

Mike: Friends, welcome back to the Everything Belongs podcast with our beloved father, Richard Rohr. Each season we've explored an aspect of Richard's deep teachings, 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 different 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-discovery. If you'd like to read along, you can of course pick up Richard's book, The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective. And we know a lot of our audience first met Richard years ago as an Enneagram teacher. And now we get to chat with Richard in his 83rd year asking him about what he's continued to learn 36 years after his book was published.

And as we're rolling along through the numbers, we're stepping back today into the big picture for an extra special bonus expert episode. And we are so excited as we are going to talk to the author of one of my favorite books on the Enneagram, Chichi Agorom, who helps us understand the Enneagram as a tool for liberation. Wow, this book was so, so, so helpful and insightful. I am here with my amazing co-host, Drew Jackson. Drew, you, Carmen, and I had such a fantastic conversation with Chichi. I have to ask, what did you love about it?

Drew: Yeah, Mike, it was such a good conversation and I just really love and appreciate the way that Chichi framed the Enneagram as being about the collective over the individual. It's such a refreshing reframing of the Enneagram as a tool. And that might be really helpful and different for some of us who were taught the Enneagram more from individualistic teachings. I know for myself, that's how I learned the Enneagram. You encounter it through learning about your type. You're discovering your type and how that leads you into your own self-discovery. And I think for me, it was the most outward I began to extend that was to think about how my typing impacts the way that I think about how I show up in relationships-

Mike: Wow.

Drew: ... but not in the way that Chichi takes it to the space of the collective. So that was really, really refreshing for me. Mike, I know you just said that Chichi's book is your favorite book on the Enneagram.

Mike: Yeah, it's wild. We've read so many books and all of them have been great, but there was something about thinking about the Enneagram types as armor that we wear that was absolutely mind-blowing for me, especially as someone who survived a lot of trauma and violence in my life. I've been saying for years like, "Hang on, I got to get my armor on when I'm about to have an interaction, even with some people that I really love and appreciate." And so this insight that we need armor, we just don't want to confuse it with our essential identity. As Richard would say, the immortal diamond of our true self.

And I loved her teaching that every number has a special insight into a holy idea that is their unique wisdom to teach the rest of us, which again, as you were saying, gets me out of the me story and into the we story, realizing that there's something to learn from every number and not just obsessing about my own. And Drew, I have to say, speaking of Chichi's book is called *The Enneagram for Black Liberation: Return to Who You Are Beneath the Armor You Carry*. And here I am as a white man saying that this was the single most helpful book I've ever read on the Enneagram. Drew, why do you think it's so important that Chichi centers the experience of Black folks and especially Black women in this book?

Drew: I mean, this is one of the things that I love about Chichi's book. And it's so again, refreshing on the plethora of teaching that's out there on the Enneagram to have this perspective as a part of the teaching. But I want to point to Chichi's words here because I think what she says about this is so illuminating. She says, "When I centered myself in all of my particularities, Black woman, immigrant, I was able to use the Enneagram in a way that helped me find more freedom. That is why this book centers Black women in our exploration of the Enneagram as a tool for liberation. I believe wholeheartedly that when Black women are free, we will all be free."

Mike: Oh, yeah.

Drew: Those words I think are so important. And I hear in them echoes of when Jesus talks about the gospel being good news for the poor. It's not that Jesus is saying the gospel is only for the poor, but he's saying that the gospel is, if it's good news for the poor, it's good news for everybody.

Mike: Oh, yeah.

Drew: And so to think about Black women in particular who have moved through the world, moved through history with particularly marginalized identities, for Chichi to talk about the Enneagram as a tool for Black liberation as a Black woman immigrant to say, "You know what? This is a tool that is for me as a lack woman, which means it's also, it's a liberating tool for everyone. It's for all of us."

Mike: And again, and it gives so much. Drew, this feels exactly like how Richard wants us to live his teachings forward.

Drew: I love that. It makes me think about what Richard said about his bias toward those on the margins or as Chichi says, those with marginalized identities. Richard writes that his bias toward those on the margins comes from the prophets and liberation theology. And he suggests that however we treat those who are on the margins who may be vulnerable or in situations of less power tends to reveal the real agenda of any person or culture. And so Richard's inclusion of liberation theology here, it points us forward toward the work of

womanist and Black theologies too. And I think about Chichi's work here and how she again points us to ways of reclaiming our power, but not at the cost of the collective, but instead in the name of liberation for all people. As Fannie Lou Hamer famously said, "Nobody's free until everybody's free." That is such a reframing of freedom, such a reframing of salvation and liberation I think we all need. And so Mike, this feels like an episode for everyone in our audience, don't you think?

Mike: Oh my God, yes. And I mean, you just said it so well. Nobody's free until everybody's free. And in working for collective freedom, we work for our freedom. So oh my goodness, yes, everyone should read this book both as a way to understand themselves and others. And this is what we're talking about this season, the Enneagram, not just as a tool for self-understanding, but as a tool for solidarity where my wounds can lead me to wisdom. And a massive part of that wisdom is insight into the experience of others. So I am so excited for folks to hear this conversation. Drew, before we jump in, do you want to tell our audience just a little bit more about who Chichi is?

