better. That’s so much better.”

Mike Petrow: This has been so good. Thank you, Kate, for your time. Thank you, Richard for being here. We close every episode with a question about living in both halves of life at the same time. And as I’ve been listening to the two of you talk, I’ve been thinking about chakra to Noah and I’ve been thinking a little bit about Origin, who’s my favorite mystic. Origin said that this life is a classroom and a hospital.

And then that teaching went to Gregory of Nyssa and his sister Macrina, and they cooked up this idea that they said, “Yeah, that’s true,” but also their mythology was that we transform forever. So they’re like, yes, but we are designed to fall into divine love forever. You read them, it sounds like they almost believe in reincarnation, and so they’re saying, yes, we’re healing and learning and transforming and growing, but we never get there. It just happens forever.

And so my closing question is what does it mean if we shift our thinking from I’m almost there, I’m almost healthy, I’m almost whole, I’m almost to a place that I’m going to have a life without suffering or even I’m almost to heaven where there’ll be no suffering and we shift our thinking to we’re always on the way forever. Does that question make sense? And if we’re always on the way, we’re always where we are. How do you think that shifts how we show up in the world if we move away from that I’m almost there model?

Richard Rohr: Kate, you go first. I’m not sure I’m ready.

Kate Bowler: Well, I think I don’t use journey language maybe because also I hate the band journey, but I think I get very stuck on, but I always want to be somewhere else. And even if I’m on a road, frankly, I’d like to be moving a lot faster than this.

And oh gosh, someone said something so much... There’s a lovely priest in Nashville, Charles Strobel. I think I’m saying his name right, Charlie Strobel. And my friend was describing wanting to give him a bicycle and he was like, “Oh, no, no, I could never ride a bike. You miss so much suffering riding at that pace.” And I was like, “Oh boy, that is so beautiful and so much”... I want to be in a... I want them to bring back those airplanes that go to London in only about two and a half hours. I want that so much. So I guess because I’m bad at the journey stuff, I mostly think of myself as a very unstructured building, and this is how I understand precarity.

Precarity is cracks in my foundation. And because of that, I can’t build very tall. I, by myself, am probably only about two stories, which is I always think of any of my interdependence as in the medieval era where they realized that they had forgotten how to build buildings. And remember when the cattle got small and most people became illiterate and they forgot how to build things? This is kind of me. But eventually, they’re like, “Gosh, if we just strap something on the outside, we get this thing a lot taller,” hence the flying buttresses and propping up here, propping up there, maybe a little fancy stained glass by the end of it.

And that cracks in the foundation, unstructural building is the only way I know how to think about my life of faith, why I need other people, and like Dorothy days, endless use of

the word precarity. What am I? I'm a precarious experiment in God's love and some things are going to fall off every now and then.

Richard Rohr: I think this is old material, but I used to say it a lot, maybe I should say it more. The steps to maturity are necessarily by definition, immature. It's so common sense, isn't it? And why can't we recognize... I think a mother or father must do that with their child. They don't expect their 4-year-old to think or operate like a 14-year-old.

Well, if you, as Jesus would say, foolish as you are, if you can love your children this way, you don't expect your 4-year-old to be a 14-year-old. How much more is an infinite God patient with and should we not be patient with the fumbling attempts? I used to tell when I was working with teenagers in first years as a priest, we talked about the clumsy amorous attempts. They were always coming to Catholic confession, confessing their clumsy amorous attempts. Of course. But when we jumped in too quickly and named it sin, I don't think God would. It was just growing up.

Kate Bowler: Well, I like that.

Paul Swanson: It certainly sparks the words of Jesus of being like a child in the kingdom and that view, of course, I loved watching my children learn to crawl and then walk. I wouldn't berate them and be like, "You can't walk yet. How long is this going to take?"

You encourage and you love the flops and the giggles that come along with that. If we can have that view of God having that same thing in our Amherst attempts or in trying to grow up spiritually, it's a much more everything-ness world and forgiving world to look in that way.

Richard Rohr: Good.

Paul Swanson: Well, thank you all so much for your time today. This has been an incredible gift to be in conversation with you. Kate and Richard for being here with us, pure gift. Thank you both so, so much.

Kate Bowler: This was so nice. I love your beautiful faces. This is the nicest part of my day and week, so thank you lovelies.

Richard Rohr: Good to be with you, Kate. Thank you. Keep doing it.

Kate Bowler: You too. Thanks. If I ever see a desert, I'll assume you're nearby. I'll come on down.

Paul Swanson: Mike, I don't know about you, but it was a delight to meet Kate and to be in conversation with her from everything from the prosperity gospel to deep suffering and this tragic sense of life. I know one of the takeaways for me was just thinking through my own experiences and those of loved ones around when tragedy strikes or when life gets really, really hard and reality is maybe showing us so many things that we wish weren't true. We're not a part of our day-to-day, not a of global events.

But instead of hiding from those things and learning to accept that this is the reality that I participate in, it allows for a different sort of engagement with reality, a different sort of

relationship that is less projective of how I'd like to be, and first accepting how it is so that I can show up with the reality of these moments before me and not always constantly wishing to be in the past or in the future where I can imagine a different reality or can reimagine a different past. Does that make sense to you?

Mike Petrow: It does, and as we talked about in the episode, Kate speaks to so many parts of my journey and was such a big part of my journey growing up in the prosperity gospel. And I don't think it's just the prosperity gospel. I think it's a uniquely... We could say an American thing. We could say a Western thing. I think it's something a lot of us experience right now where we want to have good days without bad. We want to have happiness without sadness. We want to have smooth sailing without any rough weather. And then when we have those slips into sadness, it feels like a failure.

Recognizing through so much life experience, this notion that everything really does belong and everything belongs doesn't mean everything is good or it's all good. It just means it all belongs has led me so much more to appreciate the intrinsically inseparably, interwoven nature of great love and great suffering, and really in trying to be a whole person, I can look back and see where I wasn't a whole person when I was just trying to have happiness without sadness.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I think about that as a parent. I want my kids to be flourishing, wonderful human beings, and there's this temptation to not let them suffer, to not let them see tragedy.

And of course, there's age appropriate things and all that, but how can you learn to run fast if you don't also learn that sometimes you trip and fall and bruise your knees or how do you learn to make friends if you don't also learn how the mistakes of that? And that your feelings will get hurt sometimes for reasons you don't even know. But there's this tragic sense of, for me as a parent, to know that this same reality that I have to learn to accept, I also have to learn to accept that for my kids, that I cannot create this bubble that they can operate in and also become compassionate adults in this world who can serve in love.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, that's so true. And speaking of someone who loves to run and frequently trips and runs into trees... I'm not exaggerating. That's the reality of being a whole person showing up with a whole heart of love.

Honestly, for the last two years, I've been trying to engage in a regular practice of several days a week asking myself: "What am I grateful for and what am I grieving right now? Where do I have sorrow and where do I need to celebrate?"

And this gratitude and grieving and sorrow and celebration practice has really, really helped me open my heart, I think, a lot more to the fullness of life.

Paul Swanson: Let's leave that question with our listeners. What are you grieving right now and what are you grateful for right now?

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