



# **EVERYTHING BELONGS**

**A Happy Run Downward**  
with James Finley

Paul Swanson: Hey everyone. Welcome back to Everything Belongs. This is episode two and I am thrilled beyond belief to introduce you to one of our new co-hosts who'll be joining us for the Everything Belongs podcast. And that is my colleague and friend Drew Jackson whose role at the CAC is the Director of Mission Integration, and he's also a poet extraordinaire. But Drew, welcome and let's begin first by what is a Director of Mission Integration?

Drew Jackson: Well, thanks for having me, Paul, so good to be here. Director of Mission Integration just means that part of the responsibility that I hold within the organization is to help us oversee our internal organizational culture. And really that's just a way of helping us think through how our interior life as an organization is congruent with who we say we are externally. And so it's all the little things that go into the interior culture life of the organization.

Paul Swanson: Well said. And you do it so well with your years of experience as a pastor, but you also bring this beautiful creative element not only to your work, but to your life as a poet extraordinaire, as I said, you've written a few collections of poetry. Can you share a bit about the significance of being a poet and what that bursts for you in the world?

Drew Jackson: Yeah. Poetry for me has been first and foremost a spiritual practice, both the practice of reading poetry and writing poetry because it's been an invitation for me and a way for me to pay attention to what's going on in my own interior world to what's going on in the world around me, be it sort of the global questions that we're all holding, or even just the intimate space between myself and another person. Poetry helps me to slow down, pay attention, and to name the things that I might ordinarily pass over in the busyness of a day, to give voice to those things. So that's really what poetry has been for me is a way to just get those things out onto the page in ways that even aren't necessarily trying to resolve all the tensions, but are just naming them.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, yeah, well said. And you do it so beautifully. And this reminded me of, I think the first time we broke bread and hung out was a few years ago, and we were talking about poetry and poems that we liked, and there was a poem that you and I had both committed to memory and we were both reciting it, if you remember, it was a Wendell Berry poem and one of our colleagues, Crystal, was sitting between us and just gave us both this look like, "What is going on here? How is this happening right now?" And I feel like that connection that arises out of that shared poetic spirit, and you exemplify that not only by the poetry you read, but the way that you can capture that spirit and share it with the world through your poetry. So encourage everyone to check out Drew's poetry.

And here we are now within our second episode of this season, and you're about to hear Mike and I going over to Richard's hermitage, hanging out with Richard and Opie, where we talk about chapter two of Richard's book, *Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi*.

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

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Drew Jackson: And I'm Drew Jackson.

Mike Petrow: And this is Everything Belongs.

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Richard, for bringing us back into your hermitage to talk about chapter two.

Richard Rohr: You're welcome.

Paul Swanson: Which is a lovely title, *A Happy Run Downward: The Inner Authority of Those Who Have Suffered*. To kick off this conversation, as Mike and I were talking and preparing, one of the things that we were thinking about was your time as a prison chaplain. So here in Albuquerque, it was for 13 or 14 years?

Richard Rohr: 14 years, yeah.

Paul Swanson: And you engaged in that work, if I remember correctly, I'd love to hear your thoughts, you didn't know exactly what you were stepping into or who you were going to be meeting with.

Richard Rohr: No, no.

Paul Swanson: Do you remember your first time stepping into jail to be a jail chaplain?

Richard Rohr: I mean, I remember being a little intimidated. I don't know the rules here, I don't know what my role is. What do they expect of me? What should I expect of them? And how from the very beginning, most of the people were so grateful for so little that I was able to give. I just largely talked. I wouldn't have a mass because it just became pro forma. Those who were already Catholic would feel they had to attend and the others were excluded, what good is that? So I stopped mass early and just would teach on the scriptures and try to teach a little bit about contemplation. I can't remember what words I used those days, and I'm not sure they were much interested. Their life was too strategically destroyed, and so they wanted to strategically get out of it however they could. Contemplation is just too big a leap to not be strategic, to not be planning, ego planning.

Paul Swanson: What would you say you learned from those who were imprisoned at the time as you would talk with them and teach them? Looking back, what would you say you've learned from them in that time as chaplain? And did it change your mind on anything?

Richard Rohr: Well, it was the direct line that led me to the men's work that I just recognized year after year there there's not a guy here but a gal either who has a good father. As you'd hear their stories, they all had rage-a-holic, alcoholic, wounded fathers. And I just recognize how huge the problem of the male was, how we're not growing males up very well, we're not introducing males to healthy religion. Many of those who were the most religious were some of the most sick in terms of it was all just, "My religion or you're going to hell." Well, it was a very sophisticated form of hatred, it's not love.

So I was unimpressed by so many, not all, so many religious prisoners and drawn by the nature of so many wounded prisoners. Because of course I was a man, they would do anything to get my attention and get me alone in their cell where they could talk one-on-one. And I realized there's a bigger energy swirling around this room. I'm their father, the father who never paid attention to them and they wouldn't want you to leave, they keep thinking of things to show you to keep your attention. So it really became the groundwork of what became my men's work.

Paul Swanson: It sounds like there was a deep touch on their own sense of suffering and the home climate that had done that?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. They were victims. They weren't bad guys, they were wounded guys. That's a major insight to recognize, "This guy isn't bad, he didn't have a chance. No one ever gave him a chance," particularly if he was poor or Black or handicapped or gay, anything that puts you at disadvantage in the male world, why would you hate that more? And that's what a lot of Christianity did, we used those imperfections as excuses to exclude people who'd already been excluded far too much, you follow?

Paul Swanson: Yeah, yeah.

Richard Rohr: Dang it. Why can't people see that?

Mike Petrow: Well, and what I appreciate so much about this chapter is it's called The Inner Authority of Those Who've Suffered. And so is there a way that those folks who were disenfranchised have more of an understanding of the message of Francis and the message of Jesus than folks who've sort of been able to coast on comfort and privilege for most of their life?

Richard Rohr: Definitely. But you know what's sad? They don't know it. They don't know that they have an insight into the gospel. They just feel wounded. They don't know that they're wounded healers. If they could walk the hero's journey, the transformative journey and transform that pain into compassion, or as I say in my latest book, that anger into sadness.

Mike Petrow: I so appreciate that. I can't help but think, our listeners won't know this, but a few months ago we were gifted the privilege to sit down with you and our friend, Roshi Joan Halifax, who's up at the Upaya Zen Center here. And I got to listen to the two of you talk about the Buddha's enlightenment, which Buddha was a prince coming from a place of privilege and then the encounter with sickness and death and poverty and suffering woke the Buddha up. And we compared that to Francis who was the child of a wealthy nobleman, but encountered defeat and disease and poverty and somehow that woke Francis up as well.

