



SOUL WORK BIBLE STUDY

Session • Falling Upward: A Spirituality For The Two Halves Of Life



A LEARNING PATH & STUDY GUIDE

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Materials Needed

- Open mind, open heart
- Prayer
- Bible
- Book: "Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life" (Richard Rohr)
- Journal

Schedule

June 19, 2024	Orientation & Introduction	Jeremiah 1:5
June 26, 2024	Read Chapter 1	Luke 12:22-23
July 3, 2024	Break (Rest & Review)	
July 10, 2024	Read Chapter 2	Genesis 12:1
July 17, 2024	Read Chapter 3	Luke 15:11-32
July 24, 2024	Read Chapter 4	John 16:33
July 31, 2024	Read Chapter 5	Isaiah 8:14
Aug 7, 2024	Break (Rest & Review)	
Aug 14, 2024	Break (Rest & Review)	
Aug 21, 2024	Read Chapter 6	Matthew 10:37-39
Aug 28, 2024	Read Chapter 7	John 14:26 & Romans 5:5
Sept 4, 2024	Read Chapter 8	I John 2:21
Sept 11, 2024	Read Chapter 9	Romans 8:28
Sept 18, 2024	Read Chapter 10	Matthew 5:14-16
Sept 25, 2024	Break (Rest & Review)	
Oct 2, 2024	Break (Rest & Review)	
Oct 9, 2024	Read Chapter 11	Matthew 23:25-26
Oct 16, 2024	Read Chapter 12	Matthew 20:1-16
Oct 24, 2024	Read Chapter 13	Ephesians 3:16-19
Oct 30, 2024	Conclusion	TBD

BIBLE STUDY FORMAT

6:30 PM	Welcome & Opening Prayer
6:35 PM	Review the Covenant of Care
6:40 PM	Recap or reflect on the prior week
6:50 PM	Summarize assigned chapter: What are the major themes?
7:00 PM	Scripture Reflection: How does scripture speak to the chapter themes?
7:10 PM	Explore discussion questions
7:30 PM	Review “soul work” for the week
7:35 PM	Round robin (optional)
7:40 PM	Closing prayer

COVENANT OF CARE

We are open. We assume there is something to learn; this is a great space to not know and to acknowledge we all have room to heal and grow.

We are here. We slow down and bring our full presence.

We speak our truth. We bring honesty about our experiences and our lives with God.

We are self-aware. We’re mindful of the group. When we find ourselves talking more than others, we give others a chance to speak.

We turn to wonder. We withhold judgment. Instead, if we find ourselves defensive or in disagreement, we ask ourselves “I wonder what my reaction is teaching me about me.”

We embrace silence. It’s ok to have moments of silence while we consider a question that our facilitator is asking.

We speak with “I” language. When responding to questions, we speak from our own experiences rather than speaking about what “you” do or “they” do.

We keep confidentiality. We are free to share our story, but we do not share the story of others without their permission.

CHAPTER 1: THE TWO HALVES OF LIFE

Luke 12:22-23

Learning Goal: Consider where you are on the journey of spiritual growth.

Chapter Summary¹

Chapter 1 is a discussion about the process of spiritual growth. The first half of life is to create a container for our life. The “container” is based on external credentials and associations. The second half of life is a journey toward learning “what the container is meant to hold and deliver.”

When considering spiritual growth, Rohr makes two important points. Firstly, spiritual maturation is inclusive of all the previous stages of growth. Just as physiological maturity builds on each developmental stage we experience from rolling over to crawling to walking to running and climbing, growing into second-half maturity builds on first-half of life stages. Therefore, we are “patient, inclusive, and understanding of all the previous stages.”

Secondly, Rohr makes the point that most churches are far better at helping people in the first half of life than the second half. “The first journey is always about externals, formulas, superficial emotions, flags and badges, correct rituals, Bible quotes, and special clothing, all of which largely substitute for actual spirituality (see [Matthew 23:13-32](#)). Yet they are all used and needed to create the container. Yes, it is largely style and sentiment instead of real substance, but even that is probably necessary. Just don’t give your life for mere style and sentiment.” Jesus calls us to pay attention to the substance of our inner life (see Luke 12:22-23 below) because our inner life is ultimately the source for which our thinking and actions flow.

