



EVERYTHING BELONGS

Contemplation

with Carmen Acevedo Butcher

Mike Petrow: Hey everybody. Welcome back to Everything Belongs podcast. I'm Mike Petrow. It's good to be joined by the one and only Mr. Paul Swanson. Paul, it is so good to see you.

Paul Swanson: So good to see you. And gosh, what a fun conversation this was with Richard and with Carmen later on. I have to pinch myself, we get to have these conversations on these incredible texts about these incredible themes. Yeah, I can't believe it.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, it's so awesome. And just to remind our listeners, this season we're going through Richard's book, *Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi*. And what's amazing is you don't have to read the book with us to listen to the episodes, because they're so rich and they're such good conversation, but if you want to, this week we're talking about chapter five, *Contemplation: A Different Way of Knowing*. And it is so, so good, we get to talk to Carmen Acevedo Butcher, one of our favorite teachers and friends, and we get to go join Richard in his living room for an intimate chat about how contemplation came into his life and what it means to him now.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And I felt like we went back to some of the baseboards of contemplation with Richard, talking about bearing the image of God, and what does it mean to grow in likeness, and we got into some Eastern Orthodox language around theosis and divinization and what does that mean, and what does it mean for those of us today as we seek to live in this growing expanse of participative scene? I feel like Richard, the lights get a little bit brighter on conversations that have to do with contemplation because it's been such a lighthouse for him, something that's really been a North Star. What's your impression when you're in those conversations with Richard on contemplation?

Mike Petrow: Oh man. I mean, listen, first of all, I love it whenever Eastern Orthodoxy comes up, because you know that's been a love of mine for many years, and having just discovered that I'm actually Russian, which I didn't know, is super cool, it adds another dimension to it. But yeah, Richard just opens the door to a whole different way of understanding when he teaches about contemplation. I'd been interested in mysticism for so many years. And when I ran across Richard's teaching on contemplation, and I really understood that he was giving us a way in, to open our eyes, to experiencing the mystical or the extraordinary in the ordinary. Goodness gracious, it changed my world. And never in a million years would I have guessed that I would get to sit down with yourself and Richard Rohr in his living room so often and let him practice contemplation right in front of us by seeing the divine shimmering out in everything around us and in all the things we talk about, it's of amazing.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, it's a huge gift, and I think it comes across in this conversation with Richard. And there's no better way for us to just throw it over to that conversation and give everyone a chance to join us in Richard's living room, with the two of us and Richard, and of course Opie at his feet or between us as we go into the myriad of ways of talking and experiencing and practicing contemplation.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, come on in everybody. Paul and I are going to be squeezed onto a tiny little couch with Opie wagging his tail between us, and Richard's going to be leaning back on his recliner, just sharing the wisdom. Here we go. From the Center for Action and Contemplation, I'm Mike Petrow.

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Mike Petrow: And this is Everything Belongs.

Paul Swanson: Richard, thanks again for inviting us into your hermitage to have this conversation on chapter five of *Eager to Love, Contemplation: A Different Way of Knowing*. It's great to be back in this couch with Opie here sitting between Mike and I, resting his eyes. And we've been eager to have this conversation on contemplation, knowing its roots and how deep it goes back into your lineage as a Franciscan. Of course, it goes further back than that, but that's how so much of this has come to be for you is what you've learned from the Franciscans and how it's formed you, so it's a joy to be in conversation.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, Richard, I'm super curious. Contemplation has been a huge part of your life in teaching. Do you remember when you first learned about it? Was it in seminary as a Franciscan?

Richard Rohr: Not directly, we didn't use the word. In fact, with great irony, the novice pastor used the word mental prayer. And it meant the opposite. It meant getting out of your mind, but I think the reason he used it, was to distinguish it from verbal prayer, recited prayer, memorized prayers, which ironically is mostly what we did, but the key was we came to chapel early in the morning, and we had to spend a half an hour on our knees in silence. And that was mental prayer, it was really contemplation by another name. And ironically, without much clear teaching on how to do that, some of us fell into it, because there was no teaching. The pre-Vatican II Catholic Church had lost in its main line the contemplative teaching.

As you've heard me say in other places, Thomas Merton retrieved the word, but even he didn't teach the how, only the what. So we all came to idealize this word contemplation, but there were few teachers around, to this day, it's so sad, who teach you how to do it, in terms of letting go of your thinking, letting go of your need to say prayers, and the whole movement toward lifestyle, being a prayer, doing everything consciously with love. I think I call it in the book participative prayer, where you aren't the prayer, someone else is praying in you, through you, with you, as you, and all you could do is let go and let it happen. It's such good news, because it lets loose of that whole notion of prayer as effortful or willpower, stay with it, grit your teeth and keep saying prayers. What a waste of time, because that still is emphasis upon me, Richard, doing the praying, whereas just let the prayer loose inside of me and it will happen. I still think that way that to this day

Mike Petrow: I love, in the third century, Origen wrote his famous book, *On Prayer*. And he looks at Paul, Paul says, "Pray without ceasing." And Origen says, "The only way we could ever really pray without ceasing is when we realize that all life is prayer, every moment of being alive is a conversation with the divine."

Richard Rohr: Well, that Origen. Yeah, he said it all.

Paul Swanson: Got there first.

Mike Petrow: Well, I love what you're describing, that, "I let prayer unfold in me." That's amazing. Do you think we see that in the life of Francis? Was that Francis's style of contemplation?

Richard Rohr: I think exactly so, and that's why he didn't need to chant psalms in a chapel. If you read his earliest lives, he's always wandering from one city to another by himself, if you think he lived in community, he's clearly in a daze of gazing.

Mike Petrow: Oh, that's a good phrase.

Richard Rohr: And the daze continues wherever he goes. I believe that now more than ever, having tried to understand his life all my life, he abides by the practice of the Benedictines, which is to say the whole office, which is 150 psalms in the course of the week, but he doesn't draw his inspiration from that at all. His Bible is nature, where he is all the time. I don't think he recognized that his genius was intuitive, it wasn't didactically taught to him. And that's the reason a lot of us didn't get it from him, the direct teaching. Maybe the direct teaching is impossible.