Richard Rohr: And walked out of town from upper Assisi to the lower leper colony, yeah.

Mike Petrow: What is it about suffering that wakes us up?

Richard Rohr: What is it? It's the first deep recognition that the world is not as it should be, and I know it in my own body. The world is not as it should be. It explains all the healings of Jesus. And remember, you know this, he heals people for wounds they carry in this world. They don't live forever, they die like everybody else. But he heals people for wounds they carry in this world. And we made them all just symbols of going to heaven. What a loss, what a terrible loss.

Mike Petrow: Wow.

Paul Swanson: And he heals before he does their belief system, whether they're in the crowd or out,

it's the healing that leads the way.

Richard Rohr: Whether they're pure or impure or worthy or unworthy, whether they're even Jewish. It is mind-blowing when you think of the bridges that Jesus crossed to find the liberation position he took. He just was so free, so utterly free from his own culture, his own religion without rejecting it. No negative energy, but damn angry at times, "You whiten sepulchers," he says about his own people. Yeah, his own clergy, 'whiten sepulchers', wow.

Paul Swanson: And we see Francis following Jesus in that way, and there's that image of you talking about Francis moving from the higher to the lower physically and what that represents, reminds me of this quote from this chapter and just dealing with the suffering truth of life. And you're talking about Bonaventure who, for those who don't know who Bonaventure is, he is an early Franciscan who really propelled the theological and philosophical frameworks of Franciscanism into academia and more accepted. And you write that Bonaventure called Francis the new Moses who instead of bringing tablets of stone down the mountain brought an astounding message of total solidarity with divine and human suffering. I think it's a beautiful quote and it connects to another line, I think, of the coincidence of opposites. Bringing these coincidences of opposites, this new Moses, this solidarity of suffering and the divine a human altogether, what can we learn from Francis in that way?

Richard Rohr: We thought our solidarity was supposed to be with sinlessness, which we called holiness, and I think it was a very poor definition of holiness. Holiness is wholeness, is connecting all things into one whole excluding none, excluding nothing. When the spiritual journey becomes an identification with the whole, all parts, then it always becomes, although it's the last barrier to fall, in solidarity with human suffering. I just watched the evening news again last night, the children dying in Gaza, it is just too horrible for words, too horrible for words. These little children, two days of life and they're killed already. How can you not feel solidarity, compassion, communion, caring for that?

Paul Swanson: Yeah, which authors that inner authority, right?

Richard Rohr: Yes, it gives a different name to holiness, solidarity not with sinlessness, which you can't be anyway, so just stop it.

Paul Swanson: I hang out with you guys enough to know we can't be sinless.

Mike Petrow: Goodness gracious. Well, as we start to draw this to a close, I'm reminded of a great passage in this chapter. It gives me two questions, two paradoxical questions. You write this, "Pain is the rent we pay for being human, it seems. But suffering is usually optional. The cross was Jesus' voluntary acceptance of undeserved suffering as an act of total solidarity with all the pain of the world."

Richard Rohr: Of the world.

Mike Petrow: I have two followup questions for this. Starting at the bottom of that sentence, how does Francis and being eager to love invite us to stand in solidarity with the suffering

of the world? Exactly like you're describing, there are people all over the world right now who are suffering and we're more aware of our suffering human family members than has ever been possible in human history. How do we stand in solidarity with that?

Richard Rohr: Yeah, how do we? I've been asking that every day after the evening news. How could I make any difference? Both Jesus and Francis taught us by doing it themselves, not giving us sermons on solidarity with suffering like I would, but just living a life that went where the pain was, went where the rejected were, went where the wounded were, went where the excluded were, exactly where civilized so-called culture doesn't want to go, doesn't want to go.

Mike Petrow: I love that idea to move towards the downtrodden, the disinherited, the broken with love. I'm curious how to marry that first statement, "Pain is the rent we pay for being human, it seems, but suffering is usually optional," I can't think of this conversation we had last season where we talked about falling upward and you referenced this idea from Carl Jung about unnecessary suffering.

Richard Rohr: Unnecessary.

Mike Petrow: So many of us are suffering for the wrong reasons. As we leave our listeners with something for them to reflect on and live into as we go forward, how do we hold solidarity with the suffering of the world without getting trapped in unnecessary suffering? Real easy question to close out.

Richard Rohr: By not making religion into a cult of innocence or a superiority complex in any form that we're the pure ones, the worthy ones, the right ones, the correct ones, pick your word. Once you define religion that way, you're going to do it in one way or another how can I separate myself? The very word clergy comes from the Greek clerics, the separated ones. How do we get there to separate ourselves? What are we separating ourselves from? The world? Pope Francis says it so well, we got to make sure we smell like the sheep. We smell like the sheep. Perfect.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, I love that. Something I've been praying about and journaling about a lot lately is the dichotomy between this overwhelming sense of being loved unconditionally, which I've experienced in my best moments in mystical experiences when I study your teaching, this overwhelming sense of experiencing myself as loved and then this overwhelming effort on my part to play worthiness games and continually prove myself worthy of that love, which I think for me is where I fall into those holiness games, purity games, worthiness games. Hard to navigate.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Well, that's well said. And I think everyone listening can resonate with that as we seek to become scented by sheep in our own daily life. Thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Thank you for making me say such things.

Mike Petrow: Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

Drew Jackson: Welcome back everyone. Today we're going to be exploring chapter two, A Happy Run Downward: The Inner Authority of Those Who Have Suffered. And we're joined today by

James Finley. He's a clinical psychologist, spiritual director, and a faculty member here at the Center for Action and Contemplation. He's the author of *The Healing Path* and the co-host of our sister podcast *Turning to the Mystics*. And I know that you'll all be enriched by this conversation that we're going to have with Jim Finley.

Paul Swanson: Well, welcome Jim. It's so great to have you here with Drew and I as we enter the conversation on chapter two of Richard's book, *Eager to Love: The Alternative Way Of Francis of Assisi*. And this chapter is titled, *A Happy Run Downward: The Authority of Those Who Have Suffered*. So we've actually just heard from Richard where he considers the suffering at a personal and collective level and how it connects to compassion and solidarity and surrendering to God. And so one of the fun things with this podcast and the tagline is *Living the Teachings of Richard Rohr Forward*. And we know that looks different in everyone's lives. And so you, Jim, as a mystic teacher and contemplative clinician, we'd love to get your sense of the themes of this chapter. So considering the authority of those who have suffered, what would be a starting point for you to launch from in regards to this sense of suffering?