Drew: Yes. Chichi Agorom is a writer, educator, facilitator, and a lifelong learner of what it means to be fully human. She's the author of *The Enneagram for Black Liberation*, host of the podcast *From Armor to Ease*, Core Faculty at the Narrative Enneagram, and a former psychotherapist whose life's work is to support people on their journeys toward wholeness and healing. So let's go meet Chichi.

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

Paul Swanson: I'm Paul Swanson.

Carmen: I'm Carmen Acevedo Butcher.

Cassidy Hall: I'm Cassidy Hall.

Drew: And I'm Drew Jackson.

Mike: And this is Everything Belongs.

Drew: Well, welcome everybody to Everything Belongs. And Chichi, it's so good to be in conversation with you today. I'm excited to hear you talk to us a little bit about your perspective on the Enneagram. So thank you.

Chichi: Thank you for having me.

Mike: Oh, thank you so much, Chichi.

Carmen: Thank you for sharing your wisdom so courageously and with such gentle curiosity.

Drew: Chichi, we'd love for you to tell us, how did you first discover the Enneagram?

Chichi: How did I discover the Enneagram? I was introduced to it in grad school. I was hearing about it in different circles. I wasn't sure I was interested at the time. I was in grad school studying to be a therapist. We had other modalities that we were learning about that seemed like this is good enough. I don't need another system to learn about. And the first few conversations or groups I was a part of, I would describe the way they were talking about it as more reductionist. You are this type, therefore you do this, therefore this is who you are. And then I had a friend who introduced me to the Narrative Enneagram. She was in the process of doing her training with them and was talking about the narrative approach. And that caught my attention because narrative therapy was what I was really interested in at the time. So I was like, huh, well, I like the idea of the narrative so let's see what they have to offer. So I went to one of their trainings and it was really beautiful.

I fell in love really, not just with the system, but also with getting to see and learn from individual people's stories of how this same type structure can show up in five different people so differently, but with the same core story, the same core motivation. The narrative teaches through the use of panels. And so there is a portion where you're teaching, but then you're learning from people's stories and often those get very vulnerable and intimate. And so I mean, I was touched right from the very first panel. We started with type three and I was like, "Oh my gosh. Yeah." And I completed my training with the narrative. I'm now core faculty there. So that was my introduction. I was really drawn to hearing about people's stories and how in all of these different ways we're all really trying to figure out how to just be human. And we have these stories we carry that say, no, that's not allowed. You have to be this version in order to be okay.

Carmen: I love it. I love too that your first response was, "I don't need another system." One more thing. And I also love that you emphasize that you are really drawn to how it's not reductionistic. Because for me, that's one of the beauties of this narrative approach, which I think you've introduced a lot of us to really, is that it's open and it's really based in the stories. And like you said, since you have that panel approach, how everyone in the room has wisdom to share so it's not hierarchical. And it really is countercultural. I find that so beautiful.

Mike: Oh my gosh. Well, you know Carmen and our production team knows that I'm going to try so hard not to fangirl, but your book is by far and away the most personally helpful. And of course you tell us right up front in the beginning of the book, even though I intentionally center Black women, this book is for everyone. Liberation is everyone's work, not just the work of those harmed by systems of oppression. So here I am a white cisgender presenting guy in my soon to be 50s pouring over the Enneagram for Black liberation, saying to myself over and over again, this is good medicine. This is the medicine that I need as a trauma survivor. This is the medicine that I need as a human. This is the medicine I need trying to live in a culture defined by greed and speed and

domination. And it's the medicine I need trying to look beyond the edges of the boxes that I've been put in.

Chichi: Thank you so much. I've had other people be like, "Well, I think it's just... Isn't it just for Black people?" And I'm like, "I'm so glad to hear you say that because again, like I said in the book, this is everybody's work."

Mike: And I love this idea of Enneagram as armor. And this was a game changer for me. What can you tell folks listening who haven't read the book yet? How is it helpful to think about armor?

Chichi: I would say for a lot of people, maybe it's not completely a universal experience, although I think it might be, but there might be a shared understanding of what it's like, just like you were saying that there are certain people with whom you really feel like you can be yourself, which then begs the question, who are you being when you're not with those people? So I think we all can relate to some level of that of I have to mask in some way, maybe in certain situations with certain relationships. In the workplace in the US, for example, most people have a work persona that is very different from who they are when they're not at work. So there is some understanding of that. Even for the people who I'm thinking of our type fours who are like, "No, I'm always authentic." And it's like, "Well, this is also part of what we do as people who've been socialized in this world is that there's some shifting that needs to happen."

So yeah, the armor is just that. It's learned behavior that was essential for us. As even you think about yourself as a kid at that time of life, everything is very binary. "I'm good, I'm bad, I'm loved, I'm not loved." And then you figure out, "Oh, this is what I do either to get approval or get connection. I get good grades." That's when I get a lot of attention and approval. Or when I'm really quiet and I stay out the way and I don't make anyone mad, then everyone seems to get along. There's no conflict. So you learn these things or you start noticing these things. And then because our brains are wired for survival, it's like, "Oh, this is the thing that works. Great. We're just going to keep doing that." And then you find yourself in your 30s, 40s, 50s still doing that without any flexibility.

