

Mike: Friends, welcome back to the Everything Belongs podcast with our beloved father, Richard Rohr. Each episode, the one and only Paul Swanson and I travel over to Richard's little house to unpack some big wisdom with him. And then we're joined by a guest who helps us live the teachings forward to explore and expand on Richard's wisdom in new ways by asking new questions emerging in our rapidly changing world.

Each season so far, we've explored an aspect of Richard's deep wisdom, usually focusing on one of his books. So far we've looked at *Falling Upward*, we've looked at *Eager to Love*, and last season we looked at Richard's latest book, *The Tears of Things*. But this season is a little bit different and we are so excited because this season we're going back to one of Richard's early passions. We're exploring the Enneagram, a contemporary tool that draws on ancient wisdom for discernment, solidarity, and self-understanding. If you'd like to read along with us, you can of course pick up Richard's book, *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*. We know a lot of our audience first met Richard years ago as an Enneagram teacher and now we get to chat with him in his 83rd year, 36 years after publishing that book, to learn what new insights he's developed in all that time.

Today, we are talking about the thrilling threes and learning about the need to succeed, and how threes especially can give us a very keen insight into the supposed success stories that so many of us have been programmed with, that trick us into chasing things that might not matter as much as we think they do. And gosh, we have such a good conversation partner for this. Cassidy Hall and I get to chat with our guest, Josh Radnor, actor, musician, and soulful explorer of life's ups and downs. And we have such a rich conversation about what we are actually chasing and what it means to succeed.

Gosh, this one hit me right in the feels and honestly, it is so valuable for all of us to listen to. I kept thinking of the comedian Jim Carey saying, "I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything that they've ever dreamed of so that they can see that it's not the answer." But first, we head literally over the river and through the woods to Richard's house to hang with him and his faithful dog, Opie, to learn about the wounds, the work, and the wisdom that threes have to offer each and every one of us. Thank you so much for being a part of these conversations with us. Hey, let's get to it.

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

Paul: I'm Paul Swanson.

Carmen: I'm Carmen Acevedo Butcher.

Cassidy: I'm Cassidy Hall.

Drew: And I'm Drew Jackson.

Mike: And this is Everything Belongs.

Richard writes, "A good friend of mine from Cincinnati, who is a three, has the nickname Mr. Perfect."

Richard: Oh, yes.

Mike: "Everything he touches seems to succeed and turns, as in the fairytale, into gold. The special talents of threes often cause them to radiate an ease and assurance that inspires confidence. This allows them to spread a good atmosphere around them. They have an easy time getting jobs done efficiently and completely, aiming for and achieving personal goals, as well as inspiring and motivating other people and making it possible for them to get ahead too. Threes have a sixth sense for sizing up tasks and for the dynamic of work groups. They identify themselves with the firm, or the community, or the organization, or I wonder about the cause for which they work and they have the gift of creating good climate and keeping the store together. Keenly interested in connecting and networking the members of the group through their convincing charisma and the force of their arguments, threes can gain great influence and bring the projects they believe into success."

Richard, what is a three?

Richard: Okay, let me try again. They're the heart of relationality because they relate to individual people in a very fresh and commanding way, and they equally relate to the group, to the public, which makes them so effective. This sounds like it couldn't be true really, but I don't think I've ever met a three, don't get too flattered now if those of you are threes, who wasn't physically attractive, personally attractive. Makes you wonder about the whole nature, nurture thing. Were they already cute as little kids? Undoubtedly, they were and people kept praising them for their performance, and they said, "Hey, this works. I'm going to keep doing it," and they become stars at performance.

Hollywood is filled with threes and fours. It's hard not to be impressed by a three, unless they completely give into their great temptation, which is a temptation, their superficiality. In other words, they can buy their persona more than their essence.

Mike: I'll look forward to unpacking that with you. I appreciate what you said there, it's hard not to be impressed by a three. And I will say many of the threes that I love, if you're not impressed with them, they give you a little bit of help in being impressive.

Richard: That is true.

Paul: That's so funny.

Mike: Yeah. I had a three that I loved a lot who was fond of reminding me that they were prom queen and homecoming queen and all those things, and wonderful. I think that's the stereotype I hold of it in my mind. Gosh, I'm not a three, but I feel like I'm swimming in three energy all the time living at this moment and time and this place on the planet. Does that resonate with you?

Paul: It's so true. And Richard, you tell us that the energy of the three is the water we swim in here in the US. So I think a lot of us will relate to the wound of a three's upbringing because we're swimming in that waters in our home, in our schooling, in our wider family, in our places of work, even on social media or networks with our friends. I'm going to read something to you real quick that you wrote, and then ask the question. You write, "As children, threes were often loved not for their own sake, but were praised and rewarded when they were successful and had special achievements to show for it, which you just mentioned previously. When they came home with good marks or won a football game, their mother or father said, "You're a good boy," or "You're a good girl," or "You're a good kid. We're proud of you."

Gradually they idealize victory and success and developed the guiding motto, I'm good when I win. Somewhere along the way, the world steps in and Enneagram threes discover that their environment is not as interested and/or accepting of their truest way of being and that love is easier to earn when they remake themselves into the image of their community. There's a lot that you share in that paragraph. So we'd love to ask, can you tell us a little bit more about the wound of the three growing up with that kind of praise and that kind of environment?

Richard: I'm not sure because I didn't grow up as a three, but it has something to do with my ordinary self is not good enough, but I know how to put on a good enough self that will impress people and they become experts at it, naturals at it. Is it their walk? Is it their smile? Is it their intelligence? I don't know, but somehow they learn that failure isn't worth it. So they're both threatened and attracted to my book, *Falling Upward*. They like the upward part, but they don't even understand why the falling would possibly be necessary, yet they've probably grown from it more than they realize.

Paul: The falling apart. They've grown...

Richard: The falling part. Yeah. Probably as a very small child, not performing, not being the smartest boy in class or the prettiest girl in class wasn't appreciated. That failure is so daunting that I'll never do it again. I'm just not going to fail. Even when I do fail, I won't let you see it. They're naturals at success. Now you centered in on our country. It's what America made its whole public image. It's what Europeans hate us for, and they told me this many times when I taught it over there. "This is what we hate in Americans. You're so classy, flashy, and superficial and damnable," something to that effect.

Paul: It sounds like it's almost like a guardedness, like performance is a guardedness to not be unguarded in, as you said earlier, their essence, because that's...

Richard: That's good.

Paul: ... not what they're getting rewarded for. They're getting rewarded for whatever they put out to the world.

Richard: Whatever they put out.

Mike: Yeah.

Richard: So I learned to put it out early.

Mike: It feels like threes just want to be the best at everything.

Richard: At everything.

Mike: And I'm going to fly my nerd flag here. Whenever I think of being the best, I have to think of the tournament montage in the movie The Karate Kid with the song You're the Best Around. And what a great story about the guy who gets bullied, so then he trains hard so that he can go to the tournament so that he can win and get the trophy and get the girl and be the best. There is something about that with the threes, right?

Richard: Yeah.

Mike: They just want to be the best because it gets them rewarded for something, right?

Richard: It's what people love about Tom Cruise and hate about Tom Cruise. Damn it, he's too smooth. No one should be that smooth all the time. He's the archetype of a three.

Mike: Have you ever seen him run? Tom Cruise has a perfect run, and he runs really fast. And in almost every movie he's ever done, there's a scene of him running really, really fast. It speaks to me of the speed of the three. So Richard, let's unpack this. What are the worthiness games that the threes play, and then the three culture is asking all of us to play? There's an Enneagram author I really like named Chichi Agorom, and she says, "The United States is often referred to as a type three culture. We can see this narrative about success, image management and approval everywhere we look." She really helped me understand that in a capitalist culture, it seems like threes seek approval through the accumulation of wealth and social capital...

Richard: Yes.

Mike: ... which I hadn't thought about. But what's the worthiness game? What are they trying to prove? What are they trying to earn?