Jim Finley: Yes. Well, first of all, I want to say I'm going to be giving an overview, a big picture. So I realize it's a lot but I think it's helpful to try to see everything poetically all at once knowing we spend the rest of our lives walking through it. And I want to say first there is the suffering and the healing of suffering and ego consciousness that is in our passage through times as a human being. And so in my work as a clinical psychologist, that was my task, I worked with that. But I want to focus on suffering and the healing from suffering first from a religious perspective, what's it mean from the standpoint of religious faith and then from a mystical perspective. And then I want to see at the very end how the religious perspective, the mystical perspective sheds its light on the psychological, how it illumines the ordinariness of ourselves. So that's my intention here. So it's several parts.

And what I'm really sharing here is what I learned in the monastery and kind of mystical Catholicism and the medieval philosophy, the philosophical theology of Aquinas and Duns Scotus on what it means to be a person, what it means to be a person. So I'll start as a first reflection, I think it's very poetic and very beautiful, it's also interesting how we're not used to looking at things like this, but it's really so classical and really so much the worldview of the mystic teachers and so on.

So it goes like this, echoing Duns Scotus, Dan Walsh. It's a poetry that before creation, there was no capacity for love in God because God is *actus plurisimus*, God's the overflowing infinity of love. If you have a glass of water on a table and you're filling it with water and it's overflowing, there's no capacity for water in the cup. So there's no capacity for love in God. So God, in God's need to give himself away completely, everything of God is generosity. The generosity of the infinite is infinite and God needs to give him the infinity of himself. God creates a *copax dei*. God creates a capacity for God. God creates a capacity that is capable of receiving the infinity of God, a *copax dei*, and that's you. That's what it means to be a person. To be a person is to be a capacity for God.

And furthermore, God eternally contemplates you as a capacity for God from all eternity. God, the Father, eternally contemplates himself in the word and in the word contemplates you hidden with Christ and God forever before the origins of the universe. And this is

the birthless you that was never born because God has never not known who you are in Christ. And the you that was never born will never die. So then when God creates me, say God creates Jim, that capacity is actualized by living it. I have to live it to actualize it as a potential. And so it is made real in creation by this capacity for God is given a nature because God creates all things according to their nature, *rerum natura*, the nature of the trees and stars and birds and everything is this God-given nature of God.

So our human nature in one sense is the capacity for reason, which is science and literature and art and culture and the ability to talk like right now, reason, all of that. But from this religious point of view, the most profound gift of nature is the capacity to realize the person, that is, in the nature we're capable of realizing the transsubjective mystery of ourself. And then secondly is the gift of freedom of saying yes to it because love is never imposed, it's always offered. So in the mythic story of the garden of Eden, in this mythic story, it's a revelation of Adam and Eve created by God in the image and likeness of God, they were like God in their nothingness without God, and their nature was translucently like it was luminous with divinity this way. This is the garden. The mystery of the fall is a mystery, is the mystery of trying to be like God without God, and we're caught in that.

So the person, Merton says there is that in us that belongs completely to God, the person that we are. It cannot be diminished, it can't be threatened, it can't be increased because it's infinite. But the nature, to realize it is wounded. We have this wounded nature. And so the gift of faith, and then I'll stop and see if you want to chat about this for a minute, so the gift of faith then is that God illumines the wounded nature with faith. Gabriel Marcell says it's a primitive inner assurance or it's an obscure certainty so that when we hear that God loves us to the power of the spirit who dwells in our hearts, we're experientially empowered to know that God does love us and this is the gift of faith. And since the measure of faith is love, because God is love, we live by love and we also live by hope that when we die, we're not annihilated but consummated, we'll move from a veiled oneness with God to eternally unveiled union with God as destiny. And this is our life of faith efficacious unto holiness.

And this requires also then stabilizing in a daily rendezvous with God in prayer. And the first step, this is *lectio divina* meditation and prayer. So in *lectio*, I open the scriptures and I read Jesus saying, "Do not be afraid, I'm with you always." And I take it in as the deathless presence of Jesus personally saying that to me, telling me not to be afraid, that he's with me always. That's my *lectio*. The *meditatio* is I then reflect on it. I might journal it out, I personalize it. See, I weave it into my consciousness this way. And then in my prayer is the heart center of desire, "Help me with this, I can't do this without you." And then as I go through the day, I ask for the grace not to break the thread of that sensitivity as a disciple of Jesus going through my life.

And that's the healing of suffering religiously. It's the healing of suffering. It is not the that prevents the suffering, but rather God depends on us to do our best to prevent it. Because look at the mystery of the cross, you're suffering, there's so much suffering. See, Jesus said, "The peace I give to you not as the world gives to you, what kind of peace does the world give? The peace of the world is the peace that comes in living in conditions conducive to peace. So if I have conditions conducive to peace, I'm in peace. But if I'm in conflict, I'm in trauma." So what Jesus gives us is the peace that is not dependent on conditions conducive to peace, the peace of God on which everything depends and it gives me the courage and



clarity to walk my walk to a broken, dark and precious beautiful world that God so lovingly sent his only-begotten son. So that's my first thought.

Drew Jackson: Jim, you said so much there, there's so much to dip into. But one of the things that you said, I mean, you mentioned Jesus as this picture and this entry point into human suffering. And one of the things that Richard talks about in this chapter is he says that the crucified God as personified in Jesus reveals that God is always on the side of suffering wherever it is found. And so as someone who has experienced profound suffering in your own life, how has glimpsing the crucified God as personified in Jesus transformed your relationship to suffering?

Jim Finley: Yeah, I want to say something too about a kind of fruitful suffering through empathy that when someone we love suffers and our empathy with them and love, we share it too, we share too. We let the person know they're not alone. It's not a suffering we regret, it's a suffering that's woven into the very nature of love itself. It's the love that moves us to suffer with that which suffers. So God's so lovingly sent the world his only-begotten son. So God's response to us in our wayward ways is to become one with us as unexplainably holy in the midst of our wayward ways. So Jesus lives our life, Jesus suffers our suffering, Jesus dies our death this way.

And so for me what it was because I grew up in this home, there was so much trauma from alcoholic, violent father, I was so consoled I would walk to the church during the day, it would be empty and I'd make the stations of the cross around the Catholic Church, the stations of the cross. And I was so consoled by the stations of the cross that I was not alone in my suffering, that I was one with Jesus in my suffering, one with me in my suffering. It consoled me and it gave me the strength in knowing that I was not alone in my suffering, that I was being sustained by God who's won with me in my suffering. So it was a very sustaining presence for me.

And I think really when later when I became a psychotherapist too, I worked with trauma just sitting with people who suffer, sometimes you wouldn't explicitly mention faith unless the person wanted me to, but I could sense God's presence sustaining us both this way, like the unrelenting resiliency of the human spirit to be free from suffering in the midst of suffering. And so it's been very basic to me, really. I think it's basic to all of us.