Scripture

Luke 12:22-23 (NRSVUE)

²² He said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food and the body more than clothing.

¹ Adapted by Eustacia Marshall from Michelle Van Loon: <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/pilgrimsroadtrip/2012/01/falling-upward-chapter-1/>

Luke 12:23-23 (MSG)

He continued this subject with his disciples. "Don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or if the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your inner life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body.

Discussion

- Jesus says life is more than food and the body is more than clothes. In light of the two halves of life, what is Jesus teaching us? Is he saying that food and clothes are unimportant? How do you interpret it?
- Has your faith evolved over time? Are there any beliefs about God that have changed? Do you feel you have been able to make your own "discoveries of faith"?
- As you reflect on your life, do you see deeper meaning in experiences that you did not see when they were happening? How has your reflection helped you to grow?
- If you're still developing your container, can you describe someone you know who is living their "awesome content" – that is, someone you think embodies second-half living? How do you know?
- Jesus calls us to follow him and grow. What does Jesus' command to "change your mind" or "repent" (Mark 1:15) mean for you today? What areas of your life are you being invited to grow? Spend some time thinking about the difficult situations and relationships in your life. How might they be challenging and inviting you to change your mind and grow?

SOUL WORK • JOURNALING

Where am I on the journey of first and second half living? How is God calling me to evolve?

CHAPTER 2: THE HERO AND HEROINE'S JOURNEY

Genesis 12:1

Learning Goal: God invites us to move beyond our comfort zone.

Chapter Summary²

Chapter 2 opens with a review of the hero's journey. The hero's journey is marked by a comfortable and familiar existence. The hero is disrupted when they receive a call to leave their present comfort zone for a quest, pilgrimage or adventure. On the journey, the hero discovers who they are often through the discovery a problem. The hero may even be wounded in some way. As the story comes to a climax, the hero discovers that the wound is the key to being able to successfully complete the mission. The hero may initially believe that the issue that launched the journey are the purpose for the journey, when in fact they are just a launch pad to a deeper journey. Transformed by the journey, the hero returns to the place where it all began. Only now, the hero functions as a gift and resource to that place. Rohr notes that the hero's journey is the story of our second adulthood.

The hero's journey is conveyed among the world's three monotheistic religions when God calls Abraham and Sarah to leave their country and family for a new land to which he will lead them. Jesus tells his followers to essentially leave home in Luke 14:26.

Rohr writes: "What led so many saints to seek 'the will of God' first and above their own?...I would assume it was often a sense of a further journey, an invitation from their soul, or even a deep obedience to God...When he calls his first disciples, Jesus is talking about further journeys to people who are already happily settled and religiously settled!" For those who get especially good at building their own "house" in the first half of life – of creating a comfortable identity and making themselves at home in it – the idea of leaving it all behind may sound scary or even ridiculous. Yet, Rohr writes, "To build your house well is, ironically, to be nudged beyond its doors."

² Adapted by Eustacia Marshall from Michelle Van Loon: <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/pilgrimsroadtrip/2012/01/falling-upward-chapter-2/>

Scripture

Genesis 12:1 (NRSVUE)

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

Genesis 12:1 (MSG)

God told Abram: "Leave your country, your family, and your father's home for a land that I will show you.

Discussion

- What about you? Have you found yourself launched in some way from the container you worked so hard to create in the first half of your life? What is most disorienting to you about leaving your 'house'?
- How has the call or invitation to go beyond your comfort zone impacted your spiritual growth?
- What experiences or resources do you think people need to make a leap of faith seem more possible?
- How would you describe the difference between your current life situation and what Rohr calls your actual life?

Soul Work • Journaling

Do you have a sense that there is a deeper movement beneath your everyday tasks? Reflect on what you are sensing. Are you being called to a further journey - to go beyond your comfort zone?

CHAPTER 3: THE FIRST HALF OF LIFE

Luke 15: 11-32

Learning Goal: God invites us to “discharge the loyal soldier.”

