



EVERYTHING BELONGS

Falling Upward
with Cassidy Hall
(Listener Questions: Part I)

Corey Wayne: Hey everyone, my name is Corey and I'm part of the team that produces Everything Belongs. Given the amount of questions that we received this season, we've decided to devote three episodes in responding to your questions. Thanks for listening.

Hey everybody. Welcome back to Everything Belongs on our final episode of the season of Falling Upward. My name's Corey, I produce the show.

Mike Petrow: I'm Mike Petrow, I'm one of the hosts.

Paul Swanson: And I'm Paul Swanson, one of the other hosts.

Corey Wayne: And we just want to thank you for sticking with us this season. Today we are turning our attention to chapter 13, which is called Falling Upward, and your questions.

Paul Swanson: It's super fun to be rounding out this season with, obviously, this last chapter of Richard's book, Falling Upward and getting to some of your questions. Chapter 13 really is the capstone of this book, bringing it all together, weaving it into a landing page of exuberance within the first and second half of life, and what does it mean to live that as deeply and fully as one can, sometimes holding both at once. Then we're going to kick it off with some listener questions. Some responses to the things that really piqued your interest, whether it was a personal question, a theological question, or how you can integrate this material into your day to day. And you're going to notice in this conversation with Richard that something happened. And Mike, I'm going to throw to you to explain what we encountered.

Mike Petrow: Thanks, Paul. The first thing that I should mention is that in our episode with Carmen Acevedo Butcher, one of our favorite teachers and conversation partners, it was revealed that there was a collective love of ducks.

Paul Swanson: Lot of duck talk.

Mike Petrow: Lot of duck talk. A lot of ducks in the room for that conversation. Paul, you admitted that you're more of a sandhill crane man, but still have a little bit of love for the ducks.

Paul Swanson: A lot of love for ducks.

Mike Petrow: Ducks are pretty great. One of the things that listeners would not know is that in the last few weeks that we've been doing the podcast, a duck made a nest in the giant plant in front of Richard's house. We showed up one day and Richard's like, "There's a duck in there." And sure enough, there was a duck that had made a nest, and then that duck eventually laid eggs in the nest. Then much to our amazement and surprise as we were recording this very last segment of conversation with Richard in his house, where we're talking about the final chapter of Falling Upward and looking back at the entire season, you will hear the moment where for the very first time, the mother duck emerges from the nest with a troop of ducklings that had been born in the night and pandemonium ensues in the best way.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Mike Petrow: There's a lot of excitement. I literally broke a hole in the chain link fence so the ducks could get out. It's pretty wild. But what a beautiful moment. For me, it's the perfect way to land

this season in that we're having this wonderful conversation, we're kicking around these robust ideas and ideologies and models and that's all great. Then nature just breaks in and beauty just happens. Yeah, I don't know. I thought it was fantastic.

Paul Swanson: It was perfect. This might be pushing it too far, but the way that Richard has been a mother duck to so many folks.

Mike Petrow: He's guided there.

Paul Swanson: He's guided folks to the well multiple times.

Mike Petrow: He's the elder duck.

Paul Swanson: He's the elder duck. This is the in-breaking of nature into this conversation. And you can hear the moment this happens in the conversation, and then you can hear us trying to recover. And Richard is so thrilled about the ducks that we just have to land the conversation.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, it was great. What a great way. But what a beautiful moment to end our time with Richard for this season on. People who are longtime listeners of Richard's know that he loves nature documentaries. He loves animals, and to end on this joyous breakthrough of new life is pretty fantastic.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Couldn't have asked for a better ending. Enjoy this conversation over at Richard's hermitage. You'll hear Opie, you'll hear Mike, you'll hear myself and Corey as we talk about chapter 13 and get intruded by ducks on parade.

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

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Corey Wayne: And I'm Corey Wayne.

Mike Petrow: And this is Everything Belongs.

Richard Rohr: Okay, Lord, bless our recording and help me to say something decent. Thank you for these three brothers. Amen.

Paul Swanson: Amen. Richard, thanks again for having us over.

Richard Rohr: Glad to do it.

Paul Swanson: Whether we're invited or not, we'll just keep showing up. It's been such a joy to talk about Falling Upward with you.

Richard Rohr: Oh, I hope so.

Paul Swanson: It's fun to see how some of the teachings continue to expand for you, the ones that retain, and maybe even root a little bit deeper. As we talk about this last chapter, chapter 13, Falling Upward. That's the title of the chapter, you talk about mentors and elders as touchstones

of what is possible. When you reflect on your 81 years of life, what do you think about the significance of mentors and elders that showed you what the fullness of life could possibly look like? How significant was that for you to have elders and mentors pointing to a life well lived?

Richard Rohr: I think there were a number of good people both in my family, aunts and uncles and grandparents and in the Franciscans, old friars who were very inspiring people. But I never thought I'd be like that. When you're young... They're like a different species. I know they exercise their influence. You knew you didn't have to get old and bitter. You could be old and happy, but I still didn't think it was me who would be old. It just creeps up on you and suddenly it's there. You're an old person. But I was lucky enough to have enough good people, men and women, father figures and mother figures to know that it wasn't a long day's journey into night. That you could be old and sick and even happy. Yeah, I knew that.

Paul Swanson: What do you think it is that mentors are seen in a mentee to use those more official language roles. What did you feel like those mentors and elders were seeing in you? Or how were they showing up into relationship with you?

Richard Rohr: I know it was always flattering when they took interest. You didn't expect them. Why would they be interested in me? I had so many, 101, first cousins and in the Franciscans, in my time, the house was full. It was always very flattering that an older person would notice you or care about you. But that's all that comes back to me now. It was flattering, energizing, but I never expected it because I was only one of many. Yeah. I remember at New Jerusalem, my first community, talking to several people who were only children and they both encouraged me, "Advise couples when you marry them, never to have just one child." They said it's a terrible burden. I don't know everybody would agree with this. Every day no one else is paying attention to Mom and Dad except me. No one else is calling them mom and dad except me. And it's a burden. Makes sense?

Paul Swanson: And no one's complaining about Mom and Dad except for me.

Richard Rohr: Oh yeah. Very good. Yeah, that's true.

Paul Swanson: You mentioned the sense of being seen and being noticed and cared for. Does that seem to you the greatest gift of having someone mentor you is just being seen for who you are?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. They would bother with little all me when there were so many. When my grandparents would call me Dicky and give me a quarter, which was how it went on New Year's Day, a quarter. I'd have to say a few words in German, which I don't remember now. And they'd give me a quarter and they'd smile with delight that I had learned some German. Did I answer your question at all?

Paul Swanson: Well, I think you're circling around it about the being noticed, about the significance of that-

Richard Rohr: Yeah, being noticed.

Paul Swanson: ... to help you be seen for who you are. Now I'm putting words in your mouth, and to flourish and what's being discovered.

Mike Petrow: Well, I'm super curious, Richard. You're a world-renowned and deeply cherished teacher. When you were up and coming... The audience can't see, Richard just rolled eyes really hard of that. That's great. But even so, when you were up and coming as a teacher, when you were first getting going, were there any mentors or elders in your life that gave you guidance or encouragement or people that you really wanted to be like?