Mike Petrow: Well, I wonder, I think about Francis wandering the countryside. We talked about Francis preaching to birds. We'll get around to talking about Francis converting the wolf, which is one of my favorite stories. But you call this chapter A Different Way of Knowing. And I assume that when it comes to Francis, it required a different way of teaching. If it's a different way of knowing, the transmission must be a little different. Does that sound right?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. The different way of teaching became relationship, walking two by two. Even Shakespeare calls it walking like a friar, because we walked two by two, always taking those kind of things literally from Jesus, but then separating in a line, and that's what Shakespeare meant, you'd talk, but then you'd separate. One would walk six feet ahead of the other, to just behold the mystery, which had become you. And you, the seer, all you're seeing is what you have become, what you are. Union, union, union. Beautiful union.

Mike Petrow: Oh man, I love that image of seeing what you've become and what you are.

Richard Rohr: Oh, that's the heart of the matter. God is the goodness of everything, not just everything. We call that a heresy, God is everything. What did we call that?

Mike Petrow: Pantheism.

Richard Rohr: Pantheism.

Mike Petrow: As opposed to panentheism, which is God is in everything,

Richard Rohr: That God is the goodness of everything.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That's where I'm at now. Why I can gaze on this porch for hour and a half without getting bored, just seeing the leaves on that tree, the goodness of those leaves is God-

Paul Swanson: It's a beautiful, beautiful image.

Richard Rohr: ... but it's the goodness of God in me that sees it.

Paul Swanson: Yes.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. Well, I love that contemplation is a long, loving look at the real. And I don't think I've thought enough about the long, loving look at the real in the middle... In the mirror, excuse me, and seeing what I'm becoming, or what's unfolding in me.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And that was Clare's big metaphor, the mirror?

Richard Rohr: The mirror, she used it again and again.

Paul Swanson: Any example of that come to mind as how she exercise contemplation with mirror?

Richard Rohr: She uses it so much that she must have had a lot of what I'm on a call reflective experience, that what she saw was what she was, was what she passed on, the reflection bounced back and forth. There's no other reason she would've used the mirror image so much. And mirrors in the 13th century were very imperfect, they weren't the polished, clear mirrors we have now, they still had mirrors. I'm attracted to her use of the term precisely because she uses it so much, even though again she doesn't really explain what does she mean by a mirror, "You are a perfect mirror. What you see is what you are, and you have to stand in what you are." Which she and Francis both knew was a beloved child of God. So to stand in your belovedness, did I say this here or somewhere else this week? I try to interpret that verse, "Many are called, but few are chosen."

Mike Petrow: Oh, I haven't heard that.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: That was to somebody else. Didn't that line always bother you?

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: Yep.

Richard Rohr: I've never met a person who has given a satisfactory interpretation of that. Well, now I'm going to give it to you-

Paul Swanson: Oh, boy.

Mike Petrow: Oh, here it comes.

Richard Rohr: ... what I think. Who cares what I think, but many are called, the many, we would say the masses, the masses are called. I think that's a better translation of it, but there's only a few who live inside the beloved status. Oh, it was him talking about the prophets who try to tell Israel they are the beloved of God, who choose that they are chosen, that's only a minority, but that's enough to hand on the message. It's the prophetic theme of the remnant, there's only a minority of people who choose that they're chosen. So the masses are called, God's called everybody. That old guy walking across the parking lot, God's calling him, but I don't know how much he's enjoying it. The enjoyment of it is the few. That's my present interpretation of that-

Mike Petrow: I like that a lot.

Richard Rohr: ... enigmatic line, which makes sense to so few people, many are called, but few are chosen, because we make it into an elitism again. And it's not an elitism, it's just a description of the way it's playing out. And the way it's playing out is there are so few who just enjoy the participative union, that is total gift, not moral achievement. Not moral achievement. And that's at the heart of Franciscan contemplation, it's not moralistic. I'm going to use the word, not to offend anybody, it's not Calvinistic. And I really don't resent John Calvin, I just wish he understood the gospel, that it's known by participation with God in God, not by achievement of teeth-gritting moral behavior.

Mike Petrow: Well, this reminds me of there's this idea that I love in the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition where they talk about theosis, that theosis is becoming Christ-like. And the idea is not we work hard to be good or we work hard to gain our salvation, although those are implicit in it, it's we're transforming. I know you can talk about that better than I can in regards to this book.

Paul Swanson: Well, this is a great segue, this feels like it all connects together within this chapter, and as an entry point for listeners or new readers to this book, where you bring us back to Genesis 1, where you say, "For most of us, this objective divine image that we're born with has not yet become the subjective likeness. Our goal is to illustrate both the image and likeness of God." So I think of that as enjoying that divine [inaudible 00:18:54].

Richard Rohr: Both image and likeness.

Paul Swanson: Image and likeness.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Paul Swanson: And it seems to me that Francis and Clare go all in on this vocational deepening. They savor it, they recognize it, they gaze from it.

Richard Rohr: They enjoy the fruits of it.

Paul Swanson: They enjoy the fruits. And they grow in this likeness by what the gospel compels them to do. How does Francis and Clare's surrendering in this way speak to the radical expression of the contemplative way that they embodied and shared?

Richard Rohr: They couldn't have both spoken with such calm confidence. Do you ever watch Dog Whisperer, Caesar Milan?

Paul Swanson: I remember, I've seen it before, but now [inaudible 00:19:43].

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: And those are his words for how you train a dog, and it always works, at least when he does it. You have to be calmly confident of who you are. And when you speak from that place of calm confidence, a dog knows it, and will listen to you. When you speak from a place of

insecurity, doubt, unsurety of what you really want, the dog knows that and shares in your anxiety. I think that's true. I think I've had to learn how to talk here with Opie with calm confidence. You two must too, because he's snuggled there between you, trusting both of you. Oh, you know we're talking about you, don't you? Calm confidence might be a better word for faith than believing the doctrines of the church. I've had it with people who believe the doctrines, it sounds terrible, but it's just a wrong definition of faith.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Isn't the root word of belief to wish?

Richard Rohr: What's the root word?

Paul Swanson: Isn't the root meaning to wish? So beliefs are in a sense almost like a wished for, where I feel like faith leans into that calm confidence, it takes away some of the magical thinking that I hear and to wish for.

Richard Rohr: You might be right. I don't know what source you're drawing upon.

Paul Swanson: I can't remember. So I need to be fact-checked, but that's what I recall.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Was it the Hebrew word or the Greek word?