Chapter Summary³

Our first-half-of-life container is built out of traditions, symbols, respect for authority, rules, regulations and the approval of our “tribe” ...The rules hold us and allow us to grow up - building discipline, promptness, persistence and a healthy self-image. We become “loyal soldiers” to these rules, laws, and traditions, which get us through the first half of life safely, helping us establish identity, significance and boundaries. We *must* learn these lessons to get off to a good start. However, the loyal soldier offers so much security and validation that we may confuse his/her voice with the voice of God. Thus, Rohr writes, “There is a deeper voice of God, which you must learn to hear and obey in the second half of life.” The voice of God is not bound to traditions, laws and regulations. Thus, “it will sound an awful lot like the voices of risk, of trust, of surrender, of soul, of common sense, of destiny, of love...of your deepest self.” The true faith journey only begins at this point. Up to now everything is mere preparation. It often takes a guide, a soul friend or some fall to guide us beyond being a loyal first half of life “soldier.” To explain further, Rohr describes a ritual in Japanese culture:

Japanese communities created a communal ritual whereby a soldier was publicly thanked and praised effusively for his service to the people. After this was done at great length, an elder would stand and announce with authority something to this effect: ‘The war is now over! The community needs you to let go of what has served you and served us well up to now. The community needs you to return as a man, a citizen, and something beyond a soldier.’ In our ... work, we call this process ‘discharging your loyal soldier.’ This kind of closure is much needed for most of us at the end of all major transitions in life. Because we have lost any sense of the need for such rites of passage, most of our people have no clear crossover to the second half of their own lives.

Scripture

Read the Parable of the Prodigal Son Luke 15:11-32

³ Adapted by Eustacia Marshall from Michelle Van Loon: <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/pilgrimsroadtrip/2012/01/falling-upward-chapter-3/> and <https://www.ericasp.com/2019/04/falling-upward/>

Discussion

- In your own words, what is the loyal soldier and why are we called to “discharge the loyal soldier?”
- What ways does the eldest son in Jesus’ parable reflect the “loyal soldier” characteristic of the first half of life? How does the Father encourage the eldest son to “discharge the loyal soldier”?
- What would it mean for the eldest son to crossover into the second half of life? How might “discharging his loyal soldier” change his response?
- Name the loyal soldier in you. What is he or she trying to protect or obtain? What might your loyal soldier keep you from knowing or experiencing?
- Share a ‘necessary fall’ you’ve experienced: a loss of job, reputation, self-image, relationship or moral failure that you had to own up to. What did that experience teach you about yourself? about God? How did the “loyal soldier” in show up through this experience? How might that experience invite you to “discharge the loyal soldier”?

Soul Work • Journaling

Write about a necessary fall that you have experienced. What did you learn, and what more do you think you have yet to learn? If you have never let yourself fail or perceived you were never allowed to fail, what impact do you think this is having on your life?

CHAPTER 4: THE TRAGIC SENSE OF LIFE

John 16:33

Learning Goal: God invites us to encounter God in the bitter and the sweet, to consider the tragic realities of life as pathways to spiritual growth.

Chapter Summary⁴

Rohr writes, "Life, as the biblical tradition makes clear, is both loss and renewal, death and resurrection, chaos and healing at the same time; life seems to be a collision of opposites." Coming to terms with the chronic, permanent nature of these "collision of opposites" is essential to our spiritual and emotional growth.

"The genius of the biblical revelation is that it refuses to deny the dark side of things, but forgives failure and integrates falling to achieve its only promised wholeness." This revelation is found in the person and work of Christ. Rohr says, "The tragic sense of life...is the ultimate and humiliating realism, which for some reason demands a lot of forgiveness of almost everything. Faith is simply to trust the real, and to trust that God is found within – even before we change it." Life is bitter-sweet. God is there in the tragedy of the bitter, and the delight of the sweet.

Scripture

John 16:33 (NRSVUE)

³³ I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution, but take courage: I have conquered the world!"

John 16:33 (MSG)

I've told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace. In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've conquered the world."

Discussion

- Consider the statement, 'life is inherently tragic'. What does that mean to you?
- Where have you seen the battle played out between the idealized version of life and the tragic reality?
- How does faith help (or not help) you deal with the contradictions and tragedies of life?