Richard: Once you come to know a three well, you recognize way down deep, well hidden is a deep insecurity. They hate to admit it. They hate to see it, but a fear of failure, a fear of not being liked, and that drives everything. It'll only show itself once in a while and with people they can really trust. You hope they marry, if they marry, a person who can love them without them performing. Because unless they have a lover like that, they'll just keep performing.

Mike: Well, it doesn't see like they're performing for drama's sake. They're trying to earn outward validation. Is that what it is?

Richard: Yeah. That's a good way to say it.

Mike: Well, you mentioned earlier, and of course my ears perk up when you use Jungian terminology, that this is an over-investing in their persona. Could you unpack that a little bit for folks who might not know what that means?

Richard: Your persona is your chosen presentation, your chosen image that you give to the outer world. I remember fighting that temptation after I was ordained. Now, do I have to live up to this priest thing? It was a great temptation, and yet I knew I couldn't give into it. It would destroy me. So your persona is not you. It's what you think you need to be, should be, can be, and fool everybody.

Paul: We all have personas.

Richard: That's right.

Paul: 100%.

Richard: You cannot not.

Paul: Right.

Richard: That's right.

Paul: And threes seem to have an expertise in manicuring their persona...

Richard: Well put.

Mike: Yes.

Richard: Well put.

Mike: Well said.

Paul: .. the way that they want it to be received in the world.

Mike: Yeah. They're real pros.

Richard: Where do they learn that? Do they go to three school?

Paul: There's a finishing school for threes.

Mike: Persona is the word for those giant masks that actors...

Paul: That's right.

Mike: ... wore back in Greek theater.

Paul: That's the first word.

Mike: Right. And so it's connected to acting, which interestingly enough, so is the word hypocrite. When Jesus used the word hypocrite in the gospels, that was also a word for actor. I appreciate what you said.

Paul: Can I add something to that real quick?

Mike: Please.

Paul: You'll probably know this. Did those masks also help them project their voices?

Mike: It's a good question. So I've heard that they do.

Paul: Yeah.

Mike: I cannot 100% verify that historically, but I have heard more than once.

Paul: It seems like an additive to this metaphor...

Mike: Yeah.

Paul: ... of the persona...

Mike: Absolutely.

Paul: ... as a mask...

Mike: Absolutely.

Paul: ... projecting what you want to be projecting.

Mike: Out into the big amphitheater, but that's it. I'm going to be heard, and I'm going to be seen, and I'm going to wear this. And when Jung wrote about the persona, he made it very clear. Like you said, we all have them, and we need them. He said we shouldn't get rid of them...

Richard: Yeah.

Mike: ... but we can't think that's who we actually are, right?

Richard: That's the danger. Yeah.

Mike: So do threes... In your book, you talk about one of the challenges for them is falling into deceit, I think, as a worthiness gain.

Richard: To believe their own PR.

Mike: Yeah. Oh, that's so good. To believe their own PR. I love... You write this. "In order to win, threes tend to deal generously with the truth. They create an image that looks good, can be sold, and finally will win, but unredeemed threes first and foremost deceive themselves in doing this."

Richard: And if they deceive themselves too successfully, that's the road to superficiality, to permanent actor status. And it's no surprise so many of them become actors, actresses. They're naturals at taking on another persona.

Mike: When Carl Jung visited the United States, at one point, he said something like, most Americans live their life either like they're the star of their own stage play or they're starring in a movie about themselves, more so than just living their life.

Richard: Yeah.

Paul: Wow.

Richard: Yeah.

Paul: So everyone else is just a character actor in their own film.

Mike: And is that a danger, that the other people in your life are just supporting characters in the ongoing project of...

Richard: That would...

Mike: ... building up your own image?

Richard: ... create the narcissism of the three. Ego vanity was the first code word we learned for the three. They live out of a certain vain public persona.

Mike: Yeah.

Richard: They believe it. They practice it until it's natural. That's why they're such good actors.

Mike: Well, and it's important for me because I'm not a three, but I want to learn from threes, because we're surrounded by this energy, to have sympathy for the worthiness game and to remember that this happens because folks were taught. And in some ways, all of us were taught this is the way you receive love, is that you succeed and you stock up on approval, public validation. And I'm nervous these days... I already mentioned Chichi is an author that I love. She says social media makes this extra challenging. She says Instagram, for example, is a masterclass in image management and likability. The actual definition of success on that platform is literally gauged by how many people like and engage with you and the brand you've created. To continue to be successful, you must keep fine tuning and polishing that image until it sparkles, even if it isn't true to who you are anymore.

I think about friends who I've loved on Instagram who I see one week, photos of them smiling with their partner. And then the next week, I hear that they're splitting up. And you go, "God, you never would've known that from the cultivated image." I know, Richard, you're not a big user of social media, but how do you think that's pushing us even more into three territory?

Richard: Well, it definitely does. You're right on that because I can present on the medium the self that I want to advertise. Maybe a negative way of coming at it. The three has a hard time if they'd be honest with shadow work. I've seen a lot of threes on the men's right of passage make major breakthroughs because of our emphasis upon shadow work facing your own dark side. It's very defeating, humiliating, and necessary for three. If there's no one, at least one partner who can't help you do some shadow work. You're weak two. You're phony too. You're not always beautiful and classy. If someone can love you after seeing you that way, that's essential to a three's journey to be loved like all of us, to be loved unconditionally by someone who knows our shadow, not those who participate in the adoration game.

Mike: Yeah. Someone who can see behind the mask, I guess. Dorothy, our producer, just put in the chat that those persona masks did in point of fact, help people amplify their voice and modulate it a bit and improve the sound of it.

Paul: Oh, no way.

Mike: So it's all about sounding the best and being...

Paul: Yeah.

Mike: ... seen the loudest. And someone who can see us behind the mask and still love us, what a gift that is.

Richard: What a gift for every type, but in nine different ways.

Paul: Right.

Richard: Yeah.

Paul: Wow. What's striking me about your social media question, I'm thinking about how disembodied it is to put these projections out online where it's separate from you and I almost feel like threes are ... Because they have so much practice in the persona game, it can almost intensify that separation from the self by having these outlets in our current day where it is just the best digital version of my persona out in the world that you don't have to back that up with your own incarnational reality.

Richard: And we have so many tools available to us, like spas, and workout gyms, and plastic surgery, so many things to help us fashion our chosen persona, only presenting ourself in the way that we like. Boy, that's dangerous.

Mike: Yeah. And we're targeted for it twenty four seven. Constantly. Advertising is after us all the time to improve the persona and trying to sell us something new that's going to make our life better.

Paul: Right. Hard to accept failure when you have all these tools and outlets for not having to accept failure.

Mike: You say that in the chapter. You say this may be the first time in history that people have literally been able to persistently buy their way out of failure.

Richard: We can literally, again, buy our way out of not seeing our dark side. Old age must be very hard for three...

Mike: Yeah.

Richard: ... when you lose your good looks.

Mike: Yeah. We'll get to that. One of our former conversation partners here on the podcast, Connie Zweig, who I have so much respect for, wrote a book called The Inner Work of Aging and she talks about us transitioning from role to soul, which sounds like something we all need to do, but especially something threes need to do.

Richard: Oh, perfect.

Paul: One of the beats we've been hitting in our conversations here is on the voice of the inner accuser. What does the voice of the inner accuser sound like to a three?

Richard: I wish we had a three here because I'm not sure I'll describe it very well, but it's some form of you're not good enough, and that not good enough is what drives them. They're tireless in work. They're the only number that feeds on doing it harder, better, more. They never seem to get tired. They get their energy by expending energy. That's different than any other type. I wear out by expending energy, but not the three. They can just keep going.

Mike: Threes get so much done and...

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Richard: Keep going.

Mike: Threes get so much done, and that energy creates energy.

Richard: So much. So much. You know who doesn't like threes so much are the children of threes.

Mike: I can imagine.

