

A minimalist line drawing of a landscape. The background is filled with various wavy, organic shapes representing hills or clouds. In the lower right, there is a simple line drawing of a bench with three vertical slats on its backrest. The overall style is clean and modern, using only black outlines on a white background.

# **EVERYTHING BELONGS**

**Falling Upward**  
with Cassidy Hall  
(Listener Questions: Part 2)

Corey Wayne: Hey everyone, my name is Corey and I'm part of the team that produces Everything Belongs. We wanted to let you know that this is part two of a three-part series in responding to the listener questions of season one. Thanks for listening.

Michael Petrow: One of the things that you might notice is that all of us having this conversation are, what are we, all about thirties and forties? I think I'm the old man in the room. And we thought it'd be fun to bring in some different perspectives from outside of the room, maybe a little bit of elder wisdom, and also tap into some of our favorite guests, which is not to say that anyone that you don't hear is not one of our favorite guests, but we have phoned a few friends for a few of your questions and so you'll hear some outside voices throughout this episode and we're so excited about their contribution.

Corey Wayne: All right, so our next question is coming from Pete. He writes, "Hi. Thanks so much for the podcast. I've just listened to the latest episode from Dr. B. and Brian and found it rich and stimulating. I was surprisingly diagnosed with an incurable cancer at age 48 last year. 12 months on, I'm responding well to chemotherapy, but I know I only have a few years to live, maybe less. Before my diagnosis, I had noticed myself begin the second half of life's journey in recent years having four adult kids who still lived with my wife and I, and a job where I was increasingly holding a third wave space to bring disparate voices together.

"I was looking forward to a lengthy second half of life to continue to grow and learn, but this has now been cut short. I'm learning to enter the grief of this whole heartily, as was mentioned at the end of the latest podcast, and have also found a new depth to life despite the disorder and sadness, which is also unnecessarily and fruitfully repositioning my life with God, often through deep pain and a sense of future loss for myself and my family.

"My question is, what advice can you offer for those who like me, who suddenly see their second half of life seemingly disappear in front of them? Thanks so much, Pete."

Mirabai Starr: Hi Pete, Mirabai here. I'm just sending you love and blessings from Taos, New Mexico as you take this journey that you're on. And I've been reflecting on your question about second half of life and how you were looking forward to it and how you see it disappearing on the horizon. And I'm thinking about our spiritual aspirations and how we have this conditioned idea that somehow eventually we're going to get it right. We're going to wake up, we're going to become liberated, enlightened, saved, whatever our models might be. And the thing about what you're going through, Pete, is that it is a crash course in being present with things exactly as they are and with yourself, your beautiful, dear, suffering, exalted self exactly as you are. There's no time for you to try to be pure and perfect. There is only the living fire of the invitation to enter in to the heart of love itself and let that be the truest thing. No goal, Pete, only exactly what is. So deep bow to you from me and much love.

Michael Petrow: I'm content to leave this to Mirabai. I think it's above our pay grade. I will only say yeah, this was the experience of my mom, who got diagnosed with terminal cancer very unexpectedly, not much older than myself or our listener. And I watched her in the very end of her life, I think do all the work of a second half of life in a very, very short amount of time and it was one of the most courageous and beautiful things I've ever seen.

Cassidy Hall: Thanks for sharing that, Michael.

Paul Swanson: I might just add something just to say to Pete that our silence is not lack of care, it's pregnant with prayer for you and feeling so many things that are inarticulate, but they come out as groans of prayer, I think.

Cassidy Hall: Yeah, I echo that.

Corey Wayne: Our next question comes from Simon and he's trying to figure out how to deal with the feeling of not succeeding in the first half of life by cultural standards. He writes, "My question is how to deal with the knowledge that you didn't do the first half of life well according to the culture. As a nine on the Enneagram, the second half of life makes sense and is welcomed as a relief from the competition and jostling for position in the first half. So success, security, containment and looking good, as Richard puts, it was not a game I played very well. Having said that, there remain voices, some internal and some spoken by others including the church, that say you should have been more successful and secure through finances and career and so on. Life would've been easier. Now it creates tension and even kind of grieving, unnecessary grieving, over the pain of the younger self, but perhaps also for so much of the world that frames reality and the language of the first half of life. Any thoughts?"

Michael Petrow: Paul, as our resident Enneagram nine, do you want to tackle this one first?

Paul Swanson: I just relate, Simon, and can feel and know that angst of, I'm trying to find it here, just the success, security containment and looking good where these are games that we know are happening, but we suck at them, and aren't even that interested in them and at times have to put on the costume of doing them because it's what helps us in the first half of life. So I can feel the pain of you saying that you didn't feel like you did that well. And I think going through that grieving process is a natural re-going through that part of the first half of life of recognizing the gifts within that, the limitations within that and just within the culture that you live in, if that is the dominant story.