⁴ Adapted by Eustacia Marshall from Michelle Van Loon <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/pilgrimsroadtrip/2012/02/falling-upward-chapter-4/>

- Have you experienced God's compassion and forgiveness? Describe how it feels to accept that forgiveness. Does feeling forgiven change how you relate to others in your life?
- What does Rohr mean he writes, "I do not think you should get rid of your sin until you have learned what it has to teach you'?" How do you respond to this statement? What has your sin and brokenness taught you?

Soul Work • Journaling

What is the "tragic sense of life" teaching you? This week, consider if you are currently avoiding any tragic suffering (or change). What would be born in you if you were able to face it instead of denying or ignoring it?

CHAPTER 5: STUMBLING OVER THE STUMBLING STONE

Isaiah 8:14

Learning Goal: “Stumbling” is an unavoidable step God uses to help us leave our comfort zones.

Chapter Summary⁵

Rohr writes, “We must stumble and fall, I am sorry to say. And that does not mean reading about falling, as you doing here.” If we are honest, there are some things in our lives that cannot be fixed. Rohr calls the cross a dramatic symbol of “that necessary and absurd stumbling stone.”

If we don’t do the container-forming task of the first half of our lives well, when the stumble comes (and it will), we will not be able to rise and move forward. Those who have never experienced this fall are often the ones who have benefited from soft circumstances and benefited from their ability to stand on the necks of others to arrive at their position of power. He notes that many of the slaveholders of the South were such “self-made men”. A refusal to fall, or perhaps a fear of falling has rendered them spiritually impotent, keeping them “from awareness, empathy, and even basic human compassion,” gaining the world but losing their souls in the process. While we do not glorify “stumbling” or “suffering,” there are lessons we learn in stumbling, that we can’t learn anywhere else. It often takes suffering to reveal the limitations and immaturities of the false self/ little self/ ego self.

Scripture

Isaiah 8:14 (NIV)

He will be a holy place; for both Israel and Judah he will be a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare.

Isaiah 8:14 (MSG)

The Holy can be either a Hiding Place or a Boulder blocking your way, The Rock standing in the willful way of both houses of Israel, a barbed-wire Fence preventing trespass to the citizens of Jerusalem.

⁵ Adapted by Eustacia Marshall from Michelle Van Loon <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/pilgrimsroadtrip/2012/02/falling-upward-chapter-5/>

Discussion

- The scripture equates God to a holy place and a stumbling stone. What does it mean for God to be a stone that causes people to stumble? Why is stumbling important to spiritual growth?
- W.H. Auden, quoted in this chapter, once said: "We would rather be ruined than changed. We would rather die in our dread than climb the cross of the present and let our illusions die." What is Auden saying about change?
- Think about a time when a situation when you could not fix, control, explain or change things. Were you able to acknowledge your inability to fix or control the situation – and were you able to let go of your need/desire to control things and surrender. How did you feel when you realized you were falling and there was nothing you could do? Do you, like many of us, need to experience this "letting go" again and again? Why or why not?
- When has your inability to "get out of the driver's seat" or "let go" gotten in your way? Has that experience opened new space in your life for learning or loving differently?
- What stone have you been resisting or kicking against in your life? What might acceptance of that situation teach you that you have not learned in your years of resisting it? Can you imagine how acceptance might lead to growth? Or conversely, can you see how resisting is not accomplishing anything and may actually be getting in your way?

Soul Work • Journaling

Where are you stumbling? How might stumbling be operating as a growth point for you?

CHAPTER 6: NECESSARY SUFFERING

Matthew 10:37-39

Learning Goal: Following Jesus is an invitation to lose the false self with its attachment to first-half-of-life family and group affiliations.

Chapter Summary⁶

Rohr explains that many people are restrained from growing into the second half of their lives by the “pious, immature, or rigid expectations of their first-half-of-life family.”

Also, our peer group and our society can restrain us from growing into the second half of life. “Without very real inner work, most folks never move beyond it...To move beyond family-of-origin stuff, local church stuff, cultural stuff, flag-and-country stuff is a path few of us follow and with integrity.”

Leaving home (the home of our first half), helps us find home. But often leaving home may feel like suffering; it is uncomfortable and disorienting. However, this kind of disorientation is often a *necessary suffering* that cannot be avoided. Jesus calls it - “losing our very life” or losing what others call the “false self.”