So the armor starts off that way, but I think of it as these are gifts that we have. So my armor of being self-sufficient as a five is a gift in many ways. I can do a lot of things by myself. I don't really need your help. But then it becomes a challenge or a trap or a prison when the story becomes, I have to be self-sufficient. I cannot ask you for help. I cannot rely on you. I cannot receive your help. If I'm not self-sufficient, I die. It can really feel in some of our courses at the narrative, we talk about how these stories underneath the story of who I have to be is a fear of what will happen if I'm not that way. And that can really feel primal, like life or death. Even somebody who doesn't lead with that type, they're like, "What? That makes no sense. You'll be fine."

But the interior experience is if I cannot figure this out on my own and be self-sufficient, I will die. So it's like that's what keeps the tightening around the story. It then becomes this armor. And then as you have this armor and you're navigating the world with it, it's almost like you fuse to your armor. And the armor is now me. So any other parts of me that don't fit into this story of who I have had to be and who I now need to keep being, I'm forgetting, I'm distancing myself from. I might even be shaming myself for the parts of me that are not self-sufficient or the parts of me that don't know enough. I don't want to look at those versions of me. They don't exist, but they do exist. So in order to be free, I have to be able to hold all of the parts of me.

Drew: Yeah. That's so helpful for me. So I identify with type nine. And it's been interesting to, in this journey of discovery, of learning and seeing the patterns in my own self of adaptability and at times holding back or shrinking from offering my full self or offering my full gifts to a space, but making the connection between that and also the larger systems and structures that impact Black people that send us the messages of you have to minimize yourself, your voice, your gifts in order to survive in a particular space. And so it's like this dance between, okay, I've learned this skill.

I've learned how to do this as a method of survival of moving through the world and navigating. And also it's like, how much of that is just me and how much of that is just a response to the environment in which I grew up and does it even matter if I'm differentiating between those two? And that's one of the things that as I was reading your book, particularly the section on the nine, that adaptability piece really stuck out to me, particularly bringing it in conversation with social location and larger systems of oppression. So that was super helpful for me.

Chichi: I'm really glad to hear that. And I think too, it's like adaptability for the nines is a gift. So it's like for all nine types, the armor is a gift or the thing that hardens into armor originates as a gift. And then it's when it becomes, I have to, like you said, I have to be this way in order to be safe. And then it becomes, this is the only way that I can be as opposed to I can be adaptable and.

Mike: So good. And I love how you talk about creating space between self and armor. And before I ask you about that, I have to ask, for you, when you talk about the essential self, that person that's protected by the armor, but more than the armor, how would you introduce our listeners to what you mean by the essential self?

Chichi: I feel like I probably will always still be discovering more of who my essential self is. Some people, you might say it's the part of you that's divine. It's the part of you that has always been there. I think of the essential self as freest self. The part of me that's connected to the phrase that's coming up for me right now is connected to my original story of who I am, not the story I had to create because of my family or the world or all the other stuff out there. And it's always there. So it's like life happens, but your essential self and those essential

qualities don't disappear because there's trauma or pain. It's always there. And so even that feels like a beautiful invitation to liberation to be like, I can return to the thing that's always there. I don't have to create it. I don't have to. And in fact, in nine different ways, we are trying to mimic or recreate. And it's like, if I don't have to do the work to create it and my work is simply to return to it, then that feels more possible.

Mike: That's really great. When I picked up your book, the first question that percolated into my consciousness is, oh, I wonder if our armor is what we get liberated from or if our armor is a tool in liberation.

Chichi: It's a great question. I think that it could be both. Here's the thing. I would love in a perfect world our armor is also what we get liberated from. But in the world that we live in which armor is still necessary for so many people, especially for those who hold marginalized identities, it is still necessary. I cannot walk into this world unarmored. That is not wise. I still need my armor. And so then the liberation is in being able to name it as my armor, to create enough space so I am the one who's choosing when to use it and when to put it down, which then makes me more available to experience the rest of myself instead of the armor running the show. I can also use my armor in service that when I'm in the driver's seat, when there is conscious choice, I can use my armor as a tool for liberation.

Also with conscious choice, I recognize I am not my armor. There is more to me beyond this, which also then creates with a lot of people for whom working towards liberation is their main focus, that's what they do. It can become so consuming that you forget what it is you're working towards. What's the dream? What's the vision? Where are we going? I become so entrenched in fight, fight, fight, resist, resist, resist. And so that's another way I think of the armor becoming all consuming. Now all I see is I have to be this warrior. I have to fight against injustice every second of the day.

What about those little moments where there is a bit of peace, where there is a bit of justice? Are you available for that? Because if not, you end up depleted. It's not sustainable and it also disconnects you from the fullness of your experience. So you only start to see one thing is true. Our world is really hard and it is really unjust and our world is really beautiful. There are moments that remind us of that. There are interactions that remind us of that. But my armor can keep me from being present with that because I have to believe one story because this is a story that's true. So this is what I have to do and who I have to be. And that's limiting too.