Paul Swanson: I cannot recall for the life of me, but I remember reading it somewhere. I'll have to look it up.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. Oh, you're like me. You're getting like me already, forgetting things. Don't go there.

Paul Swanson: I'll check with our librarian.

Richard Rohr: Lee will know.

Mike Petrow: What's interesting, I'm thinking about, just bring it all together, again, this beautiful verse in Genesis where God says that He's created humanity and the image and likeness of God.

Richard Rohr: And likeness.

Mike Petrow: And a lot of the early theologians, and the Eastern Orthodox, they nuanced that by saying all of us have the image of God, everyone's created in the image of God.

Richard Rohr: Everyone has, yeah. [inaudible 00:22:35].

Mike Petrow: And then our task in life is to transform more and more into the likeness of God, to become more Christ-like, to become more loving. It's interesting-

Richard Rohr: So that others can feel the Christ's presence.

Mike Petrow: Emanating out of that calm confidence.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. The line that comes to life for me is, I wonder if I was being obnoxious when my

novice pastor said, “Richard, you have to make it easier for people to love you.” That’s likeness, you have to make it easier for people to love you.

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Mike Petrow: That is a life task right there,

Richard Rohr: Isn’t it? Yes.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. Oh, I love that. Well, and it’s interesting too, I think about what you’re talking about, even in this, I love the phrase, was it the days of gazing? And as we look lovingly at the world, does that cause us to become more loving, as our view of the world is transformed, that we’ve transformed as well?

Richard Rohr: That’s the reflecting of the mirror that Clare’s talking about. As we gaze at it, it imprints, and that becomes our life stance, just to be the beauty of that leaf hanging there for a few more weeks until fall comes, and then allowing itself to fall, inherent dignity, so much so that it’s willing to fall off the branch and die. Does that make sense? It does to me.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, sobering and profound

Richard Rohr: And that inherent dignity that you’re enjoying also makes it easy for you to fall off the branch in that final falling that we call death. What’s to be afraid of? Someone has been loving me in all my ups and downs and half-hearted living of life. Why would this God change his policy toward me when I go to the final death? And that is easy belief for me now. Yeah, I do think about death a lot, but I can definitely say I’m not afraid of it. If I heard that it was going to happen at 3:00 this afternoon, I wouldn’t run somewhere and say a fervent prayer. Well, maybe I would, I don’t know, but I don’t feel like I would.

Mike Petrow: Had a Buddhist teacher who taught me that-

Richard Rohr: Maybe I should want to. Go ahead, I’m sorry.

Mike Petrow: Well, no, I had a Buddhist teacher who taught that practice was preparation for death, and not in a morbid sense of-

Richard Rohr: No, not in an anxious sense.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, but also in this notion that if death is rejoining being or whatever we come from, for us, if death is returning to the love from which we came, we will spend the majority of our existence in that state. So contemplation is just a preparation for stepping back into that.

Richard Rohr: Very good. Very good. Thank you.

Paul Swanson: A remembering too, in a way, right?

Mike Petrow: Mm-hmm.

Paul Swanson: A remembering to rejoin-

Richard Rohr: Remember.

Paul Swanson: ... before we were born.

Richard Rohr: And now I just saw a little hummingbird flicker through two branches. For the Native peoples, there he is again, the hummingbird, they didn't understand Holy Spirit the way we do, but that was their animal which spoke of the spirit, the hummingbird, which just flickered around. I have a hummingbird feeder here, and I've been watching them a lot. They don't stay there drinking, they just shoot out and shoot back, and you find it hard to position them. I can see why the Native peoples thought that was the spirit, moving quickly from here to there, and we can't capture him. You never have a hummingbird in a cage, I don't think. Have you ever seen a hummingbird in a cage?

Mike Petrow: It's a great story, I got chills thinking about it. I was, I think last weekend hiking, and at the top of my hike I got up in a tree and a hummingbird came out and got right in my face

Richard Rohr: While you were up in the tree?

Mike Petrow: Yeah.

Paul Swanson: Wow.

Richard Rohr: Oh, that's beautiful. I'm glad I mentioned it.

Mike Petrow: Yeah, I like to pray in trees on my hikes. Well, as we bring this conversation to a close, Richard, you've taught contemplation for over 50 years, you are more deeply engaged in the practice of gauging than you've ever been. What parting advice would you give our listeners for stepping into the type of seeing and being that you describe in this chapter?

Richard Rohr: Don't think of it as a duty or obligation. That distorts it, "I have to pray to make God happy." You have to pray to make yourself content, that's different, to live in the already, in the now, in the enough. You have to pray or you won't be content. I'm just grabbing for words.

Paul Swanson: I think that's so true, always when we try to talk about prayer or contemplative practice, we grab for words because that's all we can do, we're trying to speak to something-

Richard Rohr: That's all we can do.

Paul Swanson: ... about getting out of the way, surrendering, letting go of our our agenda for what we think we want or hope for in participation in God, where it's just actually releasing to enjoy it.

Richard Rohr: No definition will be adequate, it's like, it's like, it's like, it's like. Well, thank you for desiring such truth. I hope it's coming through on some level. Thank you.

Paul Swanson: Thank you, Richard.

Mike Petrow: Thanks for your quiet confidence. Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

Paul Swanson: Hey everyone, welcome back. As we explore chapter five, our guest today is Carmen Acevedo Butcher. She's an author, teacher, poet, and award-winning translator of spiritual texts. Additionally, she's the senior lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley, in the college writing programs, and she's affiliate faculty here at the Center for Action and Contemplation. And we hope you enjoy this conversation that Mike and I have with Carmen Acevedo Butcher on chapter five.

Carmen, welcome to Everything Belongs. We're so thrilled to have you here in conversation. There's so many things we could talk about, but we're going to try to harness our energy and our attention to talk about some themes around chapter five, Contemplation: A Different Way of Knowing. How are you doing today, Carmen?

Carmen Acevedo ...: Oh, I'm great. Thank you, Paul, Mike, it's so good to be with y'all.

Mike Petrow: Oh, it's good to see you too, Carmen. It's always one of the highlights of my days when we get to talk. And it's good to see you too, Paul. I feel like it's been a hot second since we met together on the Everything Belongs podcast, and it's always the-

Paul Swanson: I know, right?

Mike Petrow: Yeah, yeah. It's just when I get to hear that Swanson swoon, it just makes my heart skip a beat.