Richard Rohr: Yeah, at least one or two in every minor seminary in noviciate. You just have to have some people you admire. Father Warren, Father Benno, Father Flavian, Father Paul. Maybe especially Father Paul.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: He was wonderful. And who in the last years? I guess Father Larry.

Mike Petrow: What's great about Father Paul?

Richard Rohr: He taught phil psych. I always wonder if anybody has such a course, philosophical psychology. And we would sit in the classroom with him and he would take a concept like freedom or love or forgiveness, and he'd just sit there and unpackage it with us. He studied at Louvain. Thank God I told him before he died how much that course influenced. Really, much of my writing is phil psych, philosophical psychology or theological psychology.

Mike Petrow: Oh, that's interesting.

Richard Rohr: He taught me how to do that. There was no textbook, just his own mimeographed notes that he'd hand out. He was a very good-looking and intelligent man. We always wondered, "Why would he become a priest. Become like us?" At least I thought that.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Paul Swanson: It's a common trait amongst Paul's intelligence.

Richard Rohr: Yes. It goes with the name Paul.

Paul Swanson: It's the Cross we got there.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, Oh, that is interesting. I love how much of your teaching is philosophical psychology. That's really brilliant. What a huge [inaudible 00:13:10].

Richard Rohr: I don't know that I've ever said that before.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, that's amazing.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: Well, it's interesting. I came in as a Living School student and I got to see that there are so many of us who look to you now as a spiritual teacher, mentor and elder. Sounds like a Tolkien.... Richard, the elder. That is now your title. As an elder and in person, you have people that come to you for guidance. Show up here and, "Give me a word, Father." Then through your books and teachings, what's it been like to have a career where so many people look to you as a leader and an elder and a mentor? And have you managed to be on that pedestal without falling.

Richard Rohr: I still don't believe it.

Mike Petrow: Okay.

Richard Rohr: I'm a victim of the imposter syndrome. I'm sure I'm an imposter. And I just say all these wise things to impress people, because I don't know where they come from. Where did that come from? Where did that come from? I read a little bit of the new book, *The Tears of Things*, and several paragraphs were really good. And I said, "Where did that come from?" Really, I am a victim of the imposter syndrome. I'm convinced the whole thing is going to collapse.

Mike Petrow: Oh wow.

Richard Rohr: And you'll all see that I'm like everybody else, which I am. To accept having the gift that has nothing to do with achieving it, it's just there. Yeah.

Mike Petrow: Well, I bet there's a bunch of folks listening who unclenched a little bit when they heard you say that and also were surprised. But for folks who suffer with imposter syndrome or even just for folks who are curious, have you managed that over the years?

Richard Rohr: Well, I pray for my daily humiliation to keep me grounded so I don't fly like Icarus too close to the sun. I try not to let people... I don't think I've got a letter in three months that isn't filled with praise and thanks. They're all stacking up over different parts of the room here, and I open them and I say, "My God, this is beautiful." But I have to almost forget it that you've helped one person that much. I really don't spend a lot of time with it. My fan letters, my love letters, because some of them are. They amount to full-blown love letters, and pretty much equally from men and from women. Yeah.

Mike Petrow: Had you had your moment of humiliation yet today?

Richard Rohr: Today? Yes. When I saw Paul walking toward my door and I'm sitting here in my bathrobe, "Are those guys coming against...?" I forgot.

Mike Petrow: We've had our moment...].

Richard Rohr: I was about to take a nice nap in my chair here in my bathrobe and here you are, the three of you. It was humiliation. I forgot something again. Opie no, no. Opie. What's he barking...? The ducks coming out?

Mike Petrow: Oh my God. You should leave this one in since the last episode. The audience doesn't know that Richard has a mother duck that has.....

Richard Rohr: They're outside? Oh my God.

Mike Petrow: Richard has a duck that has built a nest in his front yard.

Paul Swanson: We've got to detach Richard quick. Richard, you're connecting to the opening...

Mike Petrow: Ducklings coming out for the first time.

Richard Rohr: Look at her.

Mike Petrow: This is way more important than the podcast.

Richard Rohr: Look at her.

Paul Swanson: This is the podcast.

Richard Rohr: He's guiding them out.

Mike Petrow: Oh my God, it's amazing. Look at those duck legs. They're so tiny.

Richard Rohr: Opie, be quiet.

Mike Petrow: I actually wish Carmen could see this.

Richard Rohr: You're not getting out for anything.

Mike Petrow: Richard, this is like one of those nature documentaries that you love.

Richard Rohr: And you are here.

Mike Petrow: Right in your yard.

Paul Swanson: Can you count how many there are?

Richard Rohr: I've seen three.

Mike Petrow: Oh my God.

Richard Rohr: Welcome little duck. We won't hurt you. She's wondering where to lead them, I think. She got them over that hump.

Mike Petrow: Where is the water? Back in the acequia.

Richard Rohr: Oh. They're following her. They're following her.

Mike Petrow: Is there a better moment in your life than Richard trumping around in his bathrobe, so concerned that the mother duck was not going to be able to get these ducklings back to the water. And for anyone listening, this duck made a nest in Richard's front yard, which is in close proximity to an acequia, which is a irrigation ditch, where there is deep water for the ducks to swim in. But mama duck flew there and didn't realize that there was no way around the fence. She was leading these six ducks back and forth along this fence, trying to find a

way through. And Richard was very, very concerned that they would be able to find their way to the water.

Corey Wayne: He called everybody in the parish to come home and open the gate.

Mike Petrow: That's right.

Corey Wayne: He had Paul and I doing his gardening to see if they could swim in a pool in his little...

Mike Petrow: Did he have you put water in a bucket in case they wanted to swim in the bucket?

Corey Wayne: Yeah, I said pool, but it was actually a little circular thing in his yard.

Paul Swanson: And you hear him charge for the door. I haven't seen an 81-year-old man run that fast to the door and with that much excitement. Yeah.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, knocked the microphone over and was... Yeah. It was pretty extraordinary.

Paul Swanson: While Cory and I are feeling these buckets of water, tell everyone what you were up to, Mike.

Mike Petrow: Well, I quickly discerned that there was a chain link fence that was impassable and the ducks were walking back and forth along it. I figured if I pried the chain links apart, I could create a hole in the fence. You guys were filling a bucket in case the ducks wanted to take a swim in a bucket and I was prying a hole in the fence behind Richard's backyard, which I successfully did.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Mike Petrow: Then herded the ducks towards the hole, which they went through to get towards the acequia and jump in the water.

Corey Wayne: Then you and Richard were at the acequia monitoring the ducks, making sure dogs in the neighborhood didn't get to them.

Mike Petrow: Yes, Richard was very concerned that a dog would eat one of the ducklings. I was concerned Opie was going to eat a duckling, but he did not.

Paul Swanson: We normally don't do ads on this podcast, but if you need some help with your ducks, Mike, Corey and I will be there.

Mike Petrow: We are ready to go. Well, so much so that when we got out there, because then we had to get the key to the gate to be able to access because we could not climb through the hole that I made in the fence. It was not person size, it was duckling size. Then the mom only had four of the six ducklings, so two were missing. In a panic, I try to jump into the acequia. Those are way deeper than you think they are, by the way. That was a bad choice on my part, and then found the other two upstream. But lo and behold, I didn't know, apparently there was a dad duck keeping an eye on the whole thing. The best moment for me was when the dad duck literally swept out of nowhere to collect the two missing ducklings and swim them back to their mom. It was very beautiful.