Carmen: Yeah. This is one of the most impactful for me parts of your book. So I want to look for just a moment at power and vulnerability. What do we mean when we talk about vulnerability? And Chichi, who gets to decide when and how we should be vulnerable? I'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

Chichi: My favorite definition of vulnerability, which is from the dictionary, I didn't make it up. But when I think of vulnerability, it's the definition around the willingness to allow yourself to be touched. The willingness to allow yourself to be impacted by the world around you, by others around you. Because I think that creates, it paints a picture of this perfect contrast of when I'm willing to be touched, I'm open. When I don't want to be, when I'm not willing to be touched or impacted, I'm closed. I'm armored. And so that's what I think about with vulnerability is A, and it's also, I would add like it's a willingness to be impacted or touched without control of the outcome because that's the other piece. You're not fully vulnerable if you're still trying to control the outcome. If I expose myself to you here and say, "This is who I am." I have no control over whether you'll welcome that with open arms or whether you'll judge me or shame me.

But that choice to say I'm still going to be open regardless and let myself be impacted is really vulnerable. So who gets to make the choice? Me. We can't demand vulnerability from other people. Even if you think, "Oh, I'm such a safe space. You should be vulnerable with me." No. The person gets to choose how much of themselves they share. I want to say this was Brené Brown years ago in her writings about vulnerability who was really emphasizing vulnerability is earned. It is not something that just, here you go, here's all my vulnerability. It's like I need to be discerning about who and how much, but vulnerability can be freeing when I have discerned this is a space, this is a person. And also a lot of us are not vulnerable with ourselves. So I really believe how we do one thing is how we do everything. So if I'm armored up with you, I'm armored up with me.

And I'm not thinking about that because all my attention is, you're the threat. I have to protect myself from you. But it's like, how am I doing that internally? So in many ways, we're not actually leaning into vulnerability with ourselves. We're not actually willing to be open and impacted even with ourselves and our own experiences and our own stories. And starting there can be truly freeing. It can be scary, obviously, because again, it's that loss of control. I have no control of the outcome. I see this all the time when I'm working with Enneagram with people. It's like, okay, if you invite someone to just pause for a minute and be with the sadness that's arriving or arising, there is a fear of like, oh my gosh, how long is this going to last? Is this going to overwhelm me? What if da, da, da? You want to control. It's like actually you have to surrender that to really be vulnerable. And then you maybe see something beautiful that comes out of that, that you can allow yourself to be that open and still be okay.

Carmen: And you talk in your book really powerfully, I think, about different forms of power, power over, power within and power with. So can you tell our listeners why power is important and how you define it in these three ways, power over, within and with?

Chichi: Yeah. I think power is important because we need it to make decisions, to create. But a lot of people have this immediate assumption when you hear power of a type of power, which is power over. The power where you are

controlling others, you are determining for others what their experience is, what they do. And so a lot of people, there are people who gravitate towards that. And then there are other people who are like, "I don't want that. I don't ever want to have power over other people and make it a binary. If I'm not doing that controlling thing, then I don't have power, but there are other forms of power. There is our internal power, which is some of what I've been alluding to with conscious choice. I'm not going to say that this is true for every situation, but in a lot of situations, we internally have a sense of power, a sense of agency to make a choice to maybe I don't have 95% of the power in the room. What if I have 5%? What do I do with that?

What do I do with my sense of agency with that 5%? And then there's a power like our shared collective power where when we come together, we actually have a lot more power together that we can use to create, to collaborate, to nurture the things that we want to see grow as opposed to... And I think that is so important, especially now, especially with everything happening in the US, in the world. That's part of why I mentioned it in the book because we're talking about transformation and growth. And again, there's a tendency to lean individual with it.

But then if we're talking about collective transformation, it requires us to tap into our sense of agency individually and collectively to say, not just, "Oh, I'm dreaming of this envisioning this world where we all get to belong or we all get to feel safe." But there's also the sense of, "Okay, I can't do all of that on my own. Thank God." My vision of friendship, honestly, I can't tell you where this came from, but since I was pretty young, I would say my teenage years, I've had this ideal of what friendship and a community of friends looks like. And every time I would describe it as, I mean, there's more to it than this, but for the context of this conversation, if you are struggling, if we are in community together and Michael is struggling and he only has 50% and needs 50% more and I only have 20 to give, but Carmen has 30. I am not depleting myself.

I'm giving what I have. Carmen is giving she has. Michael gets the 50%. And then maybe tomorrow I need 40. And there's this sense of we're sharing together. There isn't this, "Well, no, it's my 50%. I'm not going to give that to you because if I give it to you, I don't get it back." It's like, no, it's just this beautiful dynamic of we bring what we have. I have the agency to offer my 30% and I'm going to do that for the thriving of the whole, for the thriving of this person I care about within this circle. And I trust that if I need 20 tomorrow, somebody's got two, the other person's got five, the other person's got 10. It'll come.

Carmen:

That is a rabbit hole I'll go down with you any day because I really love that you keep emphasizing and bringing us back to the collective. And you're really mystical to my mind in how you approach things because you also keep bringing us into the body. And I loved how you talked about information, knowledge and wisdom. They're not the same thing at all. And you framed it in a way that helps us approach the Enneagram and our armor wisely. So can you talk just a little bit

about the difference between information, knowledge and this embodied collective wisdom and how it helps us to use this tool wisely.

Chichi: I think of information as just raw data and information can look like lots of different things. What I'm seeing with my eyes, what I'm hearing, what I'm sensing. We can collect information in so, so many ways. And then we build a sense of knowledge by gathering that information, sorting through it, you could create a system of knowledge around certain things, but knowing something is not enough. It's a good start. Knowing is not the same as embodying wisdom, which requires us to utilize that knowledge. It requires us to try it out, to live it. I don't want to misquote. I want to say that this quote is from Barbara Holmes.