Paul Swanson: This is a lovely trio to be in conversation with. If I can applaud our own efforts here, I always think I learn something when I'm in conversation with the two of you, you bring such unique perspectives and insight and wisdom. And just as a starting place, Carmen, we would love to know, since the theme of this season is Eager to Love, Richard's book on Franciscan spirituality, do you remember the first time that you came across Francis or Clare or their communities? And if you do remember, what imprint did they make on you at that time?

Carmen Acevedo ...: The first time I really met Francis and Clare was in graduate school. And the main impression I got was, "Here are two people who feel about the earth the way I do." That was my initial impression. So I never had what Richard, I love how he refers to it as birdbath theology, I never had that. I just was like, "Wait, here are two people who are really respected in Christianity, and they're talking about the earth, and really giving my experience with the earth much credence." It's not just my child heart, in other words.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, yeah. So in that initial recognition, have you noticed ways that your relationship to Francis and Clare and their spirituality has evolved from that first recognition of a kinship around the love of earth and the planet and the wild, how have you seen that evolve since that time?

Carmen Acevedo ...: Wow. I've never been asked that question, but I got goosebumps as you were asking it, Paul, because two of the ways are that the deepening was how they bring non-oppositional energy to trying to bring that love they experience of God in the earth, to their society and to their world. And so I didn't notice that at first. It was more about, "Oh, fellow Earthlings," people who really appreciate ducks and egrets and ants and things and the dirt like I do. But then when I saw that Francis and Clare, they're both so wise about not just

pushing back, but the way he built the churches outside, you know what I mean? The way he repaired and did things without pushing back, because I grew up in a dynamic of the evangelical churches of the childhood that I spent being taken to those Southern Baptist churches, and it was all oppositional energy, “We’re right, they’re wrong.” And that’s not at all what Francis was about. He gave me new ways to think of how I could be love in my own environment, and still have my boundaries at the same time.

Mike Petrow: I really appreciate that, Carmen. And I appreciate, I think one of the things that the three of us share, we’ve talked about this before on this podcast, is how we learn love from the more-than-human world. So I always joke that my favorite apocryphal saying from St. Francis is preach the gospel, and if necessary, use birds.

Carmen Acevedo ...: I haven’t heard that.

Mike Petrow: I love how.

Carmen Acevedo ...: Bet you’re really winging it there, Mike.

Mike Petrow: Oh my God, that hurt me. And it was perfect. Good God.

Carmen Acevedo ...: I love that, really.

Mike Petrow: That was great, Carmen. Wow. But I love, we’ve all communed on this before, how we are following, I think in the footsteps of Francis. We learn from our time in nature. And I know, Carmen, we share with you how much we feel it. I thought of you the other day, I was out hiking and got stuck in some pretty deep New Mexico mud, which is like glue, and it was up to my calves, and finally extricated myself, and kicked up a black-tailed jackrabbit, which I’ve never seen before, they’re huge. And had the ravens and everybody around. And I immediately thought of you, Carmen. I was like, “This is a moment that Carmen would appreciate.” Yeah, would you say something more, just for our listeners, in the spirit of Francis and Clare, how nature teaches you love?

Carmen Acevedo ...: Well, Richard says in this book, I think it’s in a footnote from the Immortal Diamond, he says all of his books are about humans enjoy an inherent God-given connection with God. He says, “That’s what all my books are about.” And this is in a footnote. So I always recommend reading Richard’s footnotes. And for me, no matter the state of my life, I often like to think of what Jim says, but when I was a child, Jim says, “If we are grounded in love, in the absolute love of God that protects us from nothing, even as it sustains us in all things, it grounds us to face all things with courage and tenderness.” And this is why when Richard says, “This is inherent connection,” he even calls it later on in the chapter an ontological union. So in other words, we don’t have to do anything but just be aware of it.

And as a child, I often went out in nature to escape a loud and violent home. And out in nature I found that ontological silence that Dr. B talks about, that union, and that Richard talks about. And I didn’t have words for it, but I didn’t need words for it. We try, and I’ve been guilty of this so much, but we try so hard, but even before I had words for this, and it did help me later to have some kind of words to describe these experiences, obviously, but as

a child, I was held in nature. And the person I most relate to on this is Howard Thurman, where he talks about he would sit underneath the oak tree and unpack his heart, and he would take out the joys, the blessings, the requests, the angers. And so I grew up out in nature speaking my heart to God, and realizing without anybody telling me that I could say anything, and Brother Lawrence says, “You would be surprised sometimes what happens in these brief conversations with God.”

I had nobody to tell me, “Oh, Carmen, you can’t say that to God.” And what I discovered is that God can take everything. Anything I would say to God was acceptable, and accepted and heard, and I would learn things from it. And then sometimes it would be just sheer joy, Mike, Paul. So I remember one time, I don’t remember the age I was, but maybe 12 or 13, and I went out to the pine woods behind our house, those tall loblolly pines of Georgia, and I may have even been burning trash earlier or something, but I went for a walk through the woods, and next thing I knew I was swinging around one of the trees and dancing. And when I got done, I was like, “Wow, what was that?” And it felt so normal. I couldn’t explain it, but at the same time, I knew this is me.

Paul Swanson: Yeah,

Mike Petrow: Yeah, yeah. I think of a friend and teacher, I think that you and I share, Paul, Belden Lane, and he wrote my all-time favorite book, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes*, where he talks about this practice he’s had of just praying with this one particular tree for years and years and years, just going to this one fidelity of place and space. Yeah, Carmen, I appreciate that, the liberatory experience of that.

Paul Swanson: Amen. And I feel like you tee up this next question, which is directly related to this chapter too, where the chapter of course is called *Contemplation: A Different Way of Knowing*. And we can go in a whole bevy of directions when it comes to contemplation, but I would love for us to define that term first for you, Carmen, how do you define contemplation, how do you bring that word into your theological awareness, your lived experience, your practicality, how do you define contemplation?

Carmen Acevedo ...: Every time you would ask me this question, I would have a different definition, I think, because I’m always asking-

Paul Swanson: I love it.

Carmen Acevedo ...: ... myself this question. But last night I happened to be at Book Passages, and I was listening to Mirabai Starr talking about her book with Anne Lamott there. And she was saying, “Really, this book is about mysticism, which is putting on a new pair of glasses so you can see.” And so for me, that’s what it is, is putting on this new pair of glasses to remind me that I’m love, the world is love, God is love, which is so easy to forget. And then of course, I would supplement that with my obsession with the histories of words and such, which does support that, being like a temple within us, where we can look out and see. But yeah, it’s just a new pair of glasses. I love Mirabai Anne’s definition.