Paul Swanson: This took what? 40 minutes to an hour break in what you're about to hear next [inaudible 00:21:14].

Mike Petrow: If you think we've been talking about this for a long time. One, remember, we love ducks a lot. And two, it was just pandemonium in the best way.

Corey Wayne: Yeah. We saved you all 40 minutes. Here we go. Back into the episode.

Mike Petrow: Back to the ducks. All right, we were talking to Richard about being a mentor and an elder, at which point... Recently a duck has made an nest in the plant in your front yard and then laid eggs and then ducklings hatched this week and then while we were in the middle of our conversation-

Richard Rohr: Must have hatched during the night.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. The mama duck left with her ducklings for the first time, which we all rushed out to see.

Richard Rohr: Six cute little ducks. Wow.

Mike Petrow: We facilitated them getting up the hill into the water, which was amazing. Richard, watching all these ducklings follow the mama duck across the yard, I couldn't help think of Living School students lining up to ask you questions at symposium.

Richard Rohr: What is it that's so beautiful about a mother or a father protecting the little ones and those little ones just do whatever she says.

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh.

Richard Rohr: And follow her wherever she goes. It's so beautiful.

Mike Petrow: Just love ducks so much. There's an episode of this podcast, Richard, where Paul and I talked to Carmen Acevedo Butcher and we really got into our love of ducks. Although Paul's more of a sandhill crane man.

Richard Rohr: I told you-

Paul Swanson: I still love ducks, but yes.

Richard Rohr: ... that the Acoma Indians, when I was with them, said duck is God's favorite, because it's the only animal that can fly and walk and swim. You just saw God's favorite and six little favorites.

Mike Petrow: That's amazing, to leave their nest for the first time.

Richard Rohr: What I'm so afraid of is someone's going to come walk along that ditch with a dog. Lord, help me to stop worrying.

Mike Petrow: Well, hopefully they'll get in the water there. They should be safe.

Richard Rohr: If we can get that gate open.

Mike Petrow: I'm happy to go knock it apart with a hammer, a pair of wire cutters.

Richard Rohr: You did a good job with the wire.

Mike Petrow: Thank you. Yeah, we'll have to tell the groundskeeper not to rewire that fence. All that to say...

Richard Rohr: What?

Mike Petrow: Thinking of Living School students lining up to you like ducklings for mama duck. Yeah, we were saying how has it been to deal with imposter syndrome, to carry the idealizations and maybe even the demonizations that some people have put on you over the years?

Richard Rohr: Some, yeah.

Mike Petrow: What's it like to be that idealized figure for so many people?

Richard Rohr: It's not pleasant, even though it is pleasant. It's flattering, but it's not pleasant because of that terrible fear of being an imposter. You've just made people think you're wise or you're holy or you're scriptural or whatever I am. Yeah, it's a terrible fear of being a phony, because I know I'm not that good as those stacks of letters make me out to be. All I can do is thank God for letting me be that good for them. Okay, my supposed wisdom or goodness apparently did help them. I can't deny that, so hallelujah. I finally can end with some gratitude. Okay. I keep thinking of the ducks. I'm sorry.

Mike Petrow: I know, we can't stop..... What is the deep metaphorical meaning as we record the very last episode of the Falling Upward podcast of ducks hatching this morning and leaving the nest for the first time.

Richard Rohr: On the feast of the Visitation. There you go.

Mike Petrow: On the feast of the Visitation, tie it all together. What's the metaphorical meaning?

Richard Rohr: Mary visiting Elizabeth and we visited by ducks. Newly hatched ducks.

Mike Petrow: I can't-

Richard Rohr: It's all about meeting. Meeting beauty. Meeting newness. Watch you knocks on the first day of their life. "Who's there?" "Well, that's Patrick."

Oh listen. Ask him if he has the key to the gate? Corey's going for it.

Mike Petrow: Oh yeah, and tell him not to close the fence.

Paul Swanson: One second. Richard, Richard...

Corey Wayne: Can I ask you a question?

Richard Rohr: What?

Paul Swanson: You're connected to the computer. I don't want you to trip.

Mike Petrow: It's the best thing that's ever happened.

Richard Rohr: Do you have the key to the gate? This gate. We opened the fence, the mother duck and six ducklings is going south. You don't have a way for us to get on the other side.

Voicemail: I don't.

Richard Rohr: I called Beto. He'll be here soon.

Mike Petrow: Richard.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: Richard, who should we tell not to close that hole in the fence?

Richard Rohr: I guess, Beto.

Mike Petrow: Okay, great.

Richard Rohr: Six and one didn't hatch. They're beautiful.

Mike Petrow: Corey, do you want to take that one egg home?

Corey Wayne: Thank you, but no.

Mike Petrow: Hatch it. I'll look at you and think you're its mom. Life is beautiful. I just can't even... You're not miked anymore, so I'll stop talking.

Richard Rohr: I don't know. Should we sit back down again?

Mike Petrow: Yeah, let's try and get...

Corey Wayne: We're close.

Mike Petrow: Let's just see if we can get something before...

Corey Wayne: Should we end with the poem?

Paul Swanson: Yeah, we'll just end...

Mike Petrow: It's so beautiful thinking, one, how just beautiful that is and how life just breaks in and is amazing.

Richard Rohr: Despite Ukraine and Gaza and Trump. Six little ducks were born in my front yard in the last few hours, I guess.

Mike Petrow: And I wonder if there's something to...

Richard Rohr: And why she picked this spot right at the foot of my steps. How beautiful.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. Life just keeps happening. As much as Falling Upward is about getting older, right? How beautiful that there's just new life and new beauty and new generations to pass things on to.

Paul Swanson: Well, I think the mentorship piece too. These little ducklings stumbling and falling.

Richard Rohr: Remember they're imprinted now, that they will follow her the rest of their life, if they can.

Paul Swanson: Wow. It's a huge....

Richard Rohr: Thank God they didn't see Corey first.

Mike Petrow: [inaudible 00:28:35] Corey, there's one egg that didn't hatch. We can send it home to Corey. It's going to print on you and follow you. Oh no, wait, but you have a cat.

Richard Rohr: I bet she's been sitting there for a few hours waiting for that last one to hatch.

Corey Wayne: Wow.

Richard Rohr: Oh, Lord, don't let anybody come along with a dog. If I saw a dog attack those ducks...

Mike Petrow: No, I think they're going to be okay. They feel like specially anointed ducks.

Richard Rohr: Is there any way to look in a duck log to see what species that is? With a little blue feather on its....

Paul Swanson: I think, yeah. If we were to look up the photo. Do a little Google image search. We could figure that out pretty quick.

Mike Petrow: Oh yeah. Who's who got a good picture of the ducks?

Corey Wayne: I did.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, we're not getting this episode back. It's all about ducks.

Richard Rohr: Good. I'm so glad.

Mike Petrow: Now at the end, Falling Upward becomes the duck podcast we always wanted it to be.

Richard Rohr: That was just about as beautiful a scene as I've ever seen.

Mike Petrow: That's kind of magical.