Carmen: Dr. B?

Chichi: Yeah.

Carmen: Dr. Barbara Holmes? Yeah.

Chichi: Yeah. I think it's her. I might be wrong, but I remember reading this and was like, oh, I needed to hear this. This is years ago. But she said that we often think about wisdom or making wise decisions as gathering all the information first and then making sure that the first step that you're making is the right one. But it's really about doing the thing and then pausing and evaluating. And then the choice that comes from that is the wisdom. Now that I've tried it, I want to keep doing that or I want to shift. I want to go here instead. That's the wisdom, but it's coming from this embodied place as opposed to... And this was really impactful for me as a very heady person because I want to know everything first. And my invitation is live first, do the thing, take the step.

And then I really love our bodies take in 11 million bits of information per second at all times. My body is aware of the temperature in this room, the sounds that I'm hearing that you can't hear, the texture of the headphones on my face, all of that and more. My body is constantly collecting information. Our conscious minds are only able to process five per second. 11 million bits of information, five bits of information per second. But we live in a society that tells us the mind is like, that's how you know, that's how you make decisions. So being able to tap into the wisdom of my body is life changing because there's so much I'm missing when I'm focused on just the five or when I'm focused on, oh, these are the facts that I've gathered or this is just the system of knowledge as opposed to, and what else is arising in here? What's the wisdom in my body? What's the wisdom in my heart? How do I live connected to all three of those centers and not overvalue one at the detriment of the others?

Carmen: That's so good.

Mike: Everything Belongs will continue in a moment.

Drew: You say liberation is everyone's work, not just the work of those who are harmed by systems of oppression. And so I'd love to hear you talk a little bit about that. And what do you mean when you talk about liberation? A lot of people use that word and it means different things. So what do you mean when you use that word?

Chichi: Great question. I think in the context of my work, and I think also in general, what I mean by liberation is the freedom to be, I say fully human, which is something I feel like I'm still, it is part of my quest in life to figure out what it actually means to be fully human and not just responding to the external requirements, the external expectations or internal expectations. But I think of it as the personal liberation, the freedom to be fully human, which then allows us also collectively to live in community where our needs are taken care of, we are taken care of, everyone gets to flourish. So it's like my general picture of what liberation looks like.

Drew: That's beautiful. I love the image of being fully human. And there's a quote that I often come back to by Saint Irenaeus who talks about, he says, "The glory of God is a human being fully alive." And there's, like you said, a lifelong quest of discovering what it means to be fully human. And there are so many things that actually block us, get in the way of us living into our full humanity. One of the things that you bring to this conversation is the perspective of a Black woman talking about the Enneagram and using the Enneagram as a tool for liberation. Can you share a little bit with us about really the larger systems of oppression that actually impact us in terms of experiencing that full humanity, which you're speaking of, and how the Enneagram can actually be a tool to help us support us in realizing and experiencing liberation? Can you talk to us a little bit about that?

Chichi: Yeah. So I was talking about being fully human. And I think in so many ways, this is true for everyone, I think, but in so many ways we're not even aware how we're not allowing ourselves internally or whether we're not allowed externally to just exist, which I think is part of freedom. And from the perspective of a Black woman, especially in the experience of a Black woman in America, I feel like there's so much armoring and so much of a posture, like posturing that is required to navigate the society on a day-to-day basis. And because you're born into that, I was not born in the United States, but I lived there since I was 17.

But you're born into that experience and it becomes so part of your everyday way of living that it becomes really difficult to notice or to see or identify that there might be other parts of you separate, different, who want something else, who want to experience something else other than the version of you that you have to be in order to navigate the world and be safe and have a sense of certainty, have a sense of belonging and community. And so I felt like I was a part of many conversations and also witnessing a lot of people talking about wanting to be free, wanting liberation. But then I was also noticing internally and with the people I was in community with, it's like we're talking about this thing that seems really theoretical out there. I want freedom and I want liberation out there.

But internally, I'm not experiencing liberation or freedom because I'm so bound to this armor that I carry everywhere with me that is necessary. It's not unnecessary, but I have come to believe that the armor is the entirety of who I am. So I have no space to choose. And I think choice is a big part of what feels liberatory and feels like freedom. I get to decide when I need my armor for how long I use it, I set it down, or maybe I don't need it. And I get to experience and explore who am I outside of this story, outside of this armor that I always have to carry. It's also really exhausting to always be armored regardless of whether it's Black women. I think for everybody, it's really exhausting to always be carrying armor around.

One, when you don't even know that you're carrying it around, that's just not part of your experience. And then sometimes when people become aware of the armor, there's still that sense of, okay, I know it's here, but I don't know how to create enough space to set it down because it just feels like this is my reality. This is all I have to do and be. When I think about Black women and the Enneagram, it's really that sense of, or wanting to offer that curiosity around what's the armor that you're carrying? Who do you believe that you have to be to be okay in the world? And then what happens in spaces where maybe you are a little safe and you are okay? Do you have the capacity and the freedom to say, I don't have to be that way here?