You are also exercising a prophetic witness to say these things don't matter, even as you grieve the loss of not participating in them. I think for me that's also been part of my own midlife journey is grieving all the roads I did not go down. And I think as, to use the Enneagram language with the nine of just life constantly overwhelming us and not being able to process it fast enough, I think the first half of life has particular challenges around trying to succeed in that way, but I also trust that there's been some gifts in that process that maybe aren't recognizable at first.

That's my nine hot take. Dig it.

Cassidy Hall: I think I would just say that one thing I noticed in that question was where they wrote according to the culture, recognizing non-success according to the culture. And I think that stuck out to me because of the wisdom in that. And yeah, I just want to acknowledge I think that the wisdom in that is there. And I think that I echo, Paul, what you were saying just about recognizing that there's a lot of wisdom and not being attached to those things, not being attached to those versions of success, but that doesn't minimize the grief, that doesn't minimize or take away the pain of needing to grieve those things.

Michael Petrow: Yeah, I think one of the hardest things to navigate in our life journey is the voice

of the internal archetypal accuser, right? In the Christian system we have this idea of Satan. Satan means the accuser. There is a voice that we internalize, the voice of the culture, the voice of teachers, parents. But it's that voice that tells you that you're never doing enough and you're never measuring up and that voice drives you and it torments you. It's been given a lot of different names, superego, over time, but it's the voice that again, tricks us into playing worthiness games that asks us to prove that worthy of the unconditional love that the Divine lavishes upon us.

And I think the great task of life is befriending the accuser and getting to the point that the voice that initially told us that we weren't good enough becomes an ally and turns around and instead questions the scripts that told us we weren't good enough. Says, "well, who gets to say what it means to succeed in the first half of life? Who says that I'm falling short? And why am I living for that?" And I think that's the gift of what we talk about as disorder is when that internal accuser becomes an advocate and instead we start to hear the voices of parents and teachers and culture and say, "Well, who says I have to live life by that rubric?"

Corey Wayne: All right, our next question comes from Greg. He writes, "My family has been through a lot, my wife's postpartum depression, my son's stroke, and now his mental health struggles. It's been a tough journey, but Father Richard Rohr's teaching on non-duality and the bright sadness of life have helped me find some peace. I've been listening to your podcast and it feels like I'm not alone in this struggle. Now I'm trying to figure out how to share this understanding with my family, especially my wife who is hurting and my kids who are at different stages of life. The traditional Catholic approach doesn't quite resonate with my experience and I'm looking for more meaningful ways to connect with my faith with the realities of our lives. I'm writing to you hoping for some guidance on how to navigate this complex terrain of faith, suffering and family."

Michael Petrow: I think what's been beautiful for me that Richard has taught me is a different way of understanding the cross. I grew up in a theological system that taught me that Jesus suffered for me so I didn't have to and Jesus died for me so I could live forever. And the great gift of Richard's teaching and a lot of the mystics in the contemplative has been shifting away from that substitutionary thinking to one of total solidarity and realizing it's not that Jesus suffered for me, it's that Jesus suffers with me or that the Divine suffers with me. It's not that Jesus died for me, it's that Jesus or the Divine dies with me. No one suffers alone. No one dies alone. We are not alone. And in the invitation to imitate Christ, we are called to be there with each other in our loneliness and in our suffering. And this is the great work of love and community, which is how to meet in sorrow, sadness, and celebration. So what I hear in this question is the great work of love and the divine life and humanity.

And we are so excited to invite our friend Erin Sanzero, who's had quite a journey with family and relationships and loved ones in carrying the highs and the lows of living and loving. I'm really excited to hear what she has to offer.

Erin Sanzero: Thanks so much for these three questions, Greg. While I hesitate to tell you what to do, I think the answer is wholly listening. I think so often when we think about

stepping into action, we get ourselves wrapped around the axle or tongue-tied, trying to think of the right thing to do or the perfect thing to say and how to solve the problem and achieve the goal. And I think we miss often the thing that's right there in front of us plain as day, presence, and really the work of cultivating a practice of presence that's really grounded in humility and love and wholly listening, not answers.

I think when we focus on the power of our presence and we give that gift of our undivided attention, we can really create that safe, sacred space where we can open up to each other and we can share. And what a tremendous gift to start by seeking to understand with your loved ones instead of seeking to be understood, whether it's your wife, your older son, your child, being present to where they're at, holding their grief and hope together as you listen compassionately and non-judgmentally. I think that's a really beautiful way for you all to break down some of these relationship walls and open that space between your hearts. So my hope for you is that as you practice presence and wholly listening that you can trust that God will dwell in that space.