Paul Swanson: Do you want to try to get this poem?

Corey Wayne: Just try to wind it down.

Paul Swanson: Okay. Richard, before we could talk more about ducks and do some more Google searches what kind of duck that mother is and it's ducklings, you end Falling Upwards so beautifully

with the coda, with this poem by Thomas Merton.

Richard Rohr: Oh, you going to read it?

Paul Swanson: How would you feel about reading it for us as we round out our time here?

Richard Rohr: Oh, okay.

Paul Swanson: And maybe if you can tee it up with any sort of... Why did you want-

Richard Rohr: Turn the light on please.

Paul Swanson: Yes. Why did you want to end Falling Upward with this poem by Thomas Merton?

Richard Rohr: Well, I remember... I think I discovered it when I was living in his hermitage in 1985. And even then it struck me as consummate Thomas Merton. Even the title, When in the Soul of the Serene Disciple, which is also the first line, "When in the soul of the serene disciple with no more fathers to imitate, poverty is now a success. It's a small thing to say the roof is gone. He has not even a house." So the loss of created identity. "Stars as well as friends, are angry with a noble ruin." They see through my posturing. "Saints are departing in all directions. Be still. There's no longer any need of comment. It was a lucky wind that blew away your halo with your cares. A lucky sea that drowned your reputation."

God just gives me such freedom. "Here you'll find neither a proverb nor a memorandum. There are no ways, no methods to admire. Poverty is no achievement. Here, god lives in his emptiness like an affliction." God like an affliction. "What choice remains? Well, to be ordinary is not a choice. It's the usual freedom of men without their visions." Oh, that is just filled with truth. And I don't think it would've struck me as truth. Now when I wrote this, what was I, 70? Probably.

Paul Swanson: Yep.

Richard Rohr: And the visions had already stopped then of grand scenarios for reforming the church or changing American politics. You don't want me to read the commentary, do you?

Paul Swanson: I think we can wrap it up there as a way to land. If you have any final parting thoughts on the poem that you-

Richard Rohr: Yeah, it's too long, the commentary. It's as good a description of the liberated soul as I can imagine. A final appeal or statement as to why I trust and love Thomas Merton. He always says it right, and in a way that you can't fake. He has become the serene disciple. I even reflected on that word, disciple, this week. I read, which I knew was true. The word priest was not applied to the ministers in the church till the early 4th century. They were disciples. We created this myth of priesthood, we Catholics and Orthodox. Thank God you didn't imitate us, you improved. Minister is much better, but disciple would've been even better. It sounds like Covenanter, huh?

Paul Swanson: Yeah, that was a strong word nurtured in my home tradition.

Richard Rohr: Yes, a disciple. Oh, I'm so happy.

Paul Swanson: Well, thank you, Richard, for the conversation and teachings throughout.

Richard Rohr: Albert, to go look at the duck.

Mike Petrow: Got to go take care of those ducks.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. We'll turn our attention to the ducks.

Mike Petrow: Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

Corey Wayne: Can you believe the amount of life that has unfolded since we started production on this season of... Goodness gracious. I think I am just more surprised in starting with Falling Upward. I am most surprised at how much it ties into the meta theme of Everything Belongs and grappling with this paradox of first and second half of life and learning from our setbacks.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, it's been a wild couple... For all of us, even personally, you think about everything that's transpired during the time that we've been working on this. I know you had a massive thing unfold in your life.

Corey Wayne: I went through a cancer scare. Thankfully, it was nothing. But that was at the time that we were actively producing the episodes with Kate and Paula and Mirabai and it's like...

Mike Petrow: Christian.

Corey Wayne: Christian.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Corey Wayne: It's pretty grueling to be in the mysteries of your own life trying to produce a show that's trying to work with these issues.

Mike Petrow: Well, I had another close friend get a really difficult diagnosis and then I had a friend of mine pass away. And in the midst of this, we're talking to, like you said, that crawl of Kate, Paula, Mirabai, Christian, all our wonderful guests, but the in-depth talk of grief and mourning and just dealing with the difficulties in our lives. It's been extraordinary.

Corey Wayne: Not to mention the collective stuff we're dealing with across the globe, like [inaudible 00:36:38].

Paul Swanson: Wars, hunger, poverty, climate crisis. To me, this is the heartbeat of the show is how practically integrated it is challenging some of the norms of societal success or cultural success, while also trying to live in the most holistic way with however one views the divine or God. It's incredible how much our lives I feel like are inter-stitched to these larger stories.

Mike Petrow: One, I think I turned 47 right before we started. And really it's been a gift to me to really ask these hard questions about the second half of life. This is why I love that we're ending the season with an episode where we just discuss questions, right?

Corey Wayne: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: Because Falling Upward, I don't think it's about getting answers. I think the whole experience and what Richard's talking about is about us living into better questions. The questions that drive the first half of life, they don't get answered. They get replaced by better questions.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, those answers are not static. They just morph into questions.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: To me, the best part about this shared life we all live together and the way of practice that connects us, the questions that connect us because I can see it in each of your lives, how you're embodying these questions. And God willing, you can see it in my own, that we have these things we can learn from one another. And that's not just from the downloads of the wisdom from our teachers, but also how do we chew on it, integrate it, and then live out in a different edge of reality.

Mike Petrow: Somewhere in Man's Search for Meaning. Viktor Frankl talks about moving beyond the questions we have for life to responding to what life is asking of us.

Paul Swanson: I love that. I love that. There's something riffing off of that. I know that at one point he talks about the Statue of Liberty and then he talks about how we should have a Statue of Responsibility. I feel like it's that. It's that expansion that liberty demands responsibility to life.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, it's true. And the responsibility to make a meaning. I think so many of us are sometimes trying to decide what the giant mystical script that God has written into our life journey. Frankl will really helped me go, "Maybe." Or maybe it's just I have an opportunity to make meaning with what's been given to me.

Corey Wayne: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. I'm excited to get into these questions.

Corey Wayne: Yeah, to that end we want to thank you all for listening to this season on Falling Upward. In this episode, we're joined by Cassidy Hall. She is an author of a new book called Queering Contemplation. She's also the award-winning filmmaker, podcaster, and leading voice in contemplative spirituality. She's the co-host of Encountering Silence and the creator of Contemplating Now and Queering Contemplation

Mike Petrow: And Cassidy is a precious friend. I'm so glad she can join us. And unlike our usual episode where we interview a guest, Cassidy has agreed to hang out with us and help us kick around your questions, which is going to be super great.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, there's nobody I can think of who'd be more fun and suited to dive into these questions with us. Everyone, welcome to this conversation today. We cannot be more thrilled than we actually are to have Cassidy Hall with us to be in conversation. Cassidy, welcome.

Cassidy Hall: Thank you so much. It's great to be with you all.

Paul Swanson: We are celebrating and enjoying your new book, *Queering Contemplation*. We wanted to kick off our conversation with you with a list of questions, but with a short conversation on your work that has meant so much to a lot of us here.