Your false self is your role, title, and personal image that is largely a creation of your own mind and attachments. It will and must die in exact correlation to how much you want to experience the true self. “How much false self are you willing to shed to find your true self?” is the lasting question. Your true self is who you objectively are from the beginning - in the mind and heart of God. Your true self is “the face you had before, your absolute identity, which can be neither gained nor lost by any technique, group affiliation, morality, or formula whatsoever.”⁷

Scripture

Matthew 10:37-39 (NRSVUE)

³⁷ “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, ³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

⁶ Adapted by Eustacia Marshall from Michelle Van Loon <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/pilgrimsroadtrip/2012/02/falling-upward-chapter-6/>

⁷ Adapted from <https://hidinsight.com/falling-upward/>

Matthew 10:37-39 (MSG)

Well-meaning family members can be your worst enemies. If you prefer father or mother over me, you don't deserve me. If you prefer son or daughter over me, you don't deserve me. "If you don't go all the way with me, through thick and thin, you don't deserve me. If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you'll find both yourself and me.

Discussion

- Critical note from Rev. Marshall: This chapter does not make a distinction between the suffering that accompanies death to the false self and suffering that accompanies injustice or illness. The suffering that accompanies injustice or illness is not the necessary suffering that is being referred to in this chapter. Suffering that comes from death to the false self is the necessary suffering that this chapter is referring to.
- Think about your favorite "homes" – those things or ideas or relationships that validate your outlook on life and make you feel safe. Paradoxically, sometimes illusions, prejudices, dysfunction and brokenness can feel like a safe home for us. Think about where this might be true in your life. What does the phrase "leave home to find it" mean to you?
- The "crab bucket syndrome" is when you try to crawl out but your family, faith community, co-workers or other networks of people pull you back in? Describe your own experience with the crab bucket syndrome? How does the voice of the group affect your spiritual choices? If you're comfortable, share specific situations that pull you back in and prevent you from moving forward.

Soul Work • Journaling

Describe how the false-self shows up in you. What does losing the false-self look like for you?

CHAPTER 7: HOME AND HOMESICKNESS

John 14:26 & Romans 5:5

Learning Goal: God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide us *from* home and *toward* home.

Chapter Summary

Memories of “home” point us back toward the union we experienced as we grew in our mother’s body; and hopes for “home” point us forward, to a final union with our Creator. He writes: “Somehow the end is in the beginning, and the beginning points toward the end ... Most of us cannot let go of this implanted promise. Some would call this homing device their soul, and some would call it the indwelling Holy Spirit ... All I know is that it will not be ignored. It calls us both backward and forward, to our foundation and our future, at the same time. It also feels like grace from within us and at the same time beyond us.” The chapter concludes with Rohr’s summary of the key points:

- We are created with an inner drive and necessity that sends all of us looking for our true self, whether we know it or not. This journey is a spiral and never a straight line.
- We are created with an inner restlessness and call that urges us on to the risks and promises of a second half to our life. There is a God-size hole in all of us, waiting to be filled. God creates the very dissatisfaction that only grace and finally divine love can satisfy.
- If we go to the depths of anything, we will begin to knock upon something substantial, “real,” and with a timeless quality to it. We will move from the starter kit of “belief” to an actual inner knowing. This is most especially true if we have ever (1) loved deeply, (2) accompanied someone through the mystery of dying, (3) or stood in genuine life-changing awe before mystery, time, or beauty.
- This “something real” is what all the world religions were pointing to when they spoke of heaven, nirvana, bliss, or enlightenment. They were not wrong at all; their only mistake was that they pushed it off into the next world. If heaven is later, it is because it is first of all now.

- These events become the pledge, guarantee, hint, and promise of an eternal something. Once you touch upon the real, there is an inner insistence that the real, has to be forever. Call it wishful thinking, if you will, but this insistence has been a constant intuition since the beginnings of humanity. Jesus made it into a promise, as when he tells the Samaritan woman that “the spring within her will well up unto eternal life” (John 4:14). In other words, heaven/union/love now emerge from within us, much more than from a mere belief system or any belonging system, which largely remains on the outside of the self.

Scripture

John 14:26 (NRSVUE)

²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.

Romans 5:5b (NRSVUE)

...God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

John 14:26 (MSG)

The Friend, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send at my request, will make everything plain to you. The Holy Spirit will remind you of all the things I have told you.