Paul Swanson: Jim, I'm thinking about with what you just shared about the basicness of this, where we all experience this personally. In your memoir, *The Healing Path*, you share about the suffering you experienced at the hands of your father and then the abuse you experienced in the cloistered monastery. Can you share about giving this suffering over to God, processing this suffering and being open about its impact on your personhood? How does the way you talk and reflect on it now differ from when you first left the monastery? You have all these years of clinical experience, you have all these years of doing the work. I'm thinking about those listening to this, what you've just shared at the middle of it is so poignant and beautiful and a lot has happened in your life as you look back through these lenses and just think about how you would look at the difference between when that was a very fresh suffering and at a time where you've brought it into hours and hours of therapy and prayer and living with it.

Jim Finley: That would be good. I think when I first left the monastery, I got married, I had two

children, and it was a very dysfunctional marriage. It was kind of traumatizing thing I did. When all that craziness was going on, I got up early in the morning and I took five years and I wrote Merton's Palace of Nowhere, which is understanding Merton's insight into this primordial Christian understanding of the path in which we're healed from all that hinders us from realizing God's infinitely in love with us in the midst of our suffering. And so I express it in that book.

Then I think when that book came out, I was a high school religion teacher in Cleveland, I started giving retreats around the United States and Canada, these silent retreats. The weekends were in silence, the meals were in silence. These are 50 to 200 people in the world who were being drawn to silence. And I would speak from my heart out of Merton and the mystics on how this mystical resonance is in all of us in our homes. And then it was out of that if someone read Merton's Palace of Nowhere, a clinical psychologist, and he said, "If you had commit yourself to exploring the contribution the mystical traditions make to the science of psychology, I'll see to it you can have a PhD in psychology with family support." So I went to Fuller Theological Seminary for five years, became a clinical psychologist, and I sat with trauma people all week long. And every other weekend I would go on the retreats, contemplative retreats.

And my insight was this, the people in trauma and the people on the retreat were often the same people. The people coming to the retreats, in the unguarded guidance of meditation, suffering arises and they would come into therapy. And a lot of people in therapy would say what they wanted, they wanted their spirituality to be a resource in their therapy. They were the same people, and I was one of them because I was a traumatized awakened person, and that's how it affected me.

And I think it's the same, I'm 81, I think as you get older, it ripens. I mean, I can't explain it seems more like transparent to me or more kind of atmospherically all-pervasive to me is what it feels like. It's a continuum. It's still the same, but the years... It's like that, I think. I can't explain it, yeah.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Thank you for that. Did you want to delve into the mystical consciousness side of this as a next step?

Jim Finley: Yeah, let's do that part. Let's say first of all that religious experience is according to Carl Rahner and Bernard Larnican and Merton, this is mysticism in the broad sense, which is religious experience. See, it's an experiential understanding of God's presence in our life. And then in this prayer of luxio meditation and prayer and so on. Where it becomes mystical and the classical sense of the mystics is this, is that from time to time, either in prayer or in life, there comes a time in which this felt sense of God's oneness with us becomes so unexpectedly pure or so unexpectedly intermingled with us that we and God mutually disappear as dualistically other than each other. There's just God in all directions unexplainably this way.

And I think from time to time we all have those moments like that. I think from time to time, sometimes it's very intense, really it can change your whole life, sometimes when quite young, you can be touched with this like a calling, but often it's very, very subtle, it's very subtle in the midst of nature, in the arms of the beloved, tucking a small child into bed,

smelling a flower, lying awake at night listening to your breathing. From time to time we drop into this oneness that alone is ultimately real I think this way.

And then what happens then with some people, so terrorism, is the desire to abide in the oneness so fleetingly glimpsed that is having rested in the oneness, this moment of oneness you say to yourself, there's several things, one, "I will not play the cynic. I will not doubt my awakening heart that I know I rested in a oneness with God in which there was no otherness anywhere in sight. I also know, and I sense it in these graced moments, as subtle as they might be, it isn't as if something more was given to me, but a curtain parted and I fleetingly taste the divinity of each moment of my life. It's like that. And I know that that's true. And sensing and knowing that it's true, then I desire to set out on a path to live in an abiding habitual groundedness in this oneness that alone is ultimately real."

And this is the classical journey to the gates of the monastery, to the ashram, to the sangha, whatever. And when you really look at the teachings of the mystics, John of the Cross, Risa, Eckhart and all, this is what they're doing. Thomas Merton once said in the monastery to the novices, he said, "in a cloistered monastery, everything in the monastery is designed to protect this, the hidden life of endless ordinariness." So it's a cloistered silent life of simplicity, getting up at 2:30 in the morning chanting the Psalms and so on, the endless ordinary. And he said, "But there are people in the world who are being called to this and they have no one to help them to understand what's happening to them." And when I left the monastery, I found that that was really true, I found that that was really true.

And so I think when people heard about these retreats that they were in silence, the meals were in silence, and the mystics, they were drawn to it because it was already stirring in them, "Where can I find someone to help me understand what's happening to me?" Sometimes when I would speak like this to people, they would say, "How come no one in church talks about this?" Thomas Merton said a lot of Catholics are losing their faith and they're losing it in church because no one's talking about it. No one wants to mention it. Everyone's circling around it.

And so what they're really writing about then is first of all, they're trying to help us understand what this is, an epistemology of realized eschatology. That is to say, here's what happens, it's really true that we travel through life in deepening oneness with God and discipleship veiled in faith. So it's veiled in our insights into the things of God, it's veiled into our memories of how God has guided us on the path, it's veiled and our will is stirred with aspirations and inspirations to be more Christ-like, more loving, all of that, all of that. And then when we die and cross to the veil of death, we cross over into infinite oneness and the infinite oneness with God is our destiny of why we were created in the first place.

What happens with some people is God decides not to wait until you're dead to touch it. So you're not dead yet, you're here. See, it's how to die of love at the hands of love until nothing's left of you but love. That's what it is really. And it's a stirring in your heart. Thomas Merton once said, "There are certain things we simply have to accept as true, or we go crazy inside. And they're the very things we can't explain to anybody including ourselves. And it's this."

Dan Walsh in the class of medieval metaphysics, he said, "I know it, I know it, I know that

I know it. The trouble is I know that I know it. When I try to explain to you what it is that I know that I know, I don't know what to say because it's not explainable." But here's this contemplative, you can tell when you're in the presence of someone who knows it too. It's like Merton called it the spiritual communication, you can feel it in the room. There's like a communal shared realization of what no one in the room can say. It's a gift when that happens seriously. And so they try to help us understand it.