Richard: Imagine if your parents are superstars. You feel judged constantly, "I can't live up to my dad. I can't live up to my mother. I'm never good enough." The child has seen the dark side of the three, how on an ordinary Saturday morning in the closed household, my dad can be a real jerk.

Paul: I want to swing back to something you said about their energy. Is it them feeding off the many small successes that keeps the energy going? Because they don't feed off of any failure or the sense of just a natural kind of at rest-ness. So, is it, part of their busyness and getting things done is it puts fuel in the tank?

Richard: I suspect you're right.

Mike: There's a complexity here because we should learn from failure. That's what Richard's book *Falling Upward* is all about. But the three temptation to rewrite the story to turn a failure into a success, I think that's part of the deceit too, is there's always this moving of the goalpost.

Richard: That's right. That's right.

Mike: To be like, "Oh, no, that actually, that was a goal. Did you see the goalpost was back there?" Wait, what?

Richard: Right.

Mike: All right, Richard, let's unpack this. I want to ask you about the religious and the cultural hook for threes, because this seems so strong. And it also seems like we're all on the hook because this is a three-oriented culture. So, I'm going to read you a little bit of what you wrote.

Starting with culture, you say, "The capitalist system which dominates the world economy is based on the three dogma. Those who exert themselves enough can work their way up. The society of the United States, the symbolic country of threes is an expression of this attitude. What I say about threes relates to all Americans to our entire society that is infected with this thinking."

Pause for a second.

You say, "And this is going to hit in a very particular way in 2026. We admire winners, and we despise losers. This can be seen just the way we deal with people fleeing poverty as well as the hungry masses of the world, because we assume if people aren't succeeding, they must not be winners."

Richard: They did something wrong.

Mike: You write, "The poor do not deserve to be noticed or appreciated. They are responsible for their situation. Threes slip easily into blaming the victim."

I've got to read a little more. This is so good, "In the US, there's no motivation not to be a three. Anyone who has mastered the three game here will get to the top of the system. In this country, not all threes, but a lot of threes will become CEOs, bishops, and presidents. And this is one of the reasons we're so often disappointed by our leaders. Every now and then it dawns on us how superficially things are managed up there. Three is the prototype of the white male American. That's how young people are brought up in our country."

And I could go on. This is a really good chapter, Richard. Wow. It feels like we are in a moment where the three is reigning supreme.

Richard: Yeah, it's true.

Mike: And we need some healthy threes to put it in check because it's kind of terrifying.

Richard: And people cannot not be impressed by it even when they want to not be impressed by it.

Mike: Yeah.

Richard: "Damn it," you want to say. How did we sell our soul to the three energy so readily?

Mike: It seems very loud on the public political stage right now.

Richard: Right now.

Mike: This narrative of winners and losers and, "We're going to be the best."

Richard: It's frightening.

Mike: Well, and then it gets even more complicated because it slips into religion so easily. You write about the American gospel of achievement, affluence and success is so dominant and universally acknowledged that it's carried over into the spiritual domain. Religion is increasingly becoming a sort of spiritual consumer product.

You remember when we talked to Kate Bowler? She really clued me into this American mentality, how it hinges on you're almost about to have your best life now, but you just need to do this extra little thing.

And that slips into spirituality so well. At first it's like, oh, you're almost there. You just need to take this supplement.

Richard: Diet.

Mike: Take this class. Read this book. Get on this diet.

Paul: Go to this conference.

Mike: Absolutely. This supplement's got reindeer organs in it. It's got whatever. And then it slips into...

Richard: Never heard that.

Mike: Oh, God.

Paul: We'll get you some.

Mike: Yeah. It's all over my media feed. It slips into our spirituality then where it's just like, well, you just need to attend church, read your Bible, serve, go on this retreat, go on this pilgrimage, take this course, take this class, figure out your attachment style, figure out your Enneagram number.

Richard: Although when I first used to teach this and gave large workshops on it, the numbers who showed up the least were the three and the seven. It didn't even interest them.

Mike: Interesting.

Richard: This study of for the true self, threes did not come to Enneagram workshops, nor did sevens.

Mike: You're talking about starting with your wound and your failure and your sin. I could see where that would be particularly hard. What do we do in a moment in time where it seems like so much of our spirituality has been commodified into something that can be bought, won or displayed?

Richard: Whatever I tried to say in the book *Falling Upward* was an attempt and an answer to that, that we have to see failure as good, necessary and positive, even though it looks like the essence of negative. If you can do that, even threes and sevens coming at it from a different way, will both grow.

Mike: It seems hard. In the TV show *The Good Place* there's a great line where it's sort of nominally about heaven and hell. And there's a great line where one of the demon characters who's disguised as a human says, "This is why I took the form of a white male in my 40s. I can only fail forward." It seems like privilege protects some of us so deeply from learning.

Richard: That's right, yeah. Privilege is such a dangerous thing.

Mike: And it's so tempting to assume that it's merit, "I earned this."

Richard: That's right, "I earned it, I deserve it," to the point of never entering your mind that you're not right about that.

Mike: How do we in the pursuit of, whether it's CrossFit culture and, "I'm just trying to get my new personal record," or it's spiritual commodification healing culture and, "I'm just the new thing that's going to finally make me feel healthy and integrated," how do we get out of that race to keep up with the Joneses? How do we get off the rat race?

Richard: I hate to insert God language too early, but God takes care of that. If we're at all honest, failure, defeat, grief comes into every life. Protestantism didn't really have a theology of failure. That's that connection between America and Protestantism. Well, Max Weber called it the Protestant work ethic. For all the failures of Catholicism, we had the cross as identification with failure. Protestantism had the cross as a strategy for success.

Mike: Yeah. I-

Richard: It's no small thing. For us, the cross is an invitation to solidarity, not an invitation to success.

Mike: I have this statement from you, Richard, lives rent-free in my head, "Sooner or later, if we're on any kind of a classical spiritual schedule, we will fail at something or something will fail us." You know that great statement from Jim

Carey where he says, "I hope everyone gets exactly what they want so they see it's not the answer." There's the three who their failure is success.

Richard: It's a good line.

Mike: Right? They climb to the top of the ladder. You quote this, I don't know, is it Thomas Merton, Richard? You get all the way to the top of the ladder.

Richard: Yeah.

Mike: And then you realize the ladder's leaning against the wrong wall, right?

Richard: Leaning against the wrong wall.

Mike: And then this is where our healthy threes who learn can turn around and shout down at everybody else, "This ladder doesn't go anywhere."

Paul: Well, we've talked a lot about a lot of the different aspects of the three and their wounds. And to all threes listening, we love you. We're not trying to denigrate any number here in this process. We're just trying to hold all the textures of the three. But I want to ask, what is the inner work of the three to help them on their own path of healing into a healthy three?

Richard: To learn to be ordinary. To enjoy being ordinary and not standing out and not being the head of the pack with genuine enjoyment. It's delightful to see when they can stop advertising themselves genuinely and be in row two instead of the front row with a big smile. Yeah.

Paul: And would you say for all of us growing up in a three culture, that that's also part of our inner work as well is to build more?

Richard: Yeah, for all of us, because we've all picked up a certain degree of this energy.

Mike: Richard, you give so many practical tips for the inner work that threes need to do in this chapter, from feeling their feelings, which apparently is hard for three.

Richard: Yes, because they jump into the ideal instead of feeling the ordinary, living the ordinary.

Mike: And then you say contemplative practice. It seems like there's something about sitting still and being useless for a minute.

Richard: That's right.

Mike: That's really empowering for a three.

Richard: That's right.

Mike: And hard in this culture. Even in healthy places, I think we're here at the Center for Action and Contemplation in our desire to make love more real in the world. It's amazing to me how much that can crowd out practice and need to sit and be.

Richard: They have a strange ability to dismiss unpleasant evidence, unpleasant information. They're genius at it, to eliminate contrary evidence. So, the only evidence that gets through is that which affirms what I've already decided to think or be my presentation self. And that's their great blindness, really.