Mike Petrow: Oh, that’s so great. And I appreciate that, because this is a podcast where we talk about living the teachings of Richard Rohr forward. And Richard really, really loves this theme of seeing. He talks about it in this chapter, who’s seeing, what are we seeing, what is seen?

And I love when Richard defines contemplation as a long, loving look at the real. This idea of contemplation as a way of seeing seems to go way, way back, prophets, oracles and shamans were known as seers. We have this practice that you and I love, Carmen, the prayer of the heart from the ancient Christian contemplatives, Origen says we sink our mind into our heart and look there for other eyes. We have the Jesus prayer, which I also know you, Carmen, and I have geeked out about together, but this prayer, Jesus Christ, son of the Living God, have mercy on me, which comes from a story in the gospels where a blind man says, “Jesus Christ, son of David, have mercy on me.” He’s asking for his eyes to be opened.

So I have loved all the conversations we’ve had, Carmen, in *The Living School*, and in just our own personal connection about prayer as seeing and prayer is paying attention. So I have to ask, you’ve translated *The Cloud of Unknowing*, you’ve translated *Practicing the Presence* by Brother Lawrence. I know you’ve recently translated something, I don’t know if we’re allowed to talk about it or not, but I know I’m excited about it. Can I share?

Carmen Acevedo ...: Mm-hmm.

Mike Petrow: Yes, I know you’ve been working on the Gospel of Thomas lately. What have translating these beautiful mystical texts taught you about seeing as contemplation?

Carmen Acevedo ...: Oh wow, y’all asking me questions that are giving me goosebumps. And I just want to say I’ve so enjoyed our conversations in the essentials dialogues, it’s been wonderful. So what it’s taught me in one sentence is to be kinder to myself, but that has really been healing for me. When I translated *The Cloud of Unknowing*, it was these people aren’t dead at all to me. And when you read somebody’s writing, you really get to know them better. It can be a first-year’s essay, it can be Brother Lawrence’s writing from the 1600s, it doesn’t matter, our writing is like a fingerprint. And when I translated *The Cloud*, it was really me wanting to eat *The Cloud*. And it was shadow for me, because I was really translating to escape my pain on some level, because it’s a complex life. And I was also trying to find a way to find peace. And I just was pulled to *The Cloud* because I just knew it could heal me, I didn’t have words for that. And I really did a lot of contemplation. That’s what it was for me, these translations are contemplation at the deepest level, along with *Lectio Divina* that I do every day. And so it was really intense.

And then when I got to Brother Lawrence a few years down the road, as I started typing him up, I was like, “Oh wow, I do this. I’ve prayed like this since a child.” And it was a part of the gold in my shadow that I had never seen before, just because trauma had hidden it from me. I was afraid to see it, I couldn’t see it. And as I was able to embrace that during the pandemic days, I became so self-compassionate, at that level, which was really new for me because I was used to being hard on myself. And I was like, “Oh, wow.” It was better than dark chocolate, I like to say. I am just still to this day so grateful for that. One of the mystics, is it Mechthild of Magdeburg, or somebody says, that God may seem delayed, but God is always right on time. So I’m very grateful.

Mike Petrow: I can’t help but wonder, and these are oversimplifications of texts that you’re so intimately familiar with, but I always think of *The Cloud of Unknowing* in the terms of the stripping away of our ideas, our thoughts, our preconceived notions, maybe the scripts and the limitations that have been put on us. So we’re unseeing in *The Cloud of Unknowing*. And

then with Brother Lawrence, we're starting to see and experience the presence of God in the ordinary in everything that's happening around us moment by moment. Do you think these two go hand in hand? Do we need a stripping away first before we can see the divine right in front of us?

Carmen Acevedo ...: Oh, I really love that actually. Yeah, I really love that. I don't think I can improve on that, because that was really my experience with them. And then with Brother Lawrence going, "Okay, I already do this. Now just see that you do it." So that was really the key in the ordinary. So that contemplation can be answering emails or doing a report that I'm not particularly keen on doing. Like we all have reports in our lives we have to write or do, things like that, and finding this as a gift in some way. So yeah, Mike, and definitely, I remember I was reading Thomas Keating at the same time that I was translating *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and he kept saying, "When you do these intense periods of contemplation, that it's really like you're moving junk out." And I don't know that I really like the term junk, it's more like unburdening, but really and truly that stripping that you're talking about, of letting go of the small ego concerns, and letting go of the injuries even, and entrusting them to this healing love, was really a stripping away, it was.

Mike Petrow: Well, this is a perfect trifecta, you remind me constantly of something that Jim says. So I love I get to talk to you. And then you in your wisdom remind me of something that another teacher that we love, Jim, says, when you say over and over again, what is it, "Only love has the right to name who we truly are," and remembering that in seeing ourselves in contemplation. So there's a letting go of all those other scripts, all those other voices that want to tell us who we are. And then am I saying that right? I know you say it all the time, and I don't have it committed to memory.

Carmen Acevedo ...: Yeah, he says, "Only love has the power to name who we are." Yeah. That to me is one of my mantras. And it's so true, because we grow up, and we might have a parent who tells us we're worthless, or we might have this notion that we've got to make all A's in school, that there's always some sort of somebody telling us these different sorts of things. And then the difficulty becomes that we internalize these things and then we tell it to ourselves, which is the worst thing to really get healing with. But yeah, only love has the power to name who we are. It's like that Hallelujah chorus, it's like hearing that burst open in your mind and thinking, "Yeah, that's it. I'm not going to settle for anything less, because that's the promise."

Mike Petrow: Well, and what a gift, what an invitation to this long, loving look at the real to see love in reality and birds and trees and the people around us, but also in ourselves. Actually, if y'all would take a journey with me for a second, you know that I love Carl Jung, something that I find absolutely fascinating is, there was a quote I had read from him early, and I was very curious about what he meant by it, and I'm starting to think he's referring to contemplation. Here's what it is. He's talking about a way of seeing the world that he thinks that Christianity lost. And so this is he writes, "Christianity must indeed begin again from the very beginning if it's to meet its high-educative task. So long as religion is only faith in outward form and not experienced in our own souls, nothing of any importance has happened. The person who doesn't know this from their own experience could even be a learned theologian, but they would still have no idea of religion or education. Even theologians could fail to see that it's not a matter of proving the existence of the light, but if people who don't know that

their eyes could see. It's high time we realize it's pointless to praise the light and preach it if nobody can see. It's much more needful to teach people the art of seeing."