Romans 5:5b (MSG)

God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!

Discussion

- Do you sense the Holy Spirit guiding you towards your true self? How do you know?
- Does thinking of your soul in communion with the Holy Spirit as an inner compass that always points you towards “home ” reflect your own experience in any way? If so, can you share how it feels when you’re paying attention to that inner guide – and conversely, when you’re not paying attention?

- Rohr says, “If we go to the depths of anything, we will begin to knock upon something substantial, real and with a timeless quality to it... This is especially true if we have ever loved deeply, accompanied someone through the mystery of dying, or stood in genuine life – changing situations.”
 - What things in your life feel real - essentials that give meaning and purpose to your life? How can you give more energy to those life-giving things?
 - What things in your life feel like “chaff” or nonessential? How might you eliminate the non-essentials in your life or give them less energy?
- Rohr suggests that evil is more about superficiality and blindness than about consciously malicious acts. He says, “Sin is to stay on the surface of even holy things, like Bible, sacrament or church.” How does that echo your own experience of yourself or your observations of others?

Soul Work • Journaling

Do you sense the Holy Spirit guiding you “home” to your true self? How do you know? How are you encountering the Holy Spirit in the depths of every experience - your successes and your failings? Reflect on these encounters.

CHAPTER 8: AMNESIA AND THE BIG PICTURE

I John 2:21

Learning Goal: God desires to heal our amnesia so that we will discover our true self and live in the big picture – heaven on earth!

Chapter Summary⁸

Life is a matter of becoming fully and consciously who we already are, but it is a self that we largely do not know. It is as though we are all suffering from a giant case of amnesia. In literature, we see such amnesia operating when the main characters forget (or have not yet discovered) who they are. The only way they can live into their identity is by setting out on a journey that will grow them up. Growing up spiritually “is much more about unlearning than learning because the ‘growing person’ is usually growing into major illusions, all of which must be undone or unlearned.”

When we do not know who we are, we push all enlightenment off into a possible future reward and punishment system (i.e., heaven and hell). Only the true self knows that heaven is now and that its loss is hell—now. Heaven and hell, according to Rohr, are not just future destinations, but have a present dimension to them. “Heaven is the state of union both here and later.”

Everyone is in heaven when he or she has plenty of room for communion with God and others and no need for exclusion. The more room you have to include, the bigger your heaven will be. No one is in hell unless that individual chooses to exclude oneself from union – that is, unless that individual chooses separation or superiority over community and love. Final aloneness and separation is hell.

Ken Wilber described the later stages of life well when he said that the classic spiritual journey always begins with an elitist mindset and ends with an egalitarian mindset. Always! While the false self prefers an economy of merit and exclusion where we can divide the world into winners and losers, the true self prefers an economy of grace, where merit or worthiness lose all meaning.⁹

⁸ Adapted by Eustacia Marshall from Michelle Van Loon <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/pilgrimsroadtrip/2012/02/falling-upward-chapter-8/>

⁹ Adapted from <https://hidinsight.com/falling-upward/>

Scripture

I John 2:21 (NRSVUE)

²¹ I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it...

I John 2:21 (MSG)

I haven't been writing this to tell you something you don't know, but to confirm the truth you do know...

Discussion

- How do you describe what Rohr calls your "true self"? Reflect on how people come to know their true selves. Have you discovered your true self? How do you know?
- While we know the truth of who we are, we seem to forget and must discover our true selves again. What false illusions or lies need to be undone so that you can grow into your true self?
- Rohr says that the true self knows that heaven is now. How does Rohr's description of heaven and hell invite you to expand your understanding of heaven and hell?
- Have you ever had to "perform" in a situation where you felt like you had to convince people you were smart enough or religious enough or worthy enough? What did you achieve in that "winner/loser" situation? And what did you have to give up?
- What might you have to unlearn in order to embrace Rohr's description of heaven? Think about what you learned at home or even in religious spaces.

Soul Work • Journaling

Rohr says life is about practicing for heaven, and heaven exist both now and in the future. Pay special attention this week to how you respond to conversations or behaviors when you are among family, friends, and strangers from the perspective of heaven and hell being NOW. Walk through your week noticing whether you experience yourself in heaven or hell moment by moment. Notice how your behaviors in these two "states" are different, and notice whether others respond to you differently.