Mike: You have given the world such a good teaching and falling upward in that we can learn from every failure, and the path of dissent is really the path of becoming. I once heard someone say the challenge for threes is that they can so buy into that message that they put so much a bow on it that they don't actually drink the failure all the way to the dregs. It's like, "This isn't a loss. This is my creative crisis. This is my new becoming. This is my falling upward moment." And it's a way to still dodge the reality of failure, grief and shattering.

Paul: Like they take a sip from it?

Mike: "I'll call a failure a success," is fundamentally different than, "I will learn from failure." How do threes navigate what you teach in falling upward without accidentally turning it into another opportunity for self-deceit or commodification?

Richard: With great difficulty, first of all, because they turn it into another way to succeed, another way to look good, which is what we did with salvation. It became a way to be saved, me.

Mike: Right. So, I can read Falling Upward, and I'm going to be the best.

Richard: Yeah.

Mike: I'm having my falling upward moment. I'm going to fail the best.

Richard: Yeah.

Paul: That image of these persona masks where to see the dings on it, the scratches, you have to take it off to see it, to know the limitations of how you're using your persona.

Richard: Very well put, yes. You have to drink it to the dregs. If you just superficially learn from it, you haven't learned from it.

Mike: Our friend-

Richard: It's usually grief work, failure work is major for all of us, but certainly for a three. They usually don't allow it until the last third of life because they're just so damn successful.

Mike: What does the voice of unconditional love have to tell the three? What do they most need to hear?

Richard: It's the same message that all nine types need. Could it be possible? Is it conceivable that I could be loved for nothing? For nothing. Everything is a creatio ex nihilo. It's something for nothing, as is the whole universe. That is so hard for all of us to believe. But in a unique way for the three, it just seems impossible that I could be loved without being good-looking and smart and strong. Old age is probably a great gift if a three gets there and can practice being at home there.

Mike: I've already twice talked about how much I love Chichi Agorom's writing about the Enneagram. She says that threes an idiot learned to hear the voice of veracity and this voice of veracity that speaks the truth of who you actually are and lets you show up honestly without performance, bringing both your strengths and limitations, successes, and failures.

Richard: And still to serenely bear the trial of being displeasing to yourself, quoting Thérèse, "To serenely bear the trial of being displeasing to yourself." God, that's a miracle.

Paul: I'm just thinking about a few of the healthy or redeemed threes in my life, and there's a humility that sparkles in their gifts because they also accept their failures. They have found a way to allow them to serenely bear. And it's contagious.

Richard: You know that man you mentioned at the beginning-

Paul: Mr. Perfect.

Richard: ... Mr. Perfect. He's still alive. He's facing cancer now, but I remember him walking in my office one day plopping down in the chair, and he said, "Richard, please heal me of my bullshit."

Paul: Wow.

Richard: He said, "I can bullshit anybody, and you know it and I know it." And at this point he's only in his mid-20s. But he's good-looking, a good athlete, smart, good job already.

And it came soon. His first marriage failed. For marriage to fail, that's why we made divorce the worst thing. It really isn't in the spiritual life. For many people it's necessary, where, "I'm so good at relationship, I can't do it at all."

I know a lot of threes who grew up through the failure of their first marriage. I'm not here to encourage failure in marriage, but it's the heart of failure for a three, to fail, there's on relationship I cannot impress, my former partner who's seen through my bullshit. Bullshit is a good word to use. Yeah.

Paul: It is.

Mike: Yeah. And it's I think a gift. The mature threes that I know, you know that old adage don't bullshit a bullshitter. They become really, really good at seeing truth and seeing untruth.

Richard: That's right. Remember that's their gift, love of truth.

Mike: Yeah, when they grow into that, I mean, again, we need threes. Threes are good at getting things done. And then threes who get liberated from the need to be special, the ones that I've met are good at helping, ironically enough, other people see how they are special. And goodness gracious, can they cut through bullshit quickly.

Paul: What other wisdom do you feel like the three shares with the rest of the world?

Richard: Once they've walked even half of the journey, they do exemplify a humility that's unique and very attractive, this willingness to sit in aisle two and contentment when they can stop performing and don't even need to perform anymore. They're on the path. It's beautiful to see. And they can delight in little things, ordinary things, things that, "Don't polish my resume." They do get there many of them. It's wonderful to see.

Mike: Richard, last note to go out on. Working for the people that we love and for the value, the rightness and the truth of something as opposed to the results or the validation. How do we do that in this moment in this time in this culture?

Richard: Well, it starts with really loving some individual people more than my image, one bonding that surpasses everything else, "I'm doing it for the sake of my son, for the sake of my wife." There has to be one love object that surpasses the self as a love object. If you don't have one love object, by default, you're always the love object, somebody who can defeat yourself adoration.

Mike: Richard, Paul, this was so good. To all our three's listening, we need you in this moment, in this culture.

Richard: That's right.

Mike: To be healthy and-

Richard: Because we're all Americans here.

Mike: Yeah. Thanks, everybody.

Paul: Thank you. This was great.

Richard: Thank you. Thank you.

Mike: Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

Cassidy: Josh Radnor is an actor, director, writer, and musician. You might know him best from his work on the hit show, *How I Met Your Mother*. Josh is a great friend of the CAC and today he's speaking with us about life as an Enneagram type three, being a new dad, his album's *Eulogy* volume one and two, and evolving into his four wing. I was really touched by the vulnerability Josh brought to the conversation when we were discussing the topic of success and achievement, two things that threes are often driven by.

So, join us for this conversation as we discuss the Enneagram three with Josh Radnor.

Mike: Oh my gosh, Josh Radnor, thank you so much for joining us for the *Everything Belongs* podcast. It is such a gift to get to spend time with you today.

Josh: Well, it's a real treat for me. Thanks for having me.

Mike: Cassidy, always good to see you.

Cassidy: Always good to be here. Josh, great to see you. Great to meet you.

Josh: Yeah, you too.

Mike: My friend, I met you in the CAC bookstore a few years ago and we got to geek out about music, about cloud cult. I learned about your music, which has been a wonderful presence in my life since then. I also think since then, congrats on getting married and becoming a dad. Is that correct?

Josh: It's true. Yeah. It's my son's six-month birthday today.

Mike: Wow. Oh my gosh. Well, extra special thank you for being with us on this precious day. Well, we are so excited to get into all the things with you and especially to chat with you about what it means to be an Enneagram three. So, our first question today has to be how did you first encounter the Enneagram? And how has it been a part of your journey since then?

Josh: Yeah, I think I first heard the word... It's one of those words that you kind of remember when you first hear it because it's so strange, and I think it has a resonance to it that's very... It's like a riddle or something that stays with you, at least it did for me.

And I think I was a little wary of personality tests generally. I think it's part of my four wing that doesn't like to be reduced into a box. Anyone who has a four, I think would be a little resistant to personality tests generally because they don't want to be thought of as a thing under an umbrella of something.

And I think it was probably around the time I discovered Richard Rohr, our beloved mentor and friend and teacher. He just spoke about the Enneagram. It's just part of his lexicon. It's part of the way he sees the world and people.

I remember him saying he had saved marriages by explaining sevens and fives, like, "This is why this person always wants to travel. This is why this person needs to be alone in a room with books. It's not personal." And I remember-

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Josh:

It's not personal. And I remember saying to Ryan O'Neal, sleeping At last, speaking of music, who's a friend of the CAC, that I felt a little bit... Again, this is a very fore thing, that it took away my uniqueness, that I was just a factory model coming out of the divine assembly line. And he said that is an archetypal kind of thing that when people first get into the Enneagram, it can be a little depressing. I remember Richard saying, "Read the types, read the descriptions. It's probably the one that humiliates you the most, that is what you are. The one you feel the most indicted by." That's another reason I trust the Enneagram because it's not very flattering. I trust things that aren't sparkly and flattering and say things that might not please us.