I can be gentle and tender with me. I can tend to myself. I can actually let in care. I think of armor sometimes as like a screen like plexiglass or something in front of me. So even if I'm saying, I want care, I want support, I want love, and you're offering that to me, but it's hitting my armor and sliding right off. I don't actually get to fully experience the things that I say I want, the beautiful things I say I want because I'm so armored up. So that was also part of what I was noticing again internally and in my community where I'm like, we're saying we want all these things. And sometimes when it's available, we can't even receive it because we're so armored up because we think that's who we have to be all the time.

Drew: I feel like what you help us do is to widen our aperture a bit and to take a look at the Enneagram, not just as a tool for my own self-help, but as a tool for collective liberation. And you actually say for meaningful transformation to occur, which is the actual purpose of the Enneagram, we must be willing to divest from the systems that teach us that our best lives are all about us and somehow separate from the wellbeing of the people around us. And I just feel like that was, it's a really important addition to the conversation on the Enneagram. And I was so thrilled to see you bring in the voice of Toni Morrison when she talks about freedom and she says the function of freedom is to free somebody else.

Chichi: Yeah. For me, it's such an important part of working with the Enneagram. I think it's fine and it's fun to come in from the, I want to learn about me. That's where we all start. I want to learn about my type. I want to learn about my armor. But then expanding that, I liked your phrase of widening our aperture. I think it's

important for a number of reasons. One is the thing that feels so important to my safety, my armor, how I navigate the world. When I'm looking at it from just my perspective, it's like, this is the thing keeping me safe or this is the thing getting me connection or getting me a sense of belonging. What is difficult to see is how that very piece of armor can also be harming another person. The Enneagram is a tool. I think of it as a tool.

So sometimes it's really dependent on the person utilizing the tool. I can use a hammer to put up a beautiful painting and make your home more beautiful. Or I could use a hammer and trash everything. So it's really about me and how I hold it. So my armor can be really protective and supportive for me. And because I have this inflexibility about how I have to be in the world, subconsciously, I might be holding you to that same story. One of my pet peeves is incompetence. I can't stand it. And then doing my work with Enneagram, I was like, oh, I can't stand incompetence in myself so I really cannot stand it in you. It's unacceptable internally and externally. And so I am maybe short with people or I have less capacity for compassion or acceptance when it comes to another person because I can't offer that yet to myself because I'm still stuck again in this rigid and flexible story of who I have to be.

So I think that's part of the communal piece that the more I create space between myself and my armor, the more I'm able to allow the people in relationship with me to have space to actually be fully human instead of requiring them to be what I need them to be, for me to be okay. And then I think in nine different ways, our types, we are doing that. We're requiring people to collude with our agenda to keep us comfortable. And we don't always recognize that we're doing that. Everybody has their own version of this. And I think it's, again, it's fine to notice, but also to build awareness of how am I requiring the people around me to collude with my agenda? Because that also prevents them from being fully human.

Drew: Goodness. There's so much there. So I mean, thank you.

Mike: It's so good. I love what you said in your book about recognizing the dangers of over identifying with a healthy or an unhealthy expression of a type. Because I hear so many people, like for me, I've been living in this place the last few months where I'm like, I'm either a really healthy four that's moving to two or I'm a really unhealthy two that's dissolving into four. And am I healthy or I'm unhealthy? Meanwhile, the world's on fire and I have a lot of trauma in my story. And so I really appreciated, and let me know if I'm getting this right, where you said, "Hang on a second. Who gets to define what's healthy? Is that a dominant culture ideal that we're being asked to measure ourselves against? Who's benefiting from that definition of healthy? And then what happens when we let that go?" So for everyone listening, could you just share a little bit of wisdom about maybe uncoupling ourselves from overinvesting in the healthy versus unhealthy idea of a type?

Chichi:

I love that question. I think the idea of healthy presents its own trap. It's another way to keep ourselves bound because whose definition of healthy? And also I think of healthy as very capitalist actually. Within capitalism, there is never satiation. There's never satisfaction. That's anti-capitalism because you have to keep there's more, more, more, more, more. I need more money. I need more influence. I need more power. So you're never healthy because then you would stop striving and the system doesn't want that for you. It wants you to constantly be striving for it to keep functioning. So the other thing I'd say about the healthy versus unhealthy, one, if somebody is just getting to learn about the Enneagram and you come into it and you're like, "Oh my gosh, I fit the description of an unhealthy whatever." Oftentimes, maybe it's not for everybody, but oftentimes that introduces shame. And shame never motivates us. It motivates us to hide. It does not motivate us to grow. So it's not a helpful invitation into self-exploration to start off with shame.

The other thing is this is like it's a continuum. It's a fluctuation. This morning I felt really grounded. I started my day with qigong, which is something I've been trying out the last few weeks. I felt very grounded. Then my day got really chaotic and I noticed some of my other patterns that are definitely not connected to grounded me. So I didn't start off healthy today and then I went unhealthy. It's just, it's a flow throughout the day. In the narrative, we use the language of conscious versus unconscious. How conscious am I? How aware versus unaware? Asleep versus awake. Because we all will fall asleep to our patterns multiple times a day. We will all dip out of being consciously present with what is happening multiple times a day. And that's normal. Nobody is 100% consciously tapped in every single minute of the day. That's impossible. And that does not make you unhealthy.