CHAPTER 9: A SECOND SIMPLICITY**Romans 8:28**

Learning Goal: Mature adulthood/ second half living is marked by the capacity to live “simply” and meaningfully. We begin to see that everything (including our sorrows and contradictions) belongs. “As the body cannot live without food, so the soul cannot live without meaning.”

Chapter Summary¹⁰

Father Rohr traces his own journey from childhood innocence to second half living where he has experienced renewed simplicity. He discusses leaving the Garden of Eden as a metaphor for leaving early childhood. As he matures, he becomes simultaneously more traditional and more progressive, finding “a much larger and even happier garden (note the new garden described at the end of the Bible in Revelation 21!).”

Rohr notes that growth shifts us from an identity defined by adherence to particular political or theological dogmas to a more relaxed and inclusive sense of self grounded in the love of God. Rohr writes: “If God asked me to love unconditionally and universally, then it was clear that God operated in the same way.” Yet, Rohr notes that many get fixated with a God who seems to torture and exclude forever those people who don’t agree with certain dogmas. “How could you possibly feel safe, free, loved, trustful, or invited by such a small God?” Rohr invites us to see God the expansiveness of God. “God is the beauty of creation and humanity multiplied to the infinite power.”

Rohr discusses how the uncertainties of life can create anxiety and doubts, causing us to want to stay in the “control tower during the first half of life.” Yet, second half living is more comfortable with mystery and paradox and finds meaning in communion with God which leads to a “deeper happiness” or joy. “Finding deep meaning in our experiences is not just another name for spirituality but is also the very shape of human happiness. This new coherence, a unified field inclusive of the paradoxes, is precisely what gradually characterizes a second half of life person. It feels like a return to simplicity after having learned from all the complexity. Finally, at least, one has lived long enough to see that ‘everything belongs’ even the sad, absurd and futile parts.”

Scripture**Romans 8:28 (NRSVUE)**

²⁸ We know that all things work together^[a] for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

¹⁰ Adapted by Eustacia Marshall from Michelle Van Loon <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/pilgrimsroadtrip/2012/02/falling-upward-chapter-9/>

Romans 8:28 (MSG)

That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.

Discussion

- In the second half of life, we can give our energy to making even the painful parts belong. With respect to the pains of life, Rohr writes, "If you have forgiven yourself for being imperfect and failing, you can now do it for someone else." Have you ever gotten stuck in a struggle to forgive yourself? If so, who or what has helped you to work through this stuck place?
- Rohr challenges us to encounter the God who is for everybody. In the second half, we know that everyone belongs. Do you see a need for increased inclusivity in your own life? How has your ability to be inclusive grown on your spiritual journey? Where does *otherness* or *newness* threaten you currently or make you uncomfortable?
- While there are those who feel safe, trusting, loving and welcomed in their relationship with God, others feel fearful, judging, and unsure of their acceptance of God. Why do you think people feel unsure about whether God accepts or welcomes them? Where do they learn that they are not welcomed or accepted by God? What best describes your relationship with God? Do you feel safe, trust, love, and acceptance? What has shaped your relationship?
- Rohr discusses the "tragic path of elders" who pass on sadness, judgment, absurdities and futilities to others so that they "have not become actual elders because they were never eldered or mentored themselves." How would you distinguish between someone being an elder socially and an elder spiritually? How have elders in your life helped you?
- Are there first half of life people you know for whom you might function as an elder? What might you offer them from your second half of life perspective?

Soul Work • Journaling

Sit quietly this week to contemplate forgiveness. How is forgiveness a "simplicity" of second half living? Reflect on situations in which you wanted forgiveness. Now hold in your awareness those in your life whom you need to forgive. Hold your need for forgiveness and your need to forgive in your heart. Prayerfully invite the Holy Spirit to be with you as you release any hurt and anger.

CHAPTER 10: A BRIGHT SADNESS**Matthew 5:14-16**

Learning Goal: As children of God, we can nurture an inner brightness that shines in a world of sadness and negativity.