So anyway, I talked to Ryan and I said, "I feel kind of reduced and unspecial by this thing," and he said, "The thing with the Enneagram is when you get to the more evolved version of whatever number you are, so few people do that, that you actually regain your individuality by becoming the kind of highest version of whatever that thing is." That led me to be, I think, less wary of the whole thing. And then I took a series of tests. I did a bunch of them just to kind of be conclusive about it. And the three with a four wing came back very conclusively that I was a three with a four wing. And it made a lot of sense when I looked back at my life and I saw how I see the world, how I see myself in the world, how I tried to secure love in the world, what my wounding is, what I feel like I'm kind of not getting in the world and why I've tried to kind of game the system to deliver me some sort of love and security in the world.

And now I just find it to be a really useful system to... It's almost like speaking in shorthand, if you're trying to counsel someone and you kind of get their Enneagram, I think you can do a little more specific and actually loving counsel with them.

Mike:

Yeah. That's a really beautiful way to put it. And I think the part of me that resonates with being a four, when I first discovered the Enneagram, I did really

feel like it was taking away my specialness and now I sort of see it as a tool that makes everyone special, which is really, really appreciated.

Josh: And it also feels, and correct me if I'm wrong on this, that when you get into the kind of higher realms... I don't know if that's even the right word, but if you evolve more within your number, you almost enter into a space where you're all of them on some level, that you're able to access more of the technicolor of the spectrum of life and you're not so siloed in this one thing.

Mike: Yeah, for sure. It feels like your primary number is your doorway in, but once you're in, all those mirrors sort of light up for you, which is gorgeous.

Josh: Yeah. It's almost like... I mean, this is another Richard area of specialty, but it reminds me a bit of 12 step in that the cost of admission to 12 step is saying, "I am a failure. I'm wounded. I'm hurt. I can't do this anymore." And in some ways that's also entering into the Enneagram. It can be painful because you have to say, "This is my wound. This is where I have been hurting." For the three, the wound that I read that resonated with me the most was the fear is I am not loved for who I am essentially, that I'm only loved for what I do. And that's great when you feel like you're succeeding, you're getting applauded, the world is very impressed with you, but those moments go away. They fade away. I shudder to think of a life that's just nothing but perpetual applause. I think that would be actually a kind of cursed life in certain ways.

But when the applause stops, the crisis begins of who am I if I'm not producing, if I'm not being impressive, if my output slows or if I need to take a break? And I have found... And maybe it's a consequence of having had a lot of success in first half of life, loyal soldier kind of success, and then realizing that that didn't save me and in fact brought on a whole host of other problems and issues. Success for a three is almost like there's a hole in your heart where you think it's going to fill it up, it just keeps draining out. You just kind of need more of it. It never is quite enough. I think that as I've gotten older, I've depended less on the success and the affirmation and the applause. It's still nice when it comes, but I don't see it as my primary fuel source.

Mike: So excited to get into all of those things with you. And I love what you said there when the applause ends, the crisis begins. I know for some folks that might not be getting applause on stage or on a screen, but even likes on social media, the accolades that come in. Yeah. Well, let's get into it.

Carmen: Richard describes the Enneagram three as those who have, as you were saying, Josh, the need to succeed and he writes about how threes seem to always succeed and go through the world smiling. And while everything seems to drop in their lap, the reality is they work incredibly hard for their success. I'm wondering how you relate to that need to succeed and also is it tiring? Is it tiring to be a three?

Josh: I thought the only way to achieve insecure love was to do. Falling Upward remains a kind of big roadmap for me because the description of the loyal soldier, the first half of life kind of go out and make your mark in the world has a very three energy to it. So even if people aren't three, they're still going to probably have some of that first half of life energy that could be mistaken for three. I don't know that I could point to a demarcation line and I don't think the line is this clear where you go, "Okay, on Tuesday I was in my first half of life and on Wednesday I was on my second half of life." I think for me there were certain things that I did step into second half of life and then I was still hamstrung and gravitationally pulled back to first half of life. I do feel now, I'm 51 years old, I have a child, I have a wife, there's certain markers of second half of life that I think have corresponded with the transition from three to four for me.

Mike: The first full season of this podcast, we did a chapter by chapter exploration of Falling Upward, and I think one of the things that I learned deeply in that is that there are parts of us that are in different stages of the journey all the time, but culturally because of the way that we live, it does feel like culturally the map and the way that Richard describes it is a little bit like moving from that three to the four wing, like those external sources of validation to the internal.

Josh: And if people haven't listened to the earlier episodes or have not read Falling Upward, I just want to urge, you can stop, press pause, go read Falling Upward and come back because it is an absolute masterpiece. And I think the reason that book is so meaningful to me is because I do think that our culture is really hurting for eldership and the entire culture is rigged around first half of life games. I mean, what's brilliant, I think, about life as a kind of benevolent but somewhat stern teacher is that your first half of life schemes, they will crash on the rocks.

I don't even like the term midlife crisis, but some sort of crisis is inevitable that your defenses, your masks, all the scaffolding of your self-esteem in your first half of life, it's just going to get swept away. And I found it looks different for everyone. It can manifest as bottoming out an addiction. It can be a financial crisis. It can be a health crisis. There's just something that feels, it's not a question of if, it's a question of when. And when that happens, it's really good to have a guide. And I think there are other guides besides Richard, but he's my favorite guide.

Carmen: Speaking of the games we play with ourselves, I've heard a lot of Enneagram teachers talk about how the Enneagram is a result of nature versus nurture, whether it is a result of nurture, whether it's result of nature. And Richard talks about how many threes grew up in homes where that was kind of reinforced, that they were rewarded for success and how this creates worthiness games in our lives where we are tricked into playing them. So I wonder what worthiness games you maybe found yourself playing as a three

Josh: Yeah, it's a great question. It's always tricky to talk about one's childhood or the childhood home. My friend said to me the other day, he said, "My needs were

not met in my childhood, my emotional needs," and he said, "You could probably say that about everyone on some level, that everyone kind of comes from a place, even if you were fed and clothed and educated and didn't want for anything physical, I think we tend to underestimate how deprived some of us were emotionally." Also, my parents did a great job and I love them and I want them to know. I don't know if they'll listen to this, but maybe they will. But I do remember a strong sense of I was a very good student and I remembered good report cards really delighted them. I remember little early attempts at performance really delighted them.

My wife is a clinical psychologist and she has really helped me understand the family I came from in a much deeper way, and my father... There was no active addiction in our household. My parents, I rarely saw them drink. There wasn't anything like that, but my father would come home from work. I remember he would eat really fast. He always wanted to get in front of the TV. He was a big TV watcher. He remains a big TV watcher. And he was just hard to locate. He was hard to reach when he was watching TV. He was just kind of locked in and in this zone. And Jordana said to me, my wife, early-ish in our relationship, he said, "Do you think there was a part of you that thought, 'I know how I'll get my dad's attention, I'll get inside the box that he's always looking at.'?"

And it really stunned me. I had never put that together, but I do think there was something to that, that we're always strategizing, how do I get the attention? How do I secure the love of these people that are the only thing going? They're all I got. Another thing my wife explained to me was the battle that we have, and Robert Bly has written really beautifully about this, this idea that we have to choose between connection and authenticity. We have to choose between being ourselves or being loved and those feels sometimes at odds with each other. So I don't know, again, if it's nature-nurture. I know from my son that we certainly come here with a personality that I didn't give him. I didn't give him these things. I mean, he's his own man, truly. Other things I'm sure we will shape him with.

But there's also the question of, and this is getting much more into the mystery of it, the kind of epigenetic stuff, we're bringing in ancestral stuff. I'm not averse to the idea that this is not our first go around here and we might be bringing in stuff from other incarnations. So it's a complicated stew and I don't know that we'll ever truly be able to tease it out. I think nature-nurture is one of those perpetually perennially vexing questions and I don't think we'll ever know, but I think we just have to deal with what we have, which is, okay, these are my addictions, these are my compulsions, these are my wounds. Oh, okay. That looks like it maps onto a seven or a one or a five. And then we go from there. And if there's nothing broken, there's nothing to heal... I remember I worked with this wonderful astrologer named Laurence Hillman. His father, I'm sure, Michael, you know, James Hillman.