Secondly, they try to help us follow the path because we're subject to self-deception. That's the thing along we get disheartened. And so they help us understand the obstacles and the unexpected blessings that occur along the way in this guidance this way, the mystics. And so really then this is the living school who's drawn to the living school? I think it's people who's been touched with this. Richard Rohr has people reading the mystic, this is why. The mystical Catholicism is alive in us, it's a charism, it's a dimension. So you can live it in your living room, you're meant to live it in your homes within your cell in this deepening presence and then manifesting it in the Christ-like tenderness towards your own brokenness, towards your family, your neighborhood, the people you live with, service to the community, whatever. So that's the mystical. I mean, that would be a way that I would open up this mystical in this classical sense.

And I think at first the purgative, illuminative and unitive way, I think purgatively, it's very hard to believe this actually pertains to you. You're just trying to get through another day for God's sakes and shimmering in your heart is this thing you can't explain. And then the illuminative way is you're halfway there, you can't go back, what are you going to go back to? And you don't know how to go forward either. And then the unitive way, you're at the precipice, you're at the brink of union. And so the mystics walk us through these phases and we can see where we are and all that. So I'd like to continue then in the light of that and we can dialogue some more.

Here's an image I share because I'm trying to look for images because I think metaphors can be so helpful because it can't be explained, but it is like Jesus' parables or koans, you can sense in a story or an image a realization that you can't explain it. And so one of the images that I like in Meister Eckhart, he says, "Imagine that you're looking at a full-length image of yourself in a mirror. And imagine this image of yourself is a thinking image of you. It thinks. And this image of you that thinks has been on a lot of retreats and has been through a lot of therapy and it thinks the time has come to branch out on its own and it doesn't need you try to explain to the image it won't go well without you because it's an image of you. But the image says, "No, you're holding me back. I'm branching out on my own." So to make your point, you step halfway off the edge of the mirror and half the image disappears. It has a panic attack, goes back on Xanax, goes back into therapy, "I'm not real, I'm not real." It's real, it just isn't real the way it thought it was real." And that's what the mystics are saying.

The false self, and Richard Rohr does this too, is this illusory self that we actually think we're actually real out here on our own trying to get to another day. But moment by moment by moment God in an ongoing self-donating act is giving God away as the very presence of ourself and our nothingness without God. Jesus said, "You have eyes to see and you do not see." There is your God-given capacity to see your God-given godly nature and you don't see it. This is a source of all your fear. This is a source of all your confusion. This is a source of all the traumatizing things you do to yourself and to other people. And then

our prayer is, Lord, that I might see, Lord that I might see through my own awakened eyes which you see in everything that you see. Because what Jesus saw and everything that he saw, he saw God.

And what's really interesting when you read the gospels in a prayerful way, it doesn't matter what he saw, whether he saw his own mother or a prostitute, whether he saw his own disciples or his executioners, whether he saw the joy of those gathered at a wedding or the sorrow of those gathered at the burial of a loved one or a flower or a bird, Jesus saw God in all that he saw, Lord, that I might see. And knowing that our desire to see is an echo of God's desire for us to see this union.

Another example that I use of it that helps me, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in the stages of dying, denial, bargaining, depression and so on, and that's the ego coming to the end of itself really, it's a cycle, it's normal. She says, but some people come to acceptance, she says not everybody comes to acceptance. And what acceptance is really is acceptance is that you look into the face of the dying loved one and you realize it's the gate of heaven. It's freedom from the tyranny of death in the midst of death. So the person in it is dying as a mystic. So the idea is not to wait until the 11th hour until we become mystical.

And by the very fact this kind of language makes any sense at all it bears witness you're already on this path because we only recognize what we already know. So we're always being re-enchanted or re-encouraged to do this. And so then the prayer then changes in a way that kind of corresponds. So instead of *lexio meditatio* in prayer, notice these methods of prayer become ways of... So in the Jesus prayer, for example, we just did the wave of a pilgrim not long ago, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner." So you sit in prayer and you quietly say to yourself, "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner." And as you're sitting there, you notice thought arising along the side, "I wonder if this is right, I wonder what this means." Notice the thought arising, but don't think about the thought that's arising because thought will carry you off again. Keep returning and grounding yourself, "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner."

And what you're doing really is you're passing beyond the frontiers of thought and time and it settles into your heart. And for the Jesus prayer, it doesn't mean like the chakras and Hinduism, your heart is a place where you and God are one. And you drop down into this oneness to this prayer. The cloud of unknowing is the same way. He says, "You're living this way of devotional prayer," and he said, "All of a sudden there's a blind stirring of love in the very core of your being," he says.

And my image of it is this, what helps me to see it is that if we think of our soul as a circle and God's all beyond us and all around us and the immanence of God, God's within us in the hidden innermost center of ourself, the kingdom of heaven is within you. What happens in devotional prayer is that God beyond us and God within us shines a light into the interiority of ourself. It illumines us with insight, it illumines us with consolations, it illumines us with aspirations onward. What happens with mystical prayer, I put it poetically, is that God beyond us, like a shooting star, passes right through the interiority of ourself to the hidden God within us and simultaneously God within us like a shooting star passes right through us into God beyond us. And you're sitting there transfixed between God and God except there's no between. It's like a quickening of a oneness like this.

And then comes, if it's given to you, is the desire to abide in it, "See, what is this way, where I find somebody well-seasoned in such things to guide me and to help me find my way?" And if you're in the midst of something like this, this is when you discover the mystics, it's so stunning because you can tell they're talking about what's happening to you. And so what I've always felt called to do is how to make these teachings as accessible as possible.

The thing is, it's so disarmingly simple we're not used to hearing language that puts words to it. We long to hear it, we long to hear it. But we have to get acclimated and getting used to sitting into what's so incomprehensibly clear that we can't comprehend it, but we can unexplainably realize it when we're quickened and then we can live by it and then realize we're called to share it with others. That's the thing. I'm to walk my walk and know that everybody I see is an infinitely love-broken person, and maybe I can be somebody in whose presence they can get a glimpse of that in them and pass on the contagious energy of healing to the world. So that's my understanding of healing.

Drew Jackson: I would love to touch back on this theme of oneness. And I've heard you say before that Merton taught you that one of the great goals of entering deeply into our own interior lives is to connect us more intimately with the suffering of the whole human family. And it seems like a bit of a paradox to say that entering more deeply into my own world, into my own darkness can move me into deeper solidarity with the suffering of my neighbors. So the question is simply, how does this happen? Or to say it another way, how do we keep our introspection and self-reflection from developing into a me-focused worldview?