And this reminds me of something that Richard said. Carmen, you've worked with us in The Living School. Paul, you were one of the early architects of The Living school. And I ran across this statement recently, Richard talking about the living school, and he says, "That's spiritual seeing, teaching you how to be contemplative and see the sacred in everything all the time, everywhere." So you see why at our school and at our center, the teaching of contemplation is the underlying epistemology. It's what we begin with, it's what we begin everything with. We don't want to teach people what to see, we want to teach people how to see. This is a huge question, but what do you think the invitation is in our time to recapture that kind of seeing for Christianity, but also for each and every person listening to this podcast?

Carmen Acevedo ...: That's such a good question. Richard calls it in the chapter participative seeing. So it's an embodied seeing. It's seeing with our feet on the ground, knowing that as a human, I'm made of earth, and that I'm a creature. And it's a reminder that, as Richard says also in this chapter, contemplation is a gift I can ask for. And then he says that it's a matter of surrendering, not achieving. And I think it's interesting, because in that quote you just gave from Jung, who yes, we share a huge love for, he mentions something about proving, not something to be proved. And surrender is actually to give back and over. So in other words, to give up, the stripping away and the accepting. But achieve is very interesting, because achieve has a head in it. One of the roots of the word achieve is head, and it's something we do with our heads, I think, "Okay, I can do this, I can define this, I can explain it." Mike, you like to say this, it's experiencing, not explaining, but achieving is something I can explain.

So I think this contemplative vision is so much more relaxing even in the middle of, because I have to tell you, as a child, there was so much chaos in my childhood. And in the middle of that, there were these moments of me memorizing Bible verses that turned into being Lectio, there was me experiencing these moments of calm in amongst these times of chaos, and real violence and concern for, for example, "Will we all be alive tomorrow?" And as we deal with, Brian's just written the book, Life After Doom, as we deal with ecological overshoot and hurricanes and so many concerns, a person with empathy will be worried about all these things, all around the world, the wars. And I think to be a loving presence in the world and to try to in some small way alleviate someone's pain and have compassion for myself is this participative seeing, because then I think, when I see an egret fly over, "You're my sibling." Okay, so can I just geek out for a minute with you too? I just have to tell you. So when I know I'm going to meet with y'all, and I look up a word, I think, "Oh, I might get a chance to share this with Mike and Paul." So recently I just learned, can you believe, life is so full of these wonderful joys throughout your whole life, that sibling and self share the same root.

Mike Petrow: Oh, cool.

Carmen Acevedo ...: So they both mean self. So my sibling is my other self. And so the way Francis says, you have, as I always think of it, I think Sister, Sun, and Brother Moon. However, he actually said it in the reverse, but we're all siblings. And I think that's what the contemplative seeing is, is seeing this Indra's net of I'm attached to everyone. So I'm not separate and

scared, I'm attached, and in relationship with everyone and everything, even the stones.

Mike Petrow: Carmen, talking about the pain of your childhood, talking about the overwhelming amount of crises that we see around the world right now, wars are raging, we are an ecological crisis, folks are being battered hurricanes, and we could go on and on, and yet we see beauty in the egrets and in the ducks and in the moments of just beautiful humanity that pass us on the street. But this seeing is not putting on rose-colored glasses. And I think that's where the disconnect lands for some people. It's not choosing not to see the hurt of the world, it's choosing to see that and have a broad enough vision to see love in the midst of it as well. I'd love to hear from both of you, Paul, you as well, how do you practice that, how do you open your eyes wide enough to see all the hurt, and also all the healing, and all the loss, and all the love?

Carmen Acevedo ...: What I appreciate about this chapter, and I'm glad you brought this up, Mike, is that Richard really deals with that, in this chapter five. He says, "One of the things we need to do is gaze on the cross, and let it return Jesus and love to us." And he gives us three steps. He says, "We have to face feeling forsaken." So one of my difficulties for the longest time, she's told me I can share this, so between my mother and me was I would say to her mother, "I need to just say sometimes my favorite prayer from the Bible is Jesus on the cross saying, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why have you forsaken us? What is going on?'" And at first she would be like, "That's a bridge too far." But I would say, "Mother, I find such comfort in that." So I think first of all it's just being able to say, "My heart is broken. This isn't right." I mean, as a child I would say to God, "I'm a good kid, I'm doing my best. Why do we have this horror in my family with people I love?" And I never got an answer. Do you understand? Last night I heard Anne Lamott say, Julian of Norwich says, "All will be well, and all will be well, all manner of things will be well," and Anne Lamott said, "Yeah, right." Like, "That's not always true."

And there's that. And then Richard says, "You pray, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing." So there's the element of, "How do I deal with this with forgiveness?" And that's a complex subject. And then the last one is, "Into your hands I give my spirit." So for me, I've heard this term before, I don't know that I like it that much, but I know it's used a lot, the bypassing thing, it's about saying, "This smells, this is horrible, this is criminal. What do we do? This is a mess. I don't know what to do," but then being met. I so trust the third way now, the third way, the way that I don't have in mind how to fix it. I spent so many years fixing things in my mind like, "Oh, if I could just do this." And now I just go, "What do I do?" That's my favorite prayer, "What do I do?"

Paul Swanson: Wow, that's mighty. Thank you, Carmen. I love that passage too, of what Richard shares in the book, those three points, and the invitation to internalize the message of the crucifixion. And so we see out with those crucified eyes. When I look at my kids and just the fragility of them in this world, and they're still in this phase of a lot of just unguarded joy with everything. My son just had a birthday this week, and so everything was turned to 11, it didn't matter what it was. And you can't help but fall into that participant of joy. And I feel like that is the contemplative invitation regardless of what's going on in the world. And that doesn't mean it's cheap or shallow. I think about Simone Weil's line about, "In the beauty of the world, brute necessity becomes an object of love." And just the way that the world can be very brutal, and that beauty is a necessity, and that it helps us formulate our own sense of

relationality to love that helps us get through.