Mike:

Studied with him.

Josh: Oh, you did? Oh, wow. Incredible family. Laurence is a really high-level astrologer and very not woo-woo predictive. He's no prophet. He just explains the archetype. He said, "I think it would be very good for you to get a dog." He said, "It would be very good for you to be loved by something for no reason." And he sensed this thing in me that I needed a deeper encounter with unconditional love, that I needed to love something and have something love me that was not based on this kind of performative contract. So I did end up getting this dog, Nelson, who I would not be married and have a child without the love of this dog. I truly believe it.

Mike: Thinking about the threes' need to succeed, thinking about getting inside that box that your dad was looking at, it sure seems like you succeeded. In addition to sort of being a Renaissance man, the easy go to is nine seasons of How I Met Your Mother, this gigantic show that takes up more than a decade of your life. I'm guessing it had to feel like a success.

Josh: Well, feels like a success now in a weird way. It's very hard to know what's happening when you're at the epicenter of it.

Mike: Here's my question for you. I am curious, you're a big fan of Falling Upward, as are we. In this book, Richard says, "Sooner or later, if we're on any kind of a classical spiritual schedule, we will fail at something or something will fail us." And something I wonder about, and I would love to hear your thoughts on this, especially for Enneagram threes, is that sometimes what fails us is success. We sort of get the thing that we're looking for and it doesn't necessarily meet all our needs or fill that hole inside of us.

Josh: Yeah, my wife describes it as getting to the top of the ladder and realizing it was perched against the wrong wall. I had this idea, well, if I was on a hit TV show, I could inoculate myself against sadness or that some kind of version of success would be so overwhelming and gratifying and just sustainably great that I would never have a tough day or an insecure moment, that it would fill the God-shaped hole in my heart, and then you get the thing and it's so complicated. Look, if success in the arts in America solved all the problems, why are the rates of addiction, suicide, all the stuff you see with celebrities is so off the charts? What is it about a kind of stratospheric success? And I want to be clear about where I was. I was on a very big iconic TV show, but I also could still go out to dinner. You know what I mean? I still was able to live a life. Some people can't.

And I think that there should be a warning label on fame, like this requires a very strong nervous system and a very strong community behind you. You need your people because it's really tricky. And for me, it was success, but I was always insecure inside of it. I always thought, "Am I doing a good enough job? Am I doing a good job at all?" I was terribly hard on myself. And I'll tell you something that really healed it. A couple years ago, Jordana said to me... She had never seen How I Met Your Mother, which was great for us in our courtship because she wasn't bringing any associations of me other than just having met

me. And she said, "I really want to watch the show because I haven't seen this. It's a huge chapter of your life I missed." So she said, "Can we watch it?"

So I called Craig Thomas, one of the co-creators of the show and we just decided to get more formal about. So we've been doing this rewatch podcast called How We Made Your Mother. We're on season three. We've been watching it all. It's been not only great fun because I love Craig, so it's great to hang, but watching the show again has been so startling. One, I remember there's a great actor named Victor Garber who I've known for years and he was in the original cast of Stephen Sondheim's Sweeney Todd, which is this great groundbreaking musical from the late '70s. It's a horror musical. It's brilliant. And he was in the original cast.

He sings this great song, Johanna. And then he got offered a lead and a ton of money to go out on the road on this tour of a musical with another star. So he left this Broadway show, he went on tour, he made all his money, he came back, he watched Sweeney Todd from the audience and he was stunned. He said, "I was in that?" He couldn't believe how good the thing was and he didn't know when he was on stage that he was in this really special, brilliant thing.

And watching How I Met Your Mother Now, I almost have the same feeling. I really genuinely like it. I mean, some of it hasn't aged particularly well when you're doing a comedy and we're atoning for some of that, but the beating heart of it is really a beautiful thing. And now when people come up to me and they say, "This show changed my life. This show helped me through a divorce or an illness," or all these people say that it's in medicine for them in hard times, I understand what they mean. And I also have really forgiven my younger self for being so hard on him because I see, oh, this job that I had was really hard and I think I did it as well as anyone could have.

I just have a different sense of myself within the context of that show and a different sense of the show itself, and it was a process of reexamining this younger version of me and also forgiving this other version of me that was so hard on that younger self. But I agree with you that success itself for a three especially can be the thing that brings on the crisis because you reach the holy land of your aspiration and there's no water there or it's not arable land.

Mike:

Richard points out that American culture is so driven by the energy of the three and the shadow that comes with that. He writes, "The society of the United States is the symbolic country of threes. What I say about threes relates to all Americans. Our entire society is infected with this thinking. We admire winners. We despise losers. The American gospel of achievement, affluence and success is dominant and universally acknowledged. This attitude's even carried over in the spiritual domain where religion is increasingly becoming a sort of spiritual consumer product. Efficiency is the three's greatest temptation. The capitalist system, which dominates the world economy and especially America is based on the three dogma, those who exert themselves enough can work their way up." Listening to you talk about this thing that you now can see as a success, but at

the time you were so inside of it, what insight do you think that gives you to sort of the grind of the culture that we live in?

Josh: It's not just my own experience. I'm intimately connected with a number of people that before I knew them, I thought, "Well, if I had that career, I'd be happy forever," and I got to know them and I saw that they were in an acute kind of pain. Not only was the fame and the money not the solution, it was actually the source of the problem or a huge amplification of the central issue. I had a friend whose therapist works with a lot of creatives and he always tells him there's no such thing as a winner's circle. You have to get it out of your head that there's some room you're going to be invited into where everyone's drinking champagne and just blissed out and aren't we wonderful? No one's actually thinking that. Everyone's worried about the next thing. Also, success, especially in show business, feels so fragile and that could be taken away at any moment. The imposter syndrome is very high because it feels like there is a high degree of luck involved in the whole thing. So it all feels very precarious. There's nothing to really rest comfortably upon, but it's been so healing for me to be in community with people who also got to the top of the ladder and realized that wasn't the wall they were really wanting to climb.

Mike: So Carl Jung said this thing once. He said, "Americans live their lives like they each think they're the star of their own stage drama or movie," right?

Josh: Yeah.

Mike: And Americans love a good story. I think threes, because threes always have the temptation to play a character, and I think actors have a special insight into this. Americans love a success story. If you know the mythologist, Martin Shaw, he says-

Josh: Oh, I love Martin Shaw. Yeah.

Mike: He's the best. "If we're not surrounded by a cloak of good stories, we're at the mercy of stories that don't wish us well." So my question is, do you think there's a better story for us in this culture than the success story, and if so, as a storyteller, what do you think that story is?

Josh: Yeah, what a question. Yeah. Oh, man. I love that Martin Shaw quote. I'm going to think about that one. I heard Rebecca Solnit, who I love, who I think is such a wise prophetic voice and an optimistic voice, even though she's clear-eyed about despair and how hard the problems are right now, but she was asked, who on the landscape politically do you think is a rising up that could be one to watch? And she said, "I want to resist the idea that there's one person who's coming along." And I think it was either the Dalai Lama or Thich Nhat Hanh. Someone said, "The next Buddha will be the Sangha, will be the community. It's not going to be one lone individual. It's going to be this networked thing." And I think even you can see that science with the mycelial network, the kind of

mushroom network or the root system underneath all of these trees for hundreds of miles that they all are connected to this one thing and they have their individual expression. They're all waves upon the ocean, but the ocean is the thing. The wave is the individual expression.

And I think one of the things that's really helped me and also is challenging and I think it's not the only way to decenter yourself, but having children is a great way to puncture your main character syndrome. When you have a child, it necessarily dethrones you from the center because the child has to be the center. It has to be. You are a supporting character in that drama when you say, "Okay, I'm not the main character anymore." And you actually get down to the business of service or maybe more where your dharma lives, there's more satisfaction in that. And in fact, people are more drawn to you than they were when you were out there trying to conquer the world.