Mike Petrow: Cassidy, one of the great joys of my life is our friendship. First of all, thank you for being an amazing person. Thank you for being a human who literally embodies a lot of what we talk about on this podcast in the way that you move in the world. I am so thrilled that your book, *Queering Contemplation* is now out in the wild, doing good. And I have two questions for you, which is, one, how's it going? How's it feel to have this marvelous book out there? Then a follow-up question, which I'll ask again, which is how do you think that the beautiful journey that you take us on in *Queering Contemplation* is one way to think about our *Falling Upward* journey of the course correction of moving into our own depth as opposed to who the world told us we were supposed to be? First and foremost, how does it feel to have the book out in the wild.

Cassidy Hall: Yeah, first of all, thanks so much for having me. It's great to be with you all. Having the book out in the world feels a little bit like a relief. There's something about just letting go of it and putting it out there. There's also something of it that feels a little naked and feels a little humbling in that way. Just kind of an opening of, "Here it is. Here's some thoughts. Let's have the conversation." And trying to hold that curiously and trying to hold that really at a distance from myself because the conversation is for everyone. It's not just about me. It's not just for me. It's about all of us, right? And I think that goes along with your second question.

I think so many of us are given these normative scripts for our lives and without falling into the depth of who we are, we don't recognize the actual script that is a part of our true self or a part of our own ever-becoming, our own evolving, our own unfolding. Yeah, for those who maybe aren't aware of how I'm using the word queer in the book, I'd like to say that queer is the way I tilt my head to look at the world. There's two other definitions I like to go by in. One is from the Reverend Dr. Pamela Lightsey who says, "Queers not only my self-identity, it's my active engagement against heteronormativity."

This idea against pushing up against dominant scripts and forces of domination. The great bell hooks says that, "Where domination is, there can't be love." Love for ourselves, love for others. But I think the way that I'm using the word queer that resonates most deeply with me comes from a poet. The poet's name is Brandon Wint and he says, "Not queer like gay, queer like escaping definition. Queer like some sort of fluidity and limitlessness at once. Queer like a freedom too strange to be conquered. Queer like the fearlessness to imagine what love can look like and pursue it."

Mike Petrow: I love that. That's so beautiful, and I think it speaks to why when we came to the end of this season of exploring Richard's book, *Falling Upwards*, and we had listeners send us these beautiful questions for conversation. And we thought about who would be a great conversation partner to kick these questions around with us? We thought of you. It's so great to have you here. One of our mantras inside CAC and our of approach to education is that some of these things have to be approached with exploration, not explanation. And dialogue, not definition.

In everything I just heard you say, I love the idea of queerness being something that can move us beyond the binaries we sometimes talk about as dualistic thinking, but the hard and fast scripts that are given to us, including even the binary and the hard and the fast script of first half of life versus second half of life, which is something we really have unpacked a lot this season. I'm super stoked to get into these questions because I know we're not going to be finding answers, but we are going to be joining the conversation with our listeners and immersing ourselves in getting free of some of the hard and fast things that have hemmed us in, and the freedom that Falling Upward ushers us into. I don't know if that makes any sense at all, but it's my way of saying I'm super excited to be here with the both of you and with Corey having this conversation.

Paul Swanson: Here here, I think the power is in the response of living where this is going to be juicy in the way that we each bring our own lens to it, but also recognize there's a multitude of lens from everyone who's listening that the wisdom is not confined to one place or one conversation, but actually builds upon itself as you live this out and engage these questions with others as well.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Cassidy Hall: I love all these paradoxical things both of you're saying, because the spiritual life thrives in paradox and lives in paradox and grows and exists in paradox. I was just at the monastery, the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, for a quick day trip. I was on a hike and in my brain I was getting really angry with the concept of groundlessness from Buddhism. And the reason I was getting angry with it is because I've been moving through a lot of anxiety in my life lately, and I need ground. I need ground. And yet, on this hike I got to this place where I recognized, "Okay, but groundlessness is the ground." Then I got mad at that, of course, too because it's another paradox to hold.

Mike Petrow: I've spent a lot of the last year of my life helping rebuild the Living School here at CAC. One of the running gags is that what we try to do is give you a firm grounding and ambiguity. And yet here we are, right? This is the gift of ambiguity. I think the gift for me of looking at Falling Upward has been not learning how to transition from the first half of life into the second half of life, but to do first half of life in light of second half of life realities, live the second half of life responsible to the realities of the first half and going back and healing the wounds incurred. Then recognizing that we really don't have it figured out, right? That we're doing our best running in the dark with a candle.

Paul Swanson: I love that image. I love that. Should we dive into the questions?

Corey Wayne: Yeah, I think I want to make a producer call though and up the order a little bit.

Paul Swanson: Do it.

Corey Wayne: Start with a listener voicemail.

Cassidy Hall: Love it.

Corey Wayne: So to kick us off though, and Cassidy in line with your book and everything we've been talking about, I'm going to take us to a voicemail from Lori.

- Voicemail: Hi, my name is Lori and I'm calling from the Washington, D.C., area. I just wanted to say thank you for your most recent episode of Everything Belongs, where you suggest that loneliness is an unlearning of bad love. As someone who has modeled bad love in her childhood and has considered a lifetime of loneliness as her greatest teacher, hearing you suggest this really removes some of the suffering of loneliness. Instead of thinking of my loneliness as doing something wrong, it reminds me that so much is happening under the surface. And as Jim Finley often teaches, "These subtleties take our loneliness into solitude with the holy." Thanks again for all you do. Take care.
- Mike Petrow: What a great question. One of the themes that emerged through the whole season is this sense of loneliness and longing for home seems to live almost universally in the human heart. I'd love to start with that question with both of you to say... Loneliness I'm assuming is something very real that you experience in your life. I'd love to ask how that is for each of you and then from there maybe we can jump in.
- Cassidy Hall: Yeah. My mind immediately went to the whole separation of loneliness versus aloneness, and the aspect of solitude. Sometimes my solitude feels very full and very enlivening and enriching. And other times it feels very barren and very... It feels like a dull ache. I think one of the most helpful things for me in that concept of embracing my loneliness came from when I was traveling to monasteries and talking with monks and nuns about silence and solitude and contemplative life. I was talking with a nun in Massachusetts who talked with me about how much she missed her home country. She was from Australia actually. She talked about missing... She lived in a part that actually was a desert location. She said that at the monastery though she recognized when she felt that loneliness and she felt that dull ache, she was reminded from God that there's space there for the whole world. There's space there for the whole world. This idea of... Here's a question. Is loneliness a marker? Is aloneness and loneliness a marker of being a contemplative?
- Mike Petrow: That's a good question.
- Paul Swanson: Yeah, that's a great question. I think about loneliness, and the fact that I just celebrated 10 years of marriage, which is wonderful. I have two children. I'm surrounded by love and constant energy, and there still is a loneliness that I think is part of living in this unfolding way of movement towards wholeness. It is a gap that reminds me of my own humanity, and I share that loneliness, I think, with every person in the world. There's this sense of incompleteness that I am trying to learn to love and forgive for all the ways that I wish it wouldn't be there, but also as a catalyst for my seeking of the beloved in every aspect of my life. For me, I recognize how loneliness has a different gleam to it now than it did because I've befriended my loneliness in a way, where it no longer feels like it's this bigger thing that's looking down on me, but it's something that I need to be in relationship with because it's educating me on a lot of things that maybe I'm also trying to hide from. How about you, Mike?
- Mike Petrow: I feel like maybe loneliness is a universal human experience and contemplation is a very, very particular way of responding to it. And I think a very good one. Growing up as a human that I was, it's very normal for me to wander off. We'd have a big family gathering or party or something and I would always wander off and go and find a place to hide because I wanted to be alone. But also in the wanting to be alone, what I also really secretly wished for

was for someone to notice that I was missing and come and find me. And now at 47 years old, one of the things I'm unpacking is how much of a layer it is in my friendships, in my partnerships, in all the different types of relationships that I have that I still secretly want someone who goes and comes to find me and pulls me out of myself and reminds me to reconnect with the people around me.