Jim Finley: Yeah, that's very good, that's very good. Here's some things that help me to try to express it. Let's say two married people who are deeply in love with each other in a moment of loving, surrendered communion and oneness, they say we are one and in love they're one. But in realizing they're one, they don't cease to be two, because if they could cease to be two, they couldn't be there to know that they're one, but they don't live by the two-ness, they live by the oneness that gives everything meaning and all they do in the two-ness, doing the chores and everything. So love is like that, if that makes sense, in the oneness.

The Catholic writer Romano Gardini says, "Although I am not God, I'm not other than God either. Although I'm not any of you, I'm not other than any of you either. And although I'm not the earth, I'm not other than the Earth either," he said, "I believe this is the essence of religious consciousness, the oneness, the all-pervasive oneness this way."

Let me put it another way. We might say Thomas Merton, when he's giving talks on creation at the monastery, he said at the very beginning, "God didn't say let there be light, let there be trees, and so on, he said creation's going on all the time. Moment by moment by moment we're being created. So if God would cease creating us at the count of three into this present moment, at the count of three, we disappear because the infinite presence of God is giving itself to us as a very presence in our nothingness without God. If God would cease creating the world, the universe at the count of three, the whole world would disappear." We're not used to thinking like this, and that's why the world is God's body that is bodying forth the love that's uttering into being.

Saint John of the cross says, "In the beginning, the beauty of the world can be seductive through possessiveness of heart," like wanting to own it through real estate. He said, "In a

moment of prayer, when you're walking alone in the midst of the mountains, you realize the beloved is passed way in haste. You can see traces of divinity in the beauty of the world." And finally at the very end, he says, "My beloved is the mountains." There's this all-inclusive realization of an all-pervasive oneness that is endlessly ribboned.

Here's another way that I put it too, I'm going to put it in Buddhist terms. Zen Master Dogen says, "When the one side is light, the other side is dark. If I'm in the mode of otherness, everyone around me and everything around me is other than me, God's other than me. And no matter what comes over the horizon, next will be one more thing other than me because it's otherness in all directions. But when I'm in the mode of oneness, the oneness is all-pervasive in all directions. See everyone and everything is the oneness of everything. And no matter what comes over the horizon, next is more oneness." He said, "When one side is light, the other side is dark. It's hard to see the dark side of the moon at the same time." He said, "What enlightenment is is that otherness and oneness swallow each other up bottomlessly. Conceptually, we always need to conceptualize something with thoughts, but here is a sudden flash of awareness that transcends thought like an unexplainable realization."

John of the Cross once said, he said, "I had to live with no light to guide you except the one that burns in your heart, and it's the light that you cannot explain, and you live in the incarnate immediacy of the unexplainable, which is love, and you live by it."

Paul Swanson: That's beautiful. This has triggered something for me that I want to ask you about, and Jim, you'll have to correct me because I'm probably going to parrot some words that you use and you can correct me how they need to be corrected or nuanced in a way where taking this idea of oneness that you and Drew have been talking about, and I think about the way you just described the mystery of the fall as something that is in one state of confusion that tries to be God without God, and that would be suffering. And when one drops into the oneness where God and you both exist within the hearts or are in communion within the heart, that authority of the suffering has no longer has authority over you?

Jim Finley: I want to insert something.

Paul Swanson: Please.

Jim Finley: A trace of Avalon, the seven mansions of the soul, the first three mansions are psychological, spiritual, maturity, discipleship. We have to stabilize in that. She said, "The fourth mansion is you're sitting there in prayer." She said, "As you sit there, you begin to realize that your heart is being dissolved." She says, "Imagine a basin filling with water only instead of overflowing, the basin keeps expanding bigger and bigger to contain, and you're sitting there in prayer and you realize your heart is being enlarged to divine proportions and you surrender to it." She says that's the beginning of the mystical. The prayer is the yielding to that and then living by it. So go ahead. Yes, right there is that, yes.

Paul Swanson: That's beautiful. The yielding, this expansive hearts, and I think about as that heart expands, that suffering no longer has authority over you, and this plays into the chapter title. But by the suffering being touched by love, you start to have authority to speak from this place of love and oneness about the suffering. It doesn't diminish the suffering or excuse it or bypass

it, but it no longer has the authority over you which it previously did outside that oneness.

So I am taking loss into consideration with the term that we hear a lot in contemplative circles of a wounded healer or the wounding and the healing coexisting in the person. And I think you've represented this in a lot of ways through the work that you've done, and there's a particular line that you use, which I think presses the experiential button a little bit deeper where you say, and again, you can correct me on this, "God protects us from nothing, but unexplainably sustains us in all things." And that to me is the experiential thrust of moving through that.

Jim Finley: I think it is.

Paul Swanson: When you were sitting with clients and you're bringing in this religious and mystical consciousness, how would you invite clients to experience this experiential truth in the midst of their suffering? Or is that something that can't be done until later?

Jim Finley: No, no, no, I always reflect off of this. One insight that comes I think that helps is that the oneness is not dualistically other than the otherness, it just creates a new dualism. The oneness is the infinite ground of otherness.

Another thing to think about suffering is this, is that you're quickened with the longing for oneness with God and you're powerless to consummate it. And it's in the longing that we're transformed, which is an echo of God's longing for us. It's a dark night for John of the Cross through love.

How I see it in therapy is that I would put this way, I'd give a couple examples of this. Let's say you call and you want to see me for therapy, and let's say I don't know what you want to talk about except the little bit you told me on the phone, but I've done it so often I already know it's going to have to happen between us that the healing you're hoping for is going to occur and it is like a liturgy. We'll both sit down, you'll talk and I'll listen, and at a certain point I'll ask you a question, and it's a real question to understand you better. The question is such that in order to answer me, you have to pause for a moment to listen to yourself, and you're becoming more present to yourself in my presence. This is very subtle.

Then I say, "Let me say it back edited for me so we know we're together." Then I ask you another question, it goes a little deeper, it goes a little. And at a certain point, we'll get to a certain point where you'll tear up or you get to a certain point where you'll laugh when you say something sad, your body will change. And then I say to you, "If we don't get close enough to touch it, it festers. But if we get too fast, you'll be re-traumatized. You're in charge. So let's back way off, talk about the weather, whatever you want. And once we're back, let's re-approach it again. And as we learn to do this together, over and over and over, you can be transformed and walk your walk so you're suffering without falling over in it and change your life."