Carmen: That's right. I think about this essay titled Integrity by Thomas Merton and in this essay he writes, " Many poets are not poets for the same reason many religious."

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Carmen: It's many poets are not poets for the same reason many religious people are not saints. They never succeed in being themselves. And he goes on to write, "They spend their years in vain effort trying to become some other saint, some other poets." This combined with the conversation of authenticity but also of this striving and the three makes me think of how you mentioned you're kind of living more into your four wing. And for those listening the wing of the Enneagram, when we talk about that, it comes from one of the numbers adjacent to the number we're talking about. So in this instance, it would be the two or the four, and the wings add kind of nuance and just more information to understanding ourselves. All this to say, what has that journey for you, Josh, been like of living more into your four wing?

Josh: As I've gotten older, acting itself has come to feel like such a three thing for me. And I suspect I'll be doing it until I die, and it is no longer my number one priority. And in fact, I find it painful to do if I don't feel authentically connected to the part. I will turn down roles that I'm either offered or people want me to read for if I feel I'm not the guy. Trust me, I'm not the guy. Let's save us all a lot of time. I'm not going to get this role if I read for it. And also if I play this role, it's going to be painful for me. It's not going to be right. The roles that are meant for me, I still light up and I still love doing them, but I have to run it through this four wing authenticity system within myself and to say, "Is this what I need to be doing right now? Does this feel authentic to me? Is this the next step on my artistic journey that my soul needs for its own expansion?"

And now, if you ask yourselves those questions and you work in Hollywood or New York Theater, you're going to work a little less because most roles are not going to fulfill that if that's your standard. So I do write every single day, I write

songs, I direct and I try to fulfill that need for soulful authenticity. There's a dilemma inherent in it, which is to say the biggest, most visible success I had was in something that I didn't create and didn't write. And I think I lent a lot, an enormous amount of heart and soul to the thing. And I know my fingerprints are all over it, but I didn't create it, but it also feels both emotionally and even honestly financially risky to say, "I'm going to make my own stuff. I'm going to only answer my soul's calling."

And I have some quiet faith that that's just the path for me and I won't be abandoned by whatever divine forces support me if I just listen for the sound of the genuine, to quote Thurman, but it's also there's a lot of fear in saying I'm not going to try to replicate the first half of life three success that I had. I'm going to be doing something new.

Mike: That triggers a question in me. There's a great line in one of my favorite songs that says, "My old clothes don't fit like they once did, so they hang like ghosts of the people that I've been."

Josh: These are good, Michael.

Mike: Yeah. And I think about threes and fours in their search for authenticity and their tendency to play characters, they also have this penchant for reinvention, resurrection, reincarnation. It's like an ongoing samsara of the self.

Josh: You mean fours or threes?

Mike: I think both. I think when threes mature, I think because a lot of times threes have played that character, they'll play the character that lets them succeed. But in that, what you're learning is that you can reinvent yourself. And I really want to ask you about this. When I listen to eulogies, especially volume one, and especially the third act of volume one, right? When you start with the darkest hour and then what is it? I think it goes into What If Learning and Joshua 45, 46, where I think you call Richard out in one of those, by the way.

Josh: I do.

Mike: Which is very cool.

Josh: In Joshua 45, 46. Yeah.

Mike: But I hear this mourning of the self that you used to be and this opening to the new self that you're becoming and you put such beautiful lyrics to that. What wisdom would you offer to folks who maybe have found themselves crawling up the wrong ladder and now realize it might be time for reinvention?

Josh: Wow. What a question. I'm so glad you gave the album such a deep listen. I'm so proud of having made that. Thank you. One thing I did want to say, and I

want to get into this, I think the great tragedy for a three would be if they never got the success and lived thinking if only I got the success, then I would have been happy and lived my life. It's very good, especially for threes, to get the thing you think will make you happy so that you can disprove to yourself the idea that that's what will save you. The quicker you can get that as a three, the quicker you can be disillusioned and have your ship crash on the rocks of success, the better it is for you spiritually. My wife, her therapist always says, "A loss for the ego is a win for the soul." And the quicker you can kind of get that ego... just that three kind of thing, it's just very good.

I've met people who never had the thing and are still, they're older and they're still thinking that thing's going to save them, and it's really hard. It's really hard. Regarding the album, I brought my friends 30 songs when we went to Nashville to make that record. I worked with three great producers who became dear friends and we winnowed it down to 24 or 23 songs. Some of them became Volume two, which was much more lo-fi acoustic, just me and a guitar, a little harmonica. And the first volume, Eulogy volume one was much more produced, and we just put more bells and whistles on it. But in the middle of the night, I woke up and I realized there's a story in Eulogy Volume One. So it begins with this song Red, which is this kind of howl of adolescent rage. It was like the delinquent kid I never could be because I was so invested in being a good boy, but what was the roiling pain and anger and sadness underneath it?

So it's this kind of adolescent howl of rage is the only way I can describe it. And it's a great toe tapper. The second song is called Pretty Angel, and it's about a man in his 40s who can't fall asleep and he's being haunted by regret. So I told them, I said, "I think this album is about a sleepless night in a man's life who's at a midlife crisis turning point. He can't sleep and his whole life floods back to him, all these different parts of who he was, who he's becoming, mourning who he no longer is." So you can look at the whole record as that, and when it gets to the darkest hour, that really is the kind of darkest dark before the dawn. So the darkest hour, it says, "We got to let ourselves go. We got to let our old selves go. We got to let our old lives go."

I was actually thinking about that this morning. If you're asked what my favorite lyric on the album is, and it would be hard, but in the darkest hour I say, "these gray hairs at my temples, they tell me where I've been. I don't know where I'm going. I just hope they let me in." And to me, I don't know, there's something so evocative about the signs of aging are upon us. And we're staring into more mystery because the certainties of youth have been dismantled. So it goes The Darkest Hour, What if, Learning, and then Joshua 45, 46. Okay. So What If is about love avoidance and about the fear of intimacy and what if I stuck around? What if I didn't lace up my running shoes, as I say?

And then Learning is a song I wrote with Kyle Cox, who was one of the producers. I'm learning to be lonely, I'm learning to be sad, I'm learning to be scared. All these things, these emotions that I was afraid of in my youth that I'm now learning to re-embrace and say, this is part of the whole palette. So it's

expanding one's emotional palate. And then Joshua 45,46 is really a prayer. It's a benediction. It's a blessing. I wrote it, I was right about to turn 46. So it's Joshua 45 to 46, which it looks like a Bible verse, which I really love, but it's really about me going from 45 to 46. And it's about me becoming a songwriter. It's about, I reference how I met your mother. I say, I get stopped in airports because I played an architect.

Sometimes people think that's who I am. It used to drive me crazy. Some days it still does, but I'm learning how not to give a damn. And the thing I say about Richard is Richard said that God is love. I'm starting to believe him. I can feel it in the mountains and the water in the air. And Julian said that all is well. Theresa said, "There is a hell. It's just that no one's there." Both of which I learned from Richard. So it's a kind of nod to the mystics that I have so fallen in love with and an embrace that the notion of Joshua, I love that I have this ancient biblical name. It means God is my salvation. And I say the walls are coming down. All these walls that I built up, they're coming down.

And I can feel... At the end of Pretty Angel, he does fall asleep and maybe the whole album is a dream in some ways, but I can feel at the end of Joshua 45, 46 and my friends sing with me. You can hear them in the room and we were all crying because we had come to the end of this month. Also, when I was recording Eulogy was halfway through, I went up to upstate New York to see some friends and that's when I met my wife. So the meeting of my wife is intimately tied in with the recording of that album. I think it was a piece of art that I had to make. I didn't know that there was such a story until I got the story kind of locked into place, but so much of songwriting especially is a channeling process.