So for me, loneliness has particularly manifested in two things. One is the rhythm of my interior life and my connection with the people around me. And I get lost in both, right? When I go too deep inside and I forget about the people around me, I get lost. And when I'm too extroverted and I'm surrounded by other people and I'm neglecting my inner life, I get lost. So loneliness is the back and forth on that. But the other thing is, and this is where I really think there's a genius to that notion, that loneliness is unlearning bad patterns of love. So much of my loneliness is interwoven with worthiness games that I've been taught to play from the time I was a tiny child. All the different ways that being with someone or being seen by someone makes me feel worthy of the overwhelming unconditional love that I know that I'm receiving in my truest moments of contemplation.

Cassidy Hall: I think another question is how do we not flail in the loneliness? How do we re-engage our contemplative lives amid that dull ache when it feels out of control, when it feels... When we catch ourselves becoming a child, going away. How do we re-center ourselves? How do we re-engage the contemplative loneliness, almost that healthy space of regaining traction?

Paul Swanson: The first word that came to me was just a sense of belonging. How do we have a circle of belonging where we can have an at-oneness, at-homeness that can be porous enough to also hold our loneliness and impact it in a way that acknowledge the beauty of solitude, and for some folks in that solitude silence as well, which I think sometimes gets so wrapped up in one another that it's hard to disentangle. The sense of isolation, I think, in cultural waters today and where does one actually belong? I think contemplative circles sometimes have made it such an individual practice, an individual process rather than having it be this wider circle of belonging. Now what does that look like in digital space, in physical space, in traditional institutions and emerging institutions? How do we find that sense of belonging that can honor the contemplative loneliness and longing that spurs it forward while recognizing the distinction between the loneliness of that isolation? I think sometimes they do get confused for one another.

Mike Petrow: I think that's well said. For me, it's two big things. I was going through a really, really intense season of just soul-shearing loss, and I was working really closely with a Zen teacher. It was just a bad time. My loneliness, my pain and my anxiety were through the roof. I remember she said to me... It was helping me lean into practice and she said, "Zen is just being there in the moment, fully present to reality, whatever it is. And it's just being there." That is what Zen is. But then she said, "Sometimes you lose that and you get spun out and you get lost. And when you lose it, you simply notice and return." And that is also Zen and that is what the practice is the noticing and the return. Then she said the highest level of the teaching and the awareness is when you realize that everything is Zen.

So the losing it is also Zen. It's also part of the practice. And I feel the same thing is true with me with love. This is the great lesson of the Song of Songs and this beautiful love poetry of love found and lost and found again, is that it's being fully present to reality and knowing

that I'm not alone, knowing that my mother and my brother and my ancestors and my teachers are there. Knowing that the trees and the mountains and the wind and the ducks are speaking to me and my cat and overwhelming love is ever present. Then losing that, when I lose it, notice it, honor the pain of longing and then come back into it. But also realizing that somehow the loss and the longing is a part of the love and loving the loneliness, right?

Paul Swanson: My favorite haiku of late is from Kobayashi Issa, where he wrote after his two-year-old daughter died. He wrote, "The world of dew is the world of dew. And yet, and yet." Just that everything is impermanent. It doesn't mean it doesn't hurt like hell. So how do you hold the beginning and end together and hold the love lost, the love grieved, the love returned? It's all present in one, but you got to experience it sometimes in different ways.

Mike Petrow: Well, one of the things I wonder about that I think manifest in this conversation, the holding it exactly the way we're doing it right now in the connection... All three of you are friends. I've turned to every single one of you in a difficult moment, and we've shared that experience. And the fact that we don't hold it alone. I think the greatest lie of suffering is that we are alone in it. And three things that have blown my mind, like Mirabai talking about her experience as a bereaved mother and then realizing that when she was grieving, she was grieving with every bereaved mother that has ever lost a child in the entire course of human history. Or [inaudible 00:58:48] saying something that has permanently shifted my thinking where she said, "The path of dissent is a crowded path."

And yet when we are walking through it, we think we're alone. And last but not least, how could I not say Jim Finley saying, "If we're absolutely grounded in the absolute love of God that protects us from nothing but sustains us in all things, then we can touch the hurting places in ourselves and others with love and allow others to reach us in those places." But that's the trick. Paradoxically, if loneliness is the most universal human experience, then we are least alone when we are lonely.

Cassidy Hall: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: What do you think?

Cassidy Hall: Yeah, I think I would just say the same thing in probably different words. The heliotrope flower returns to the sun. That reminder to just... There it is, go back to the sun. And I think another experience of mine in those moments of finding the ground, and Michael, when you were talking about Zen, returning to what is known is a practice for me that's really, really helpful to gather myself from the flailing. Even if the known is loneliness is universal... Someone was reading a poem to me the other day where they wrote that the known was the weather, looking at the weather. I realized at the monastery the other day, I loved the monastery because everything is certain and everything is known. I know exactly when the bells will ring. I know that I won't sleep well. I know what the trails look like there.

I know that no matter what happens in the world, they're going to keep praying. Whether I join them or not, and I don't join them most of the time, but they're going to keep doing that. And there's something so safe about returning to what is known, whatever those pieces are in our lives. I know Zen meditation happens at seven o'clock tonight, whether I choose to go or not. Ending on that note that you just mentioned, Michael, that loneliness

is universal and the paradox that we're not alone in it. It feels safe. That also feels mind-blowing and complicated.

Mike Petrow: To take it back to Lori's question. In this loneliness we are also doing the work of unlearning these bad patterns of love, and those rituals of stability give us a container that hold us to do the work and give us space to fall apart in the midst of it. Put ourselves back together, which seems to be the journey of Falling Upward.

Corey Wayne: That's what I say.

Cassidy Hall: Yeah.

Corey Wayne: I think it's fair to say that loneliness is a theme through all of these questions and paradox. This is going to be a journey that we're going to be taking throughout the rest of this episode, which is our next question. Rick, he's reconciling Brené Brown's reference of the dark night of the soul as a quick transition. He says, "I don't think this is how it works. My experience was that I had a 14 year and one month dark night of the soul transition between the first and second half of life. I do not believe one can simply jump back and forth between living in these two different realities. But I would welcome your sage words on this." Any thoughts from the group on dark night of the soul and how it relates to this journey?

Mike Petrow: I'll go first because I'll have the easiest thing to say. I think it's different for everyone. I remember reading one time, Gerald May said, "The dark night of the soul is absolutely unquantifiable. For some people it's weeks. For some people it's decades. You can't put a time limit on it." And then he goes, "Although in my experience, I've seen it tends to last about five years." Which I thought was hysterical. But yeah, what is it, Teresa of Calcutta? Talked about a dark night of the soul that lasted years and years and years and years and years. Then for some people it's brief.