I think about Viktor Frankl, and just the noticings that he had in *Man's Search for Meaning* that helped propel him. I remember one passage, it's just been a while since I've read it, where said to him, "You walk like a mountaineer." And here they are in this death camp, and somebody says that, and they took such pride in that they could see his craft from before. So even being surrounded by atrocity, him being recognized for this small thing, this passion of his before became enlarged and inflamed to something he could take pride in, regardless of what's going on around. Again, doesn't dismiss what's happening. And I look for that with, I say this, I feel like I think about this every day, to look where there's life, like, "Where is life happening right now?" And it's the egrets, it's the ducks, it's children, it's the changing in seasons, it's friends' smiles. But to pay attention with that fullness of heart is my greatest discipline in a contemplative practice, to show up and constantly be saying, "Lord have mercy." Because I don't know what else to say when I behold the largeness of the beauty or of the brutality. Mike, how about you, how does that land for you with your own question?

Mike Petrow: Oh man. Oh, I wasn't prepared to answer my own question. I think the way that it lands for me in this exact moment is three things. One, the way this podcast is called *Everything Belongs*, and I always joke and say like, "My most honest question is, if everything belongs, why does it have to hurt so much?" And I think that question is the beginning of the reality of it, but I also recognize I'm sitting right here with three of my favorite people in the world. Paul, I've learned so much working with you here and the way you really embody contemplation as a person, as a parent, as a teacher. Carmen, I've learned so much from you as a human, as a person, truly walking your healer's journey, as a scholar, as a fellow dyslexic person who's letting seeing the world differently open your eyes in a different way, and reminding listeners, like Corey's here with us as well. And Corey is someone who has walked his own, I would say truly heroic journey in finding meaning and living into his true identity, irregardless of what the world would ask of him, instead recognizing who he is and what he has to give in his own unique way, and the quintessential example of someone in the background silently making all this happen, right?

Paul Swanson: So true.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. And so the gift of the glorious revelation of the divine in the humans around me, but also the willingness to watch everyone be nailed to their own cross and carry their own struggles and suffering. I've seen all of you face really difficult challenges in the last little bit. So I don't know, man, it's an open-ended question for me. I think the struggle makes the beauty that much more beautiful, but to be very nerdy about it, I have a little limerick I like to say, which is as nerdy as it gets when I say the only answer to theodicy is theophany. And theodicy is the theological term for the question of if God is good in love, why do bad things happen? And the theophany is God shows up in the real world. And so the only answer to like, "Why is life so hard?" Is I don't know, but it does seem to be there, that divine love is made most real.

And so all I know is the practice of trying to hold gratitude and grief and sorrow and celebration together. There's some ramblings of, I don't know, but I appreciate the invitation. I think the cross means so much more to me than it used to, it doesn't mean anything at all. It used to be this thing of like, "Here's what paid the price for your sins." And now it's,

“Here’s a reminder that it’s really hard to be alive and it’s really hard to love, but it’s worth it. It’s worth paying the price to love.” Sorry, there’s a ramble.

Carmen Acevedo ...: That was beautiful.

Mike Petrow: I don’t I know if any of that lands.

Paul Swanson: Yeah, that I’ll preach.

Carmen Acevedo ...: No, it was beautiful. And it reminds me, Mike, of how you often say that deep listening is important, is what makes us human, is what we’re all trying to do here and wherever we go. And for me, that’s where a lot of the beauty of life is too, is in either being deeply listened to, or trying to deeply listen, and some magic that happens, that you cannot explain.

Mike Petrow: Yeah. Oh, it’s interesting. So this chapter’s on contemplation. We had a chapter on mysticism, we talked to our good friend Mirabai Starr about that one. And I found myself last night as I was getting ready for this episode, wondering what is the difference between mysticism and contemplation. And I wonder if contemplation is the stance in the view that allows the mystical moments to break in and be possible. But yeah, thanks for that reminder, Carmen, that’s been something I’ve been learning the last two years, is that contemplation is deep listening and not deep ignoring. It’s closing our mouths so we learn how to speak, getting into quiet so we learn how to listen, closing our eyes so we learn how to see, getting still so we learn how to take action. And you’ve really helped me learn a lot of that in the last two years of working with you. And you too, Paul. And you too, Corey. What a gift.

Paul Swanson: I would love to expand further on that question to tee up your sense of this, Carmen, where oftentimes contemplation gets put on the cushion, like, “Contemplation is what happens when you sit in meditation or contemplative prayer.” And of course that’s true, but how would you also invite others to lean into the contemplative practice of the tradition, whether it’s this, the prayer of the heart, Lectio Divina, but also being ambassadors who are pushing the boundaries of what it means to join in this participative scene called contemplation? So how would you encourage those listening who say, “I don’t have time,” or like, “I have these traditional ways of practicing contemplation,” but are also maybe pushing the boundaries in their daily life of thinking of it as, like you were saying earlier, dancing with the trees, or having a mantra that came from a place that wasn’t necessarily the sanctioned way we think of sacred texts coming from, what would you invite listeners into that space to explore?

Carmen Acevedo ...: I would invite them to explore... Just you worded that so beautifully, Paul, because one of my favorite parts of The Cloud of Unknowing is that he says, “Just try.” He says, “And as you try this contemplation, you’ll discover that God is your teacher, and God can teach you far better than I can.” And so in other words, what he does in The Cloud is he says, because he’s an experienced contemplative, and he says, “This is what works for me, these strategies. You try them. If they work for you, great. If you find something else that you try works better for you, come back and tell me,” he said, “Because I’m certain that you can teach me more than I can teach you.” And that’s a true teacher. But what I love about it is that there’s a personalization of the experience and an invitation to experiment.

So there’s not a method that we will lock into and forever have the way to contemplation

for the rest of our lives. There are ways to practice that are time-tested and work, but it's like any relationship, you can find out the principles of good relationships, but when you're in a relationship, it's very personal, and you've got to figure it out as you go. I mean, it's the same dynamic. So I would say one of my favorite prayers, because I used to think I was doing everything wrong, because I learned contemplation as a child, trying to make my way through difficulties. And I do and have sat, I've done all the traditional things, centering, prayer, everything, still do. But I for the longest time didn't realize that also walking counted, like praying the Jesus prayer walking counted, walking with Bible verses on a 3X5 card counted, and was even Lectio Divina before I had the words for Lectio Divina.