And I don't mean that in any sort of woo-woo way. There's just certain things you write that come out of you in song connected to melody that you think, "My God, where did that come from?" I don't know. You were just following some sort of little trail internally that was tugging at you and out comes the thing you meant to say, but in a much more poetic way than you ever could have said it without the guitar in front of you.

Mike: I was not prepared for such a thoughtful exploration of sort of getting grown. I've had some big emotions listening to it. You being so vulnerable about how you've wrestled with those questions I think invites a lot of us in.

Josh: Yeah, thank you.

Mike: So big thank you for me for that one. I really appreciate it.

Josh: I've done work in 12 step rooms and I was told, if you're not hearing at a meeting what you need to hear, you got to be the one to share it. Get your hand up and say, just so you can hear it. And the best art that I make is I want this thing to exist in the culture that doesn't exist right now. I think I'm going to have

to make it. One thing Richard says is, if you don't have a notion, some notion of a benevolent higher power as you age, you'll become a control freak because you don't believe anything's got you. So you have to control and manage the world and then your life just becomes about putting up more walls as you get older, which is a real tragedy. So like Joshua 45, 46 says, "I'm trying to dismantle those walls, not build new ones."

Mike: Again, and that requires so much unlearning and relearning, including learning how to be lonely, learning how to be sad and learning how to be scared. Goodness gracious, what a gift. Thank you.

Carmen: Yeah. The other thing really sticking with me from this is the way that disappointment and success can save threes.

Josh: Yeah. It's almost like you write it on a prescription pad, go out there, succeed, get your heart broken by your success, and then come back and see me and we'll get on with the business of life.

Mike: Wow.

Josh: I just want to say that, knowing that the CAC exists, knowing what Richard and James and all of you guys have built there is so meaningful to me. I love how Richard says the keyword is and, that it's action and contemplation. And I tell people if you want the clearest, kindest, most evolved spiritual voice writing today, you got to check out Richard Rohr. He really genuinely saved my spiritual life because I was so heartbroken and disappointed over a spiritual teacher that I had thrown everything into. And I heard him on a podcast and I said, there was something about his voice. It felt like I was being hugged. It was, everything's going to be okay. And just the notion of removing the worthiness test from religion. I've just absolutely annihilated myself with my unworthiness, with my shame, and to just be welcome back and say, "We don't come to God by doing it right. We come to God by doing it wrong."

Some of those things he says, just your heart cannot hear anything lovelier than that. So I have so much gratitude to Richard and to all of you guys at the CAC. It means a lot to me that you asked me to be here and yeah, just got a lot of love for all of you.

Carmen: Mike, okay. So threes are the shining stars of our lives, the success stories that we are surrounded by. What an incredible conversation about the three. In each episode, I know we both find ourselves really relating to something in particular about each number. In this instance, I found myself really stuck on this idea of, can I let myself be loved for nothing? And that message that really all nine types have a wound about that. It's inconceivable that we could be loved for nothing. So all the types create some sort of striving or doing to receive love, and just this idea of, yeah, no achievements, no making, no doing, but just plain me. And

so that aspect of the three that so desperately wants to achieve makes so much sense to me.

Mike: Well, and we live inside a culture that's so driven by the energy of the three. It really got me thinking about how much Americans love a success story, but what is our story of success? If I sit down and ask myself in my mind, what does success look like? I'm now asking myself, who's actually benefiting from my dream of success? Is it actually making my life better? Is it bringing more love into the world or is my idea of success just driving capitalism and dominant culture? And then I think about how that gets into even the good wisdom that we talk about here. The wisdom of falling upward, I think is so valuable for Threes and that came up, but even in embracing falling upward and in embracing failure, we can turn failure into a success. It's like, "I'm going to fail the best. I'm going to out-fail everyone. I'm going to learn the lessons of my falling upward and then I'm going to become the great enlightened second half of life person."

That's a lot to navigate to get to these raw moments of our true selves where we can just let ourselves be loved in the way that you're talking about.

Carmen: Yeah. And embracing that wound or standing face to face with the failure can be a key to opening us up both in our authenticity and our wisdom, as we talk about wisdom on this podcast, but not wisdom as this collection of information like look at me being successful with wisdom even. More like just the ground of our being, the rawness of who we are, the is-ness of ourselves.

Mike: Yeah. And I think Josh and Richard gave us some really, really helpful metaphors for thinking about the ways that we avoid this truth of who we are. We talk about this all the time, the worthiness games, the ways that we hide from our wounds and in so doing, we hide from our wisdom.

Carmen: Yeah. It hit me like a ton of bricks when it comes to the three, that this idea that disappointment in their success can save them to see this is not it. And that's relatable too, that actually reaching the pinnacle of our goals or the idea of what we think is success and seeing this isn't it is so important. Just failure is a good and necessary and even positive part of growing and being true to our authenticity.

Mike: Yeah. Or the failure of success, getting to the top of the ladder and realizing that it's leaning against the wrong wall, and saying, as you just said there, this is not it.

Carmen: This is another part that really stuck out to me in this episode, this idea of how important and helpful it can be for the three to sit still and be useless for a moment. And if that isn't a practice in and of itself, and I think about this in terms of again, for every number, the importance of a practice of sitting still and being useless for a moment, not useless in a negative sense. I hear that in a way

again as like the ground up our being, the is-ness of who we are. I think a lot about this Merton quote from love and living here and in that Merton writes, "When we are constantly in movement, always busy meeting the demands of our social role passively carried along on the stream of talk in which people mill around from morning to night, we are perhaps able to escape from our deepest self and from the questions it possesses. We can be more or less content with the external identity of the social self, which is produced by our interaction with others in the wheeling and dealing of everyday life. But no matter how honest and open we may be in our relations with others, this social self implies a necessary element of artifice. It is always to some extent a mask. It has to be."

And Martin also writes, "For when we come face to face with ourselves in the lonely ground of our being, we confront many questions about the value of our existence, the reality of our commitments and the authenticity of our everyday lives."

Mike: Oh my gosh, that is so good. Josh on his album, Eulogies, has a song called Learning and in it he talks about learning to be lonely, learning to be sad, learning to be scared, learning to just be with what is. And it's such a gift that practice helps us do that. And I also think about every time we do a recording at Richard's house and Opie just sits on Richard's lap and loves him. I think about Josh's love for his dog and how he told us that his dog taught him how to receive unconditional love. What a gift when we can be with all of who we are and let ourselves be loved. And as I said, I know practice leads us there.

Carmen: That's so true, Mike. And also reflection, right? And the Enneagram three and Me can sometimes use practice as just another way to achieve. So I'm excited that this month in our email series, which Mike, you'll share about a little bit more in just a minute, we have a unique practice that's an invitation to look specifically at practice just a little bit differently. And when it comes to reflection, I'm thinking, is there a time when you reached the top of the ladder and that pinnacle of success, and then it wasn't really what you thought it would be? What was that experience like? Then who in my life helps me drop my masks or release my grip on being the main character? And again, that might be a beloved pet, a lover, a friend, our niece or nephew, a grandparent. And finally, when we think about that idea from this episode, can I let myself be loved for nothing?

We're invited into the ground of our being, this birthplace of love. And so I wonder if we can ask ourselves, how can I allow unconditional love to wash over me? How can I remember that I am innately lovable?

Mike: Oh my gosh. Hey listeners, what a gift it is to invite you into these conversations with us. Always a gift to be in conversation with you.

Carmen: Thanks, Mike. Can't wait for next time when we get to look at the four.

Mike: Oh, big, big one, big number folks. And hey, we love that we know that you are out there having your own conversations about how the Enneagram is a tool that can help us look at our wounds and turn them into opportunities for healing, for deeper love and finding our work in the world. As always, you can sign up for bonus content and conversation starters at cac.org/belongs2026. That's cac.org/belongs2026. Thanks friends.

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

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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 SoundOn Studios for all of their work in post-production. From the high desert of New Mexico, we wish you peace and every good.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:31:28]