Michael Petrow:       Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

Corey Wayne: This is coming from Kentaro. I hope I'm saying the name right. He writes, "Hello, thank you for the Everything Belongs podcast where you ask for questions. I believe I heard someone mention a third half of life in one of the episodes, and I love any reflections or musings on that. A note of gratitude as well. I'm a 51-year-old man and about 10 years ago I had a life-changing heart attack in the part of the heart where they call the widowmaker. And the following year I went to the Illumin conference with a couple of friends in Albuquerque where Richard Rohr spoke on the theme of drawing from a deep well. At that conference, he invited the "young men" under 45 years old, which was quite humorous to me because no one I knew considered me a young man in my forties, to sit with him for lunch at a large round table.

Two years later, my family and I moved to San Francisco where we sold our house and left all we knew, including good jobs and strong community for me to enter what I call my midlife crisis doctoral program in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which was life-changing.

I listened to Richard Rohr and other CAC staff's books and podcasts multiple times over these past number of years. I'm certain that I've listened to well over a thousand hours of CAC books and podcasts because they're almost always on repeat. I quote Richard Rohr to the point that my family and friends make fun of me, but honestly, he and others at CAC have changed my life. Hopefully I'm living in a way that can provide others with hope in a similar way that I feel like the CAC has given me hope. Thank you. Kentaro."

Cassidy Hall: Before we dive into the conversation, could someone unpack this third half of life concept?

Michael Petrow:       Yeah. One of the things that's interesting, I'm really glad you asked Cassidy, is this came of really fun playful conversations that Jim Finley and Richard have been having as they're both 81 years old and both embracing their mortality and being

very happy and also saying things like, “Oh, if it’s our time, we’re ready to go.” And they’re jokingly saying they’re in the third half of life. That is a completely different season than what Richard talks about, the first and the second half of life.

Another thing that I think is relevant to this that emerged in the podcast, I think for me it started with a great episode we had with Erin who had written an article about midlife as a part of the journey, and really recognizing that there is the first half of life and there’s the second half of life, but there’s this huge middle act of midlife where we’re balancing both. And last but not least, from staff and listener feedback, one of the things that really has become apparent that we’ve learned a lot in the last year is that when you read *Falling Upwards*, you end up trying to live in both halves of life at the same time in the liminal space of holding both realities. Does that make sense? And does that reflect your life experience in any way?

Cassidy Hall: Yeah. Well, I mean it definitely makes sense. I can’t speak to the idea of third half of life because I’m 40, but conceptually I love it and I love the liminality of it all. I also love just the paradoxical language of it because I’m an Enneagram five of third half. The incongruence of that is really beautiful actually.

Michael Petrow: Yeah, it is a really fun... and it works. Exactly. Thanks for pointing that out because the clunkiness of it is what makes it genius, the third half of life.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, I’m clearly not in my third half of life either, unless we redefine it in a way of the midlife, which I think is a fun push and pull to see the multiple potential halves. One of things I’ve appreciated about this conversation throughout the season, particularly today, is even though we tend to worship the written word, I think in our culture, if it’s printed, then it’s like, well, it’s right here. We can reference it. But that’s the starting point for the conversation. Even Richard who wrote a book on the two halves of life is like, “Well, there’s a third half of life.” And in our conversations here, well there’s potentially a third half in the mid half. And how we’re just allowing the dexterity of it to expand and contract.

And I’ve so enjoyed hearing Jim and Richard talk about this because part of what I feel like they’re pointing to is the journey continues. There is no period. It’s another comma of mystery that is meeting us and residing within us as whatever age we’re at, if we feel like the sunset’s about to come, or if hypothetically we think it’s a ways away yet, I appreciate that sense of unknowing awe that I can hear both Richard and Jim and the twinkle in their eye as they joke about the third half of life.

Michael Petrow: It’s been a gift to recognize the liberation and the freedom, and again, the twinkle in both of their eyes right now where they literally are like, “Ah, tomorrow’s not promised to either one of us.” And they’re so at peace with it and also so playfully present to what life has to offer. And also not ignorant of the fact that we’re living in dire times and yet there’s a grace with which they hold that, which I find so inspiring and it’s such a privilege to get to witness it.

I also want to point out that as a practical manual, one of the guests we interviewed this season was Connie Zweig. Connie talked to us about doing shadow work, but Connie has also written an award-winning book called *The Inner Work of Aging: Moving from Role*

to Soul, and she really unpacks the second half of the second half of life. And I think that book could almost be read as a sequel to Falling Upward. And she looks at the initiations of retirement, illness and death as three things that really, really bring folks into a greater place of depth in that season of life. And for some of our listeners, that book is 100% worth picking up.