And some of the patterns that we ascribe to unhealthy versions of type are, again, things people have to do to navigate really complex situations. So I find that compassion is actually far more impactful in this type of work and working with yourself. And it's the thing that we're often most resistant to. Again, I think just because of the society we live in, it's like, no, give me the three steps. What are the three things I need to do to be freer by tomorrow? You know what I mean? That feels more like that's what we want. But when we're working with people on panels and things and you invite people to offer compassion, it can feel like, what's that going to do? But then it creates space because you are allowing yourself in that moment to actually be human, which is to be free. Even if you don't like what you're witnessing, being able to hold space for that means being able to hold space for your entire reality instead of escaping reality and calling that a desire for growth.

Mike:

It's so good. I appreciate you saying that. As you were describing that, I'm like, oh my God, the healthy person is the person who can keep working and keep consuming. And who's benefiting from that? So it is wild to me how sometimes the very tools that can help us can get turned against this. And so one more question about getting liberated here. I really appreciated in your podcast, in your book, how you shared in your own journey how you've at one point were

like, oh my God, am I a six because I have anxiety? Am I a four because I feel this way?

And then in particular, you point out how, especially folks with traditionally marginalized identities, need multiple types of armor to survive in the world. And I think about the time that I and friends of mine have spent going, no, but what's my real type? What's the real armor that I'm wearing? And so my question one is is that the point of the Enneagram is to really figure out what my type is? And two, what does it mean that sometimes we have different types of armor that we need to wear at the same time?

Chichi:

Yeah, that's a great question. I'm going to go back one second to add one thing to the capitalist comment. I think part of capitalism as well is that health becomes a performance. I mean, we're required to perform in general. So it's like you were saying, the healthy person's the one who can keep working. I'm like, yeah, and that's a performance because capitalism requires that even if you are tired, if what is true in reality is I'm exhausted or I don't even care. I have to keep up the performance because that is what is expected. And we can do that with our personal growth work. We can do that with Enneagram work. I'm going to keep up the performance of what it looks like to be a healthy five, even if that's not true to my experience. And who suffers? Me because I'm not actually allowing myself to be.

I'm not meeting myself in reality. But then to your other question, I think of it as multiple layers of armor, especially for people who hold marginalized identities. I really resonate with the type six armor as a Black person in America, as an immigrant. Also, I was raised in a culture where you're literally with words told, everyone's out to get you. So you can't trust anybody. So that was ingrained in me from childhood. So I really resonate with the type six. I also really resonate with type eight. I would say that was the culture of the city that I grew up in. And that also can be very true for the experience of Black women in America, that is a form of armor. In fact, we do typing interviews in the narrative method and there are many times where someone will type. I coach people learning how to do typing interviews and they might type someone, a Black woman as an eight.

It's like, oh, I heard a lot of eight language. It's like, yeah, that's secondary armor. That's how she has to be in the US. So to your first question of what's the point? I think all of this work is beneficial. Whether you start at the neighboring house or another house, all of the work can be beneficial. And I think an awareness of multiple layers of armor, for me, I know I have some eight armor, I have some six armor. And I'll offer two things. One is if you're trying to explore which one of these is my core story and which is just like multiple layers of armor, what helped me was I know how I am when I'm embodying like six energy. Can I turn that off? Do I do that all the time? And for me, I noticed like when I'm actually at home by myself, I feel safe.

I don't operate that way. My thoughts and my mind are not going in that direction. I'm not scanning for threats. I am doing that. I can show up as a six in spaces where I don't feel safe, where I feel othered, all of that. I'm noticing the patterns of behavior, but when I'm not in those spaces, it's not quite there. The same for the eight. I can power up. I can take charge. I can be the loudest voice in the room if I need to be. That's not how I am. So that was one of the things that helped me. It was like really when I'm by myself, I am such a little five, but I can show up differently based on the situation, based on the armor that I need in order to keep myself safe.

Mike: I love how you talk about the holy idea. Every single number has a holy idea. My great teacher origin of Alexandria says that our individual wounds give us our individual wisdom and then that's our wisdom to share. Could you just, again, for folks who haven't read the book yet, just let them know what you mean by the holy idea.

Chichi: So over the last couple of years, I think I mentioned earlier, yeah, I'm core faculty of the narrative and we've been working on reworking some of the language to make it more accessible for today's world. And I really like that we now refer to the holy ideas as the greater knowings of the type. So that's how I would describe it for the listeners. It is an expansive embodied knowing of how reality is that is not confined to our limited perspective based on type. So it's like if I have a camera lens, if I'm looking through a camera lens and I'm focusing on the center of the photo, it blurs everything else out on the sides. And all I see is that whatever's in that little circle in the middle, that's what's real. And it's true. That does exist and it is real and it's not all that exists.

And so the greater knowing is, or the holy idea is this invitation to widen the lens. It's like, okay, right in the center there was this thing, but if I open up to what else is true, there is so much more. And so each type has a connection to an aspect of the greater knowing of the greater reality, of reality as it is, not just how my type sees it. And that's also the aspect of reality that for each type they have a hard time believing is true because the type story is like the opposite of that. The thing too with the holy idea or the greater knowing is it's not something that we manufacture. One of my colleagues says our types are playing God in nine different ways. So our types try to mimic the greater knowing or the holy idea because I no longer can trust in the abundance that already exists.