Another image I use with therapy where I would see it, is the person, when I would sitting in my therapy office, my chair, I kept my eyeglass case on the arm of my chair, and I kept my rosary in my eyeglasses case. And they'd be sitting there and the window is behind them, and outside the window was a telephone wire. And they would be talking this way and when I felt the suffering was getting... See, if I stayed clinical, they could tell they were alone in the



room. I have to be willing, I'm sitting in my circle of healing, they're sitting in their circle of suffering, our circles are touching each other. I have to take one foot and put it into their circle where they're alone so they know they're not alone. But because I'm traumatized too, I know what trauma is. If I start to get re-traumatized, I owe it to them and to myself not to be overtaken by it.

And so what I do is I intentionally back off a little bit. I touch my rosary, I count the birds on the telephone wire. They think I'm taking session notes, I'm doing a grocery list. And what I'm really doing is taking care of myself. And little by little by little, they learn to take care of themselves. They pass it on.

And I want to give one image that I use where this comes up in therapy I've shared I have a number of stories. I was seeing this woman in therapy, and she was never physically abused or sexually abused, but her parents would have violent arguments in front of her, she was maybe six years old. And they were so enraged at each other they couldn't see how scared she was. And so while she came into therapy, she felt invisible. That's what happens to childhood trauma, you carry something inside of you that gets triggered like this. And she shared with me, we were talking about it, and she shared with me, she said one summer night they were screaming at each other, and she opened the back screen patio door, went out into a little tree in the backyard, climbed up in the low branches of a tree, closed one eye, lined it up with a twig, and said to God, "If you know I'm here, move the star move to the other side of that twig." And she waited and she said, "God, this started to move."

And then she said, "But there's something about remembering myself as a little girl sitting alone in the dark waiting for God to move a star that consoles me." And I say, "Yes, God didn't move the star. But all these years later, in remembering it, you were moved. And that's how God works in our life. And I want to tell you something. When you shared yourself with me, I was moved by it. So let's make a deal that anytime we feel stuck in the work we're imagining we're sitting together in the low branches of that tree waiting for God to move a star." And that's the religious, mystical, light shining on brokenness, if that makes sense. And by doing that over and over with people, you know what I mean? Yeah, it's like that.

Paul Swanson: That's powerful. Thank you, Jim.

Jim Finley: Yeah, it is, it is powerful.

Paul Swanson: Jim, do you want to round us out with the next phase of...?

Jim Finley: Yeah, let me enlarge on how this is carried out in therapy. And this was my thesis statement for my dissertation too. Then I want to walk through each word of it. The thesis is in the axial moments of therapy, the patient unwittingly assumes a stance strikingly akin to the stance assumed in deep meditation. I want to walk through that statement, thesis statement.

By the patient, I don't mean the medical model, I mean the one who suffers. A person's in therapy because they suffer. The psychotherapeutic process, psychotherapia is a transformative process in which the psyche is soul, the whole self, therapia is the healing, it's being restored to wholeness. So session follows session insight follows insight follows session. You keep sifting it out, walking the walk, doing the work. From time to time there's the axial moment and the axial moment is a turning.

Jacques Maritain, he's talking about contemplation and aquinas, and he says, "In logical thinking, the mind moves in a horizontal line, one plus one plus one equals whatever, but with a mystery, it's not like that. In a mystery, the mind stays in one place and circles around the hidden axis round and round and round to endlessly deeper places. And you discover the depth in which you're descending is welling up and giving itself to you as your life." This is often very, very subtle, like the little thing, the woman in the tree, very subtle. And sometimes it's so subtle it takes a while for people to get sensitized to the far-reaching implications of what's happening to them.

I want to share one more example of this that I share. One of my rotations was in a VA hospital and I was working with an ward with terminal lung disease, COPD lung disease, and there were four beds in the room and they were all dying of this lung disease and there was a waiting list to get one of those beds. So when somebody died, then somebody else would come in and I would go in to see them and I would look at their chart and I was to assess them, I was an intern for depression, anxiety, and I was to chart those kinds of things. And someone had died, the bed was empty and this new person came on and he was a divorced alcoholic businessman. And he had a phone set, he had his oxygen mask on and he had arrangements for a phone by his bed and he would talk with his stockbroker so he'd have to take some oxygen and lift it up and make some more stock like this.

So I introduced myself, I said, I'm from psychology. "I'm an intern and I'm to see you." He said, "I don't want to see you." And I said, "You have no choice," I said, "But how about if we make our sessions brief?" And he agreed. He was uncooperative with his medication regimen. He wouldn't talk to the other three men in the room dying of the disease that he was dying of. He was just a very angry person. And one day I went in to see him and he opened his pajama top, he said, "Look at this muscle spasm on my chest this way." And I went in the next week they did a biopsy and here was a very aggressive cancer coming out through the chest wall. And when I approached the bed, he reached out to take my hand and he grabbed my hand and held onto it and he said, "I wasn't born a son of a bitch, I became one. I think I'm ready to give it up." And I said, "You're going to retire as a son of a bitch?" He said, "I am." And he did.

I talked to his adult son out in the hallway, he cried. He said, "It's the first time my father's ever talked to me ever." Three days after he died, his bed was empty. And I talked to the other three men and we all agreed what a good man he was. We all agreed how glad we were we got to him. Sometimes in the 11th hour you can save your life and bring other people with you this way, and that's grace.

So what I've always been looking for is wherever there's suffering, having a sensitized responsiveness to it at this level. You meet it first, "I see you dear one, and I'm here for you." You meet it where it's at. But as you engage, you always look for openings where there's places to find a little deeper footing and it takes one to know, and you're suffering too. And so your own suffering teaches you, "Been there, done that." We're in this together and there's a kind of a ministry in that, if that makes sense, do you know what I mean? That's my sense of it.

Drew Jackson: As you share these stories and I think about your work as a clinician, it really brings to mind for me thinking of Francis and Claire and their own proximity to suffering as part of

their witness in the world. And so we live in a time where we have so much information overload and constant news stories of the suffering of the world that are coming at us constantly. I think about what's going on in Palestine right now, I think about what's going on in Ukraine, Congo, I could go on and on. And I know so many of us are in this place of wondering how to both live in solidarity with the suffering of our global neighbors and at the same time not be overwhelmed to the point of being numb. So what is one practical invitation that you might give our listeners into how to hold that, how to step into that in a way that is transformational?

Jim Finley: Yeah, it's good, it's really good. I put it this way, it helps me, is that sometimes I think we pretend that we care less than we do because we let ourselves feel the amount we really care would sweep us away. Therefore, we have to really pace ourselves. We have to pace ourselves. And what we have to do, be careful what you watch, what you listen to. And so what we have to do really in the light of this is to be grounded in this root sense of ourselves in God in prayer, to be grounded with the people in our life we love and who love us like our groundedness, then re-grounded in that groundedness, come back and return to the hurting place again.