Paul Swanson: That's a great resource. I love that. I also think what it reminds me of too is who in our lives do we see either entering the third half of life? And who's doing that well? I think about, I feel like my parents are doing some of these things really well, and from a very practical point. They don't have to be a spiritual master to the world. They can also be folks in your community. And where are those models? And I think having a book like that helps you recognize the models that might be around you already.

Michael Petrow: It is interesting for the four of us around our late thirties and forties, me late forties, recognizing the folks who have really done this work of transitioning from role to soul, we get to recognize, we get to experience the gift of having true elders in our lives.

And as my second to last thing to ask the two of you as we land it, who's an elder who's inspired you, especially as we've talked about Falling Upwards and Looking Back, where do you experience someone in your life who's really done the work? You just talked about your folks. And what do they teach you about what it means to be, and also to have a good guide? We've clearly identified Richard and Jim Finley. I would throw Dr. Barbara Holmes in there as well.

Paul Swanson: I was going to say all of our core faculty could be on there. Maybe we'll just not go there as a way because we've already celebrated how much impact their work has had on so many.

Cassidy Hall: Yeah, I would say I'm really inspired by those who continue to engage a rhythm in their lives, whatever that might be, their routine, their contemplative practice, but also still remain open to wonder. Because the older we get, I find the older I get, the more I become less immune to new things or discomfort or difficulty or challenges or things that take me out of my expectations are rhythms. And so I think seeing people in my life that remain open to wonder amid that rhythm just really, really inspires me. And I see that in my parents. I see that in the person who leads the Indies and center practice here, and it's a really, really remarkable thing.

Michael Petrow: I love that.

Cassidy Hall: I think I would also say to the listener, what I've loved about this conversation is how we're reaching for language and words to make sense of what's happening in our lives. And I'm thinking about the question earlier about pruning, and then also thinking about the language of the dark night of the soul. And then I'm thinking about this language of third half and it's like, well, what language is working for you right now in your life and embracing that so that we can be in that liminality or be in that space or be in that unknown. And I think there's something so refreshing about, okay, accepting I'm in my midlife and navigating what that is after naming it.

Michael Petrow: Cassidy, you think about your work on querying contemplation, and I appreciate everything you just said about recognizing the language that works, and then also sometimes

recognizing things that are not working. Is there a way that you would connect... This is a silly question, but I think it's also a poignant one. Is there a way to queer how we think about these things, dark night of the soul pruning course, but first half of life and second half of life?

Cassidy Hall: Oh, I love that question. I think anytime we look at something through a new angle or a new lens, we give ourselves permission to see it differently, but not just to see it differently, also to see beyond what is for what could be. And all of this is stepping back into the unknown and stepping back into releasing our clenched fists in order to hold what's happening, but also with this ability to be free to see possibility. Yeah. Queering, looking at this is a really interesting thought because I think, much like anything, it would look different for everyone. And that's what's so beautiful about it. Either of you describing midlife is different from the way I will describe it, and that's a really beautiful thing.

Michael Petrow: Amazing. As we bring this whole season to a close, I love this invitation for all of us to be in the liminal space where we are living the first half of life in light of the second, the second half of life in light of the first, all of it in light of the third, any closing comments on how we stand in that liminal space and embody this beautiful teaching going forward?

Paul Swanson: Thanks, Mike. I have found the conversations this season and then landed here with this conversation with you, Cassidy and all the listener questions. I just feel like I'm in a state of gratitude and humility of the depth of my unknowing continues to surprise me about just the different textures of our lives and how the questions arise and are heartfelt. And we're all pining from this sense of, I want to call it divine loneliness for connection with one another and for the Beloved. And I'm in all of that, and it humbles me to stay the course and keep doing the work that I need to do so I can be a person of deeper humility and vulnerability and desire towards the good, the true and the beautiful. So I have nothing but gratitude.

Cassidy Hall: Divine loneliness, I love that. I love that, and I love that as a commonality. And I think part of that is the liminal space for the contemplative life that divine loneliness is a part of the liminal space. So yeah, I think in conclusion I would just say that, and I say this to myself also, that we're not alone in that. That we're not alone in that divine loneliness.

Michael Petrow: I love the liminality of that. In a lot of spiritual direction conversations, I love when someone says, "I don't know where to start the story." And you can say start in the middle, because we are always in the middle. And yeah, here we are, never less alone than when we feel alone meeting each other in the middle of the mess. What a gift. Cassidy, thank you so much for joining us.

Cassidy Hall: Yeah, great to be here. Yeah, loved chatting.

Michael Petrow: Such a gift to have you here.

Paul Swanson: So fun.

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Megan Hare: Megan Hare.

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Barb Lopez: Barb Lopez,

Brandon Strange: Brandon Strange,

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