I have to try to mimic or create my own abundance by hoarding, holding onto my resources, withholding myself to create my own form of limited measly abundance. But that's what our types do in nine different ways. So the invitation with the holy idea or the greater knowing is not to try to recreate or mimic, but to actually relax, which is the hardest thing for all of us to relax into what already is instead of trying to mimic or create. It's like if abundance already there, I'm not making it. And part of doing that is training my eyes to look for it. But if I'm not looking at that, my type is only looking for the opposite of that

where there is depletion and not enough. But if I'm looking for abundance, turns out I see it everywhere. It's also part of my reality.

Mike: Oh my gosh, that's so good. Yeah.

Carmen: We are here at the CAC, Chichi. And when we think about contemplation, we're often asking how can we practice in our head and heart and body to create space regardless of what our number is?

Chichi: Yeah. I think creating space can happen in small bits moment by moment. Sometimes I think people feel like if I don't have an hour or a weekend to dedicate to doing some work to create space, then it just can't happen. Life is too busy. But I think pausing, we talk about pausing a lot at TNE. I probably put it a lot in the book as well because our types are so quick. It's like rapid fire response to what's happening outside because really your type is just trying to protect you. Unfortunately, it thinks there's only one way to do it, but it's just trying to protect you. So it's very quick. And so there's a lot of power in slowing down the process. And our breath is a great resource for that because as long as we're alive, we always have breath and you always have it with you. And also really just meeting whatever is there. So like not pausing, noticing that there's tension or there's fear and going, I shouldn't be afraid. Or this is because we're getting stuck in the story. Oh, this is here because blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

And now I'm back in the story and I'm no longer in the present moment. The goal is not, I'm always present and I'm always, but the goal is to return. So when I notice that I've left, how do I come back? And then when I'm here to meet whatever is arising with compassion and curiosity. But that can happen when you're driving, that can happen on a walk, that can happen on a podcast interview. You don't need a weekend retreat in order to be able to pause. And the more that we can do that, the more access we have to being embodied for most of our lives as opposed to embodiment as something that you only experience during certain high moments. I think also the curiosity piece, being able to just look at something with curiosity instead of judgment like, "Huh, okay, that's there. I wonder why that's there." As opposed to, "I can't believe that's there. Why am I feeling that? Or why am I responding that way?" Or like, "I thought I was more involved than this." It's just like, "Huh. Interesting. Tell me more."

Mike: Cassidy, who's another one of our hosts and I were having a conversation just yesterday about the gift of curiosity. Cassidy, another really great five and imagining curiosity as something that's an aspect of the divine, like going, what if God is just curious and is wondering why we do what we do and can't wait to see what we're going to do next? What a beautiful-

Chichi: I love that so much.

Mike: Yeah. What a cool way to think about being alive and then to give ourselves permission to be curious. When I've lost the rhythm, I find it again. When my mind wanders in practice, I notice and I go back and I don't beat myself up about it. If I want to be curious about it later, maybe there's something there. Oh, this is so good. So last question before lots of appreciation. How do you think our types empower us to take good action to put our healing in the service of healing the world?

Chichi: I think each type has strengths. There are things that come naturally to each of the nine types. Some of them I think of as superpowers of each of the types. For example, with the type nine, they have this ability to see things from everyone's perspective and understand where each person is coming from, which of course makes them great at mediating. And other people can be good at that, but they have to work to be. It's like I have to learn how to be able to see things from other people's perspectives. And for the nines, it's super easy. So each type has many gifts like that, that I think could really be of service in the work of creating the world that we want to see. Again, back to this being a tool, it depends on how we're holding it.

If I can just let you show up as who you are with your gifts and your challenges and not make them about me or how those are impacting my story of who I need to be to be okay, then we can collaborate with our gifts. As we offer our strengths to the collective, I think the awareness of other types and what it is that each type is afraid of or what they're struggling with can help us bring compassion to that experience rather than getting stuck on the behavior that's driving us crazy. That also is transformative, not just for our individual relationships, but then imagine that in the widening circles of influence where we exist and how that in and of itself can transform the world.

Mike: Oh, that's so good. Listening to you talk, I'm like, "Oh God, this is not a solo act. This is an ensemble."

Drew: Just thank you for your work. Deeply grateful for your voice, for your added contribution to this larger conversation with the Enneagram. Yeah, it's been deeply, deeply impactful for me to engage with your work. So thank you.

Carmen: Thank you so much for bringing us such teaching that is encouraging, collective, embodied, and always evolving. Man, awesome.

Chichi: Thank you so much. Thank you for having me. Thank you for all the kind words. I needed that reminder today. So thank you, the three of you, for those beautiful reflections. This really fun.

Mike: And to everyone listening, we cannot recommend enough picking up Chichi's book, just jumping in and learning from all the wisdom in there. Chichi, thank you for the work you do in the world. Thank you for all that you do and all that you are. And thank you for this conversation.

Carmen: Thank you, Chichi.

Chichi: Thank you.

Mike: Thanks everyone for listening. Again, a reminder, this was an extra special big picture bonus expert episode. We will be back in just about two weeks with our episode on the Enneagram 4. As always, don't forget, you can sign up for extra content and conversation starters because we really, really hope that you're getting together with friends to chat about these episodes. And you can sign up for those at cac.org/belongs2026. That's cac.org/belongs2026. Hey, thank you so much for being a part of the conversation.

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