I know for me, I've had two very intense ones that did last about five years each. I think just like the journey from first half of life to second half of life. Although honestly, I do think this podcast has convinced me that there's really three seasons that we're talking about. First half of life, midlife and then the third. But I think it's utterly and completely unique for everyone. Also, to our questioner, Godspeed solidarity and every blessing for journeying the walk through your 14-year dark night... How long Anthony was in the cave?

Paul Swanson: I think it was longer, isn't it?

Mike Petrow: Well, yeah. Look at Anthony of the desert. He locked himself in a cave for years and years and years. That was his dark night of the soul. You too, what do you think?

Cassidy Hall: I would just echo that and validate the listener that only we know what our dark night experience looks like and feels like. And while it's helpful to look to other written experiences or other experiences from friends, and I like, I think I would just want to validate that listener's experience that that is real. And yes, you experienced that.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I'll very briefly add, when I used to work with university students and they would read John of the Cross, they would immediately start to use language of the Dark Night of the Soul, and that's what they were experiencing. It came to me to realize I cannot say yes or no

to this. This is language that helps when you're in a phase of the journey that either... It puts language of something you've experienced, something that you can feel the edges or maybe you're in the midst of. I always felt like it was never my job to say yes or no, you're in the dark night of this soul, because I just don't know. But how can I be a supportive presence for whatever you're going through? Yeah, Godspeed to anyone who feels like that language is most representative of where they are right now, because those seasons are sometimes very rich, but you don't see it until later. The path can be so obscured.

Corey Wayne: That leads into our next question from Thelma. She's questioning the necessity of the order, disorder, reorder pattern. She writes, "I'm thinking of this in relation to Rohr's teaching on the first and second half of life and the pattern of order, disorder, reorder. When Richard speaks of the pattern, it sounds like it's a necessary pattern. But is it? Yes, I see that it is the way things are right now, but is it necessary? To me, it feels like order from the first half of life is what causes the amnesia. This is going back to chapter 8 or episode 8. Don't all the expectations to impress and not disappoint, which are put on us from that first order teach us a way to lean into what we already know in our hearts as children. And additionally, could a child be encouraged from a young age to listen to what their heart already knows so they don't get amnesia? Could they then go on and learn and experience things as they go through life in the security of knowing who they are, trusting the inner witness to guide them?"

Cassidy Hall: I think the only thing I would say to this, which you all will have probably much more wisdom on this, is that, in my experience, the necessity of the disorder related to potentially having learned or gained, if we want to call accurate or clear things in childhood? The necessity of the disorder is for me to know for myself. For me to receive for myself or understand for myself. While I might go back to the original. Does that make sense? The original order of my childhood or what I learned or what my childhood heart knows, I think the shakeup has to come in order for me to know for myself.

Paul Swanson: I can't help but think about my own children in this question as she brings up childhood as the mega metaphor for that. I think I can't help but try to give them order. The world is so big they cannot absorb so much of what's going on, so within our little family system and in our wider communities, my hope is to pass on the best things that I know how to pass on at this point. Some of those are rules. Some of those are practices. Some of those are about how we treat people. I'm giving them a certain type of order that they are going to find paltry and inefficient and not quite what they want as they get older. To me feels like the risk of parenthood. Like I'm doing the best I can to pass on the best parts of life as I see it, and I'm continuing to grow and I'm going to have to apologize and they're going to have to go through therapy to work through some of the disorder pieces.

But in my sense of how I've grown as a parent, I don't know how we can't but help give them some sort of order, even if it's not a religious dogmatic order. We're giving them an order that they're going to, hopefully, have a safe container for their own flourishing, to build a healthy ego. They're going to have to learn and drop through some disorder and reorder as they go on their own ways.

Corey Wayne: That leads into our next question from Brian. He writes, "My question is part question and part wish. Throughout the series you have had different speakers who have had occasionally

referenced their life experiences married. I would love a deep dive into how they or anyone who's at a spiritual journey, this work, when we are so intimately connected to other humans. I am married and have three kids. What does it mean to be on this intensely spiritual journey when you are committed to a partner that may not be on that same spiritual journey or at a different place in that spiritual journey? I think it is in the art of letting go that Richard talks about how someone who is more than two levels ahead, quote, unquote, "In their spiritual development." Will often be seen by others as crazy or even dangerous. What does it mean to walk the spiritual journey and have your partner or kids see you as crazy or dangerous? How do we balance these life commitments with our spiritual journey? Can they call us in seemingly opposite directions?"

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Corey Wayne: I feel like I see this a lot in listener feedback on all of the shows that we produce here and other areas of our content that we do.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, in Living School we get this question all the time as well. What do I do if my partner is not interested in the things that I'm interested in?

Cassidy Hall: That's a really big question, and I think we would all say probably very specific to every situation, every particular dynamic. The only thing that I would say is that I would imagine that's painful and difficult, and I think potentially one of the biggest mistakes... And I could be wrong in this. Potentially, one of the biggest mistakes we could make in that situation is assume someone is ahead or behind. I think that takes away the pace of someone else's journey or the rhythm of someone else's journey or our own. I think that's all I would say because I don't know. I don't have a lot to say to that. That's a really difficult, difficult situation.

Paul Swanson: Again, going back to my own home life as the canvas for my response. I own that. This has come from my own experience. My beloved would not call herself contemplative. She's supportive. She has her own spiritual lineage that she's a part of and that animates her, but it's very different than a lot of the things that I am a part of. Whether it's working at the CAC or being a part of a new monastic community, or just the books that I read and the conversations that light me up. But I imagine we're these two circles, then we have a lot of overlap. We both love to hike. We both love to be enriched by community. We both love to serve and love our neighbors. I learned so much from her spirituality and how she exercises it in the world in such a grounded, generous, beautiful way. To your point, Cassidy, mine's not better than hers. It's just different. And I think some of the ways that contemplative can get separated from other types of spirituality... It can create a hierarchy that is not there.

Cassidy Hall: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And I want to celebrate her in the fullness of her life. I love the way that she does that for me. A big piece of our own discernment towards marriage was... I know for me all the things that were holding me back was when she said, "I never want to get in the way of your transformation." I was like, "Wow, we are in this together." We want to be that mutually supportive even as it looks different. 10 years in, we're still celebrating that. And that has been a gift that I cannot take for granted. Also, the work of honoring and respecting one

another's paths and what calls to us, I think, is so hard. Because I always thought like, "I'm going to end up with somebody who just loves Thomas Merton." Who loves these four things and these mystics were their mystics. That would not have lasted.

Mike Petrow: My experience has been the opposite where I was in a multi-year relationship with someone who was also a contemplative and with whom I was very spiritually compatible. This person introduced me to Richard. In a way that relationship might be the reason that we're having this conversation right now. That relationship ended. It ended well. It ended respectfully, and we're still cheering each other on in the world in the great things that we're doing, but it ended because we were incompatible in a bunch of other real world areas like things that matter. When you share a budget, a bedroom and a bathroom, there's a lot more going on than the books on the end table, right?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: That's the paradox, is on the flip side spiritual compatibility alone does not a successful relationship make. I think I would want to go out on pointing out two things in this, which is one, I'd like to take this question back to our first question, which is question of loneliness. I want to honor that when there is a part of you that your partner or your kids cannot relate to or don't want to relate to, and that part of you is so precious, that is a deep loneliness. And there is nothing more lonely than being lonely inside a relationship. And yet none of us can 100% or should 100% mold and meld with another person.