So one of my favorite prayers is, "What should I do? How should I do it? What do I need?" So I'm full of mostly questions on this, and then, "Thank you for helping me. That worked for me, thank you for that." So for me, it's mostly about dialogue, but then also like washing dishes, Brother Lawrence is so good at this, and Richard's talked about this, but Brother Lawrence says, this is his definition, "Just try to return to love, to God as often as you can throughout the day." And he says, "When you forget, no big deal, NBD. Just return when you can."

So it's not that feeling that I grew up with, that if you missed church on Wednesday night, somebody called you and they're saying, "Where were you?" It's not admonishment of any sort. It's just you turn up and God's like, "Great." It's like if I haven't called my mother for a few days, she might send me a text, "How's it going?" And then when I call her, she's like, "Oh, it's so good to talk with you." It's not that notion of, "You haven't called me in so many days." It's like, "God's excited you're back. God never left, and you never left really, quite." There's just that notion, that illusion of separation because you weren't paying attention.

So that's what I would say, because Brother Lawrence says, "Whatever you're doing, whether it's washing dishes or flipping an omelet in the pan," or as I like to think of it, answering emails, because that's my *bête noire*, is work emails, you get so many and such, is trying to be very mindful about that. And also small things like, "What meme can I add to my course that will make students feel cheerful?" So that's also contemplation. So definitely I would say find the ones that have worked for others, read all about it that you can, and then ask God, "What would work for me? Wait, walking works. Okay, that works too." Yeah.

Mike Petrow: I love the permission in that, because first of all, one of the things I've learned from our conversations, Carmen, is that everyone is already a contemplative, they just don't know it. So to figure out what's natural for you and the thing you already lean towards, it might be a sitting practice, it might be walking, it might be reading deeply, but to just lean into that and trust it. And then when I was a Living School student, one of my classmates was a Zen teacher, and a real lineage, had gone through all the trainings, and the lineage, could trace themselves all the way back to the Buddha. And she and I would talk about Zen, and she was a very, very beautiful tutor for a bit for me.

And I remember she told me once, I'll never forget this, she said, "Look, Zen is just being present in the moment. That's all, being fully present to what is." She said, "This is Zen." But she said, "But then sometimes you lose that, and you're not present in the moment. And so Zen is just noticing that you've lost it and just coming back. And that's all Zen is, is noticing and coming back, and noticing and coming back. So it's being present. Sometimes you

lose that. Being present is Zen. Noticing and coming back is also Zen.” And then she said, “The highest teaching is when you realize that even the losing it is Zen, because everything is Zen.” And I feel like in the conversational universe that we’re in, do you think the same thing is true of Christianity and spiritual practice, it’s all practice, does that feel true?

Carmen Acevedo ...: Yeah, because isn’t this the AMAs and the ABAs of making the outside and the inside one? And in the Gospel of Thomas where it talks about the bowls outside and inside, sometimes when I’m washing a bowl, and I am very careful, because I like bowls’ outsides to be washed just as well as their insides so they’re not gritty out with soup or something, and sometimes when I’m doing it have my mind blown a moment, because I’m thinking, “Am I washing the outside, the inside, they’re the same?” Boom. And you have that moment where you realize that it’s all just one. And so yeah, you said it beautifully, Mike. I totally agree.

Paul Swanson: Wow. What a note to end on. Your practice is your practice, so keep practicing wherever you’re finding that, in the tradition and at the edge of it. That’s marvelous, Carmen, thank you so much for your time today. And Mike, you as well. Of course, it’s a joy to be in this conversation as we continue to walk through Eager to Love and all its permeations and growing edges that we’re finding.

Mike Petrow: Oh my gosh, what a gift.

Carmen Acevedo ...: I love it. Thank you both, Paul, Mike, I love y’all both so much. Thank you.

Mike Petrow: Oh.

Paul Swanson: We love you.

Mike Petrow: Right back at you, thanks for being a good teacher and a good friend.

Paul Swanson: Amen.

Mike Petrow: My gosh, Paul, how amazing is it always to talk to Carmen?

Paul Swanson: It’s the best. I feel like not only do I learn new things about her, but I also learn new things about the contemporary tradition and practices that I had considered, or I see them from a completely different angle because she’s pulled out the meaning of a word that I thought I knew, and I do know, but she’s found the root word that has exploded it into a different direction that helps me to see with bigger eyes.

Mike Petrow: It’s so good. One fun little personal anecdote that we can throw into the conversation is being friends with Carmen, she loves to send notes in the mail. And so one of the favorite pieces of snail mail I’ve gotten in the last few months was just this tiny little card. We’re talking about not getting too hammered into there being a right way to do contemplative practice. Carmen sent me this tiny little note, and it was a saying from the desert fathers and mothers early in the Christian tradition, these beautiful ascetics who went out and lived in the deserts of Egypt and Syria and the surrounding area. This is what it says, “Abba Macarius was asked, ‘How should we pray?’ The old man said, ‘You don’t need long-windedness. Just reach out to love and say love as you wish and as you know, grant me self-compassion, or just love help.’”

Paul Swanson: Wow, that's a lovely, lovely note to consider.

Mike Petrow: I feel like this exudes who Carmen is, is just the simplicity of love help, of approaching contemplative practice as, "What's right today? What's already working? Where am I already a contemplative and where's it showing up in my life?"

Paul Swanson: Yeah, those invitations to look at the reality, the conditions of your own life. And I think, as you said, Carmen exudes that, part just from her own experience, but who she's translated, and how they are friends that live through her. And that's how she invites everyone, I feel like, into a contemplative way of seeing is, "Look what my friends are up to. They're no different than you, they just have books that are a little bit older." And she's translated them for the benefit of all. And how does contemplation and practices show up in your life? Yeah, that seems to be a major theme that runs through our conversation with Carmen.

Mike Petrow: So good. I feel like, Paul, that might be a good question to leave our listeners to sit with between now and the next episode. How would you phrase that?

Paul Swanson: Where in your own life are you finding moments, snippets, stances of contemplation, whether it's in traditional ways or emerging ways, or things that feel at the edge of the boundary of what you would be comfortable calling contemplation, where in your life are you finding contemplative moments?

Mike Petrow: What a great note to go out on. Thanks for listening, everyone.

Paul Swanson: Thanks everybody.

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