And when it comes to the world, when it comes to the world contemplatively, Thomas Merton, he had insomnia and in one of his journal entries, he's lying in the middle of the bed at night, he can't sleep. And he says, "Suddenly the bed becomes an altar. And in a distant city somewhere, someone's suddenly able to pray." This is the cloistered life too, that your hidden life of fidelity to surrendering yourself to God, surrendered over to you, touches the whole world in ways we don't understand. It is a hidden ministry in fidelity and prayer. And this is why sometimes some people come into this global ministry in nursing homes, they come to it in the depths of themselves touching the sufferer.

The image I give is this, two images, one Thomas Merton said, "In the moment of your death, you can get all the people in the room with you that you want. They can all climb up in bed with you if you want, but you're dying alone and you're that alone right now. And you'll never find the intimacy you're looking for by avoiding it. Because hidden in that aloneness is the infinite intimacy of this way."

And here's another image that I share. Imagine you're in the middle of the night and you're alone in the dark and you're dying and you know that you're dying and you turn and you'll see the flowers on the windowsill silhouetted in the moonlight, they seem to know all about it. It's that way, I think. So I think there's a certain kind of quiet depth-like intimacy. And I think this is the heart of Jesus.

This is a good image to end on too in this way too. When you look at the miracle story, the healing stories in the gospels, they're all the same. They're all different, but they're all the same. Jesus would spend whole nights in prayer in this eternal oneness with God, this logos. And he would come out roaming the earth looking to deliver people from suffering. And when the word got out, they came to him, "I have leprosy," "I'm a prostitute," "My daughter died," like this. And if you look at all these stories, they're all the same. This is a good way to end today I think really too. Jesus responds in a stunning way. The lame pick up their bed and walk, the blind see, and so on.

But Jesus says, he said, "I was given to you as a sign for the true miracle that you might

believe it.” Here’s the true miracle, I’m going to say it poetically. Jesus is standing there say with whoever it is that he healed and Jesus saw that the real problem wasn’t they had leprosy or they’d become a prostitute, Jesus saw that they thought they were what was wrong with them. That was the problem. And Jesus says to them, this is private between them, “I know you because from all eternity, God, the Father, contemplated you and me before the origins of the universe. You’re the beloved.” And reflected his eyes they saw their true face.

Kierkegaard talks about the leap of faith. He said, “In the leap, you’re caught in the free-fall by Christ. Reflected in his eyes you see your true face. There’s no fear there.” And I think this is Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, picking up dying children off the street, holding them as they died, leprosy, going through all that. But she didn’t drown in the suffering in which she was immersed. They all spent their day together, sisters of charity in contemplative prayer. And she would hold a dying baby rubbing, “I see God in the person.” And when she died, they carried her body through the street, thousands of people came out, almost all of them were Hindus wanting to touch the casket because they saw her as a sannyasi, they saw her as the beloved, as God’s presence in the world. And I think this is the relationship between mystical union and social justice, between mystical union and touching the world with mercy and giving yourself in service to the world as the spiritual life itself this way.

Paul Swanson: Well, Jim, what a note to end on. We can’t thank you enough for taking the time today to dive into this conversation and offer with such generosity your wisdom and experience and insights. Yeah, a gift to be with you both today. Thank you so much.

Jim Finley: Thank you. It’s a gift to be invited to do this. I appreciate it. It’s gifted me too, so thank you.

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Jim. Drew, that was such a fun conversation to be a part of with you and Jim and a great way, I think, for your first joining on the podcast and with the long future I had together here. How did it feel for you as this is your first entry point into being a part of the cadre of co-hosts on the Everything Belongs podcast?

Drew Jackson: It was so beautiful and rich to be in that conversation with Jim. And the thing that was really striking me and just resonating in my soul was Jim’s reflections on how we can both stand in solidarity with the pain of the world and not be overwhelmed at the same time and just that dance between engaging and retreating to our own ground, our own belovedness, that word belovedness is the word that he used. And I mean, that is really the essential ground of everything. And so that invitation was so beautiful and is really resonating in me.

Paul Swanson: I love that. There are so many vapor trails of that belovedness throughout and the different ways he was talking about suffering at the religious consciousness, mystical consciousness, and reflecting over the ego consciousness. But it all felt encircled by this belovedness and this recognition that we are beloved by God and touching that place of oneness in a very grounded real way is what allows our heart to expand and be transformed.

Drew Jackson: Absolutely. It makes me think of Jesus and Jesus’s own movement in the gospels. If you watch Jesus, it’s this movement between this place of solitude and solitariness into engagement with the suffering of the world that was all around him. And I always think about what enabled Jesus to be so engaged with all of the stuff that was going on around

him, and to be described as someone who is very acquainted with sorrow as the tradition says, a man of sorrow is acquainted with grief, is often attributed to a messianic figure. And so how to do that, and when you see that in the life of Jesus as this drawing away to the desert and getting in touch again with his own belovedness, I often get this image of Jesus retreating from all of the voices to sit again under the one voice that could speak belovedness over him constantly and then re-engaging.

Paul Swanson: I love that image and the way that you bring in that teaching embodied lesson from Jesus and connect it to how Jim is inviting us into that same space. And as we were talking just a few minutes ago about an invitation, a contemplative prompt for our listeners today, we had talked about this and I wonder if you could tee that up for all those listening about something that they might carry with them, an invitation for how they might engage with this in their own lives as after they walk away from this podcast.

Drew Jackson: Absolutely. I mean, I think the invitation is really in what Jim said, it's that retreat back into the ground of our own belovedness. And to think about how do we build that into the rhythms of our own days and our own lives, that it takes a consciousness and an awareness of how we're moving through our days and how we are interacting with our own suffering and the suffering around us. And to be aware that we're not getting overwhelmed or becoming numb to that, but retreating back to that question, that essential question of who am I? Who am I? And to be able to hear with fresh ears, "I am beloved, I am beloved." And then out of that to then be able to reengage the world from a center of belovedness, from a place of belovedness so that I don't need to hear that from the world, I know that it's something that's in me and I can live out from that place, that place that I abide in. Jim used that word abide, right? So if I'm abiding in that belovedness, the fruit that comes out of that is a fruit of love for the world.

Paul Swanson: Beautiful. And so as all those listening take these words into hearts and look at their own lives, we invite you to seek that abiding and to live out of that sense of purposeful solidarity with the suffering of the world. Thank you, Drew. It's been a joy to be in conversation with you today and I look forward to future conversations with you and Mike and Carmen down the line.

Drew Jackson: Thanks Paul.

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](http://Cac.org). Everything Belongs is made possible thanks to the generosity of our supporters and the shared work of...

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Sarah Palmer: Sarah Palmer.

Dorothy Abrams: Dorothy Abrams.

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.