There always needs to be parts and pieces of us that are mysterious and separate and different. That's why this Song of Songs rhythm of losing each other and finding each other again is so important. It's the reason Paul said to some of his readers... This is old language. "Don't just get rid of your spouses and partners who aren't believers because there's a sanctification that takes place between the two of you in the relationship." Jim would always say to Living School students, they'd go through this beautiful experience and be like, "I can't share this with my partner and I want a partner who is like the people I'm meeting in my circle group."

And Jim would always say, "Please wait a year to integrate this before you make a major decision about your relationship." I want to honor that sometimes that's part of the journey of our spiritual quest and our unlearning bad patterns of love and our owning our loneliness is those disconnects from our partners. And yet, I also want to very gently point out that this questioner says, "What happens when someone sees you as crazy or dangerous?" And that is very intense language.

Paul Swanson: Fair point.

Cassidy Hall: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And someone seeing you as crazy or dangerous may actually be something that is prohibitive to a relationship continuing or does require very extreme boundaries to protect the sanctity of who you are and protect others from doing the damage of categorizing another person in that way.

Cassidy Hall: That's a great point. And/or therapeutic intervention. I want to mention one thing to what you were saying, Michael, and then also what you were saying, Paul, that I heard Jim Finley say the other day. I hope this is okay to share, but he talked about two people deeply in love and moments of loving oneness with each other, say in that moment we are one. But in realizing that they are one, they don't cease to be two. Because if they cease to be two, they can't realize they're one.

Mike Petrow: Brilliant.

Paul Swanson: Jim lands it. I love-

Cassidy Hall: I'm just letting him do the mic drop there.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, it's brilliant.

Corey Wayne: Our next question builds on this sense of loneliness, but turns it inward. It comes from Darlene and she writes, "Richard, Mike, Paul and Corey and Cassidy. I just love hearing Richard talk. Falling Upward was the first book I've ever read by Richard. I feel like I overshot the second half of life. I don't believe in anything with any certainty and I cannot authentically be a Christian. However, I love the idea of a universal Christ, but I am more comfortable with divine mystery. I feel alone out here. I feel like I'm living on the edge of everything. Are there others like me? Any support or direction would be appreciated."

Cassidy Hall: Everyone in this conversation is like you are. You are so not alone. That is such a feeling I know that resonates with probably every person in this conversation and it's hard to find those connecting points and those people that help us to feel less alone in that spiritual journey. And it's incredibly normal to have your faith of origin or faith you come from not fully resonate with you, and to navigate that in your own experiences and expressions and evolution.

Mike Petrow: The first cheeky answer that comes to mind is remembering that Jesus was not a Christian, which gets thrown around a lot, but there's a real depth to that. I often joke that I feel like a lot of our listeners and ourselves are just all a part of the tribe of wandering exiles, right? We are folks with whom our shared collective home is not having a home, and it's the journey and the search. And yet I relate to everything you say here. It reminds me of Richard talking about living on the edge of the inside. Richard says in... Is it in this book or in Universal Christ, where he talks about being a man without a country?

I think one of the things that I'm thinking about for the very first time in my entire life is what it looks like for me to develop a practice based around realizing that I'm never less alone than when I feel lonely. Because when I feel lonely, I am sharing an experience that almost every person who's ever lived has shared. How can I develop a practice that in my loneliness, I choose to step back and acknowledge that I am sitting with millions of people who have had this. So to this listener, I would say, yeah, you're not alone. We're with you and please continue to listen and hang out with what we offer and what spiritual organizations offer to those of us who are literally right now all around the world taking this journey together.

Cassidy Hall: I just want to say that that reminds me of... That whole idea that anytime we pray, however we pray, we're jumping in a river of prayer that is already moving. There's someone somewhere else already praying. And I used to think of this in the monastic context, that there's a monastery somewhere already praying somewhere in the world anytime of the day. But I love the idea of thinking of that river of loneliness, that when we engage that, whatever the practice might be that we're getting in this river of loneliness with others who are experiencing that at the very same time. So our practice is never alone. Whatever that practice might be, even amid the loneliness.

Paul Swanson: That image of the river is so helpful, Cassidy. Something that I'm thinking of as I think about this question is I'm too Christian for some people and I'm not Christian enough for others.

Mike Petrow: Preach.

Paul Swanson: We're all here with you in that and in the nomenclature about divine mystery, universal Christ, God. I think, for me, finding language that's intimate enough, that lights me up. I have gone through different phases where different words for the divine make more sense. I don't know about you all, but the playfulness in that is actually really helpful for me to find the right language to exemplify how I'm feeling and how I'm pissed off at God or I'm enamored by the beloved. And for me, the Beguines, this radical amazing group of women, mystical poets and writers and community members, their language is so ripe that it helps me expand how am I relating to God in ways that are more natural for me and also expansive, so I don't get stuck in this old language which often will keep my own image of God too small and how we relate to others too small.

I love the spirit of experimentation that I feel like resides underneath this question of reaching barriers and how can you go beyond some of the confines that you're finding? I'll also say Cassidy's book, *Queering Contemplation*, was another piece of that for me. Just the expansiveness of living into a more generous tradition than I think I have previously allowed for myself.

Cassidy Hall: Thank you for that.

Corey Wayne: Our next question comes from Mark. He asks, "How do you transform the more first half of life containers, work, friends, community? As you enter into a second half of life, I have felt a sizable shift with my relationship to many things in life over these past few years with everything that has occurred. And at times feel a step out of place and almost out of touch with the atmosphere of stress, busyness of many of these places in life now. Thanks for all you do. Look forward to this episode."

Paul Swanson: Mark, I want to hang out with you. I would love to be out of some of the stress, busyness that I feel like I'm in my current season. That's really, really fantastic. I think tipping friendships over into new spaces takes a lot of risk and it takes some courage to be the one to go first and to question norms of a sick society. It is terrifying for some to step outside of that, and I think the fact that you have done so is incredibly brave and beautiful. I want to honor that. And then risking vulnerability to invite others into different spaces of relating, conversation, spirituality, and practice. There's a boldness that I honor and encourage

whenever I see or hear about that.

Mike Petrow: I think the paradox and the tension that Mark is inviting us to hold is that sometimes the greatest mark of sanity is when we realize that we're participating in an insane system. And to feel out of step with the pressure and the pace of the culture that we live in, as painful as that is, and as hard as it is to navigate, like, "Thank God." Right? Thank God. I so appreciate that and the invitations it brings all of us into work Sabbath and rest and reintegration into the insanity of doing things in the world.

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

Mike Petrow: Mike Petro.

Paul Swanson: Paul Swanson.

Jenna Keiper: Jenna Kuyper.

Izzy Spitz: Izzy Spitz.

Megan Hare: Megan Hare.

Sarah Palmer: Sarah Palmer.

Barb Lopez: Barb Lopez.

Brandon Strange: Brandon Strange.

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