Chapter Summary¹¹

Father Rohr explains that though there is still darkness in the second half of our lives, growing adults have “a changed capacity to hold it creatively and with less anxiety.” There’s an inner brightness that shines. As we are cooperating with God’s gift of maturity, we will find we have less tolerance for nursing old grudges or rushing to judgment as we did when we were younger. “You learn to positively ignore and withdraw your energy from evil or stupid things rather than fight them directly,” he notes.

In this second half of life, one has less and less need or interest in eliminating the negative or fearful, making again those old rash judgments, holding on to old hurts, or feeling any need to punish other people. Law is still necessary of course, but it is not your guiding star. After all, many laws have been wrong and cruel too many times. (Think here about the laws of segregation or the policies that harm vulnerable populations). In the second half of life, we no longer have to prove that we or our group is the best or that our ethnicity is superior or that our religion is the only one that God loves, or that our role and place in society deserve superior treatment. We are not preoccupied with collecting more goods and services. Quite simply, our daily desire and effort is to give back to the world a bit of the goodness we have received.¹²

Scripture**Matthew 5:14-16 (NRSVUE)**

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵ People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

¹¹ Adapted by Eustacia Marshall from Michelle Van Loon <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/pilgrimsroadtrip/2012/02/falling-upward-chapter-10/>

¹² Adapted from <https://hidinsight.com/falling-upward/>

Matthew 5:14-16 (MSG)

¹⁴⁻¹⁶ "Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

Discussion

- Why do you think the chapter is called "a bright sadness"? What does it mean?
- How does one nurture "a bright sadness"?
- Rohr discusses the idea that in the second half of life, we pay more attention to what we share in common with others rather than highlighting our differences. In what ways does this focus on commonalities help us to shine in a world of sadness and negativity?
- Second half of life people are generative people. Psychologist, Erik Erikson defines generative people as those who are able to generate or produce life from their abundance and for the benefit of others. What are the shining characteristics that you might expect to observe in a generative second half of life person?
- Those who embody an inner brightness have a particular experience and orientation with God. "God is no longer small, punitive or tribal." How does this theology or view of God impact the way our God given light shines in relationship with others? with ourselves?

Soul Work • Journaling

Do you consider yourself a generative person with "a bright sadness"? How might you become more generative and light-bearing in the world?

CHAPTER 11: THE SHADOWLANDS

Matthew 23:25-26

Learning Goal: Humans come to full consciousness precisely by shadowboxing or facing their own contradictions. It's when we see and confront our mistakes and failings that we are able to grow into spiritual adulthood.

Chapter Summary¹³

Shadows are what we refuse to see about ourselves, and what we do not want others to see. The more we have cultivated and protected a chosen persona, the more shadow work we will need to do. As we do our inner work, we will begin to learn and know that our self-image is nothing more than just that – an image. Images are not worth protecting, promoting, or denying. Yet we still protect our images every day, and we often become our own worst judge and jury especially when we are offended. Our shadow self makes us all into hypocrites on some level. Remember, *hypocrite* is a Greek word that simply means 'actor,' someone playing a role rather than being "real." We need to see beyond our shadow and disguise to find who we really are – that is, to see the soul or true self that is "hidden [with Christ] in God," as the Apostle Paul puts it. Zen masters call it "the face you had before you were born."

Usually, everybody else can see your shadow, so it is crucial that you learn and see what everybody else knows about you—except you! Spiritual maturity is largely a growth in seeing, and full seeing seems to take most of our lifetime.

Scripture

Matthew 23:25-26 (NRSVUE)

²⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and of the plate¹ so that the outside also may become clean.

Matthew 23:25-26 (MSG)

"You're hopeless, you religion scholars and Pharisees! Frauds! You buff the surface of your cups and bowls so they sparkle in the sun, while the insides are maggoty with your greed and gluttony. Stupid Pharisee! Scour the insides, and then the gleaming surface will mean something."

¹³ Adapted by Eustacia Marshall from Michelle Van Loon <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/pilgrimsroadtrip/2012/02/falling-upward-chapter-11/>

Discussion

- Shadows are what we refuse to see about ourselves and what we do not want others to see. Rohr says it is like a “double blindness” keeping us from seeing and being our best and deepest self. What shadow is Jesus addressing in the scripture? How does Jesus address it? What do you think about Jesus’ way of addressing it?
- When has it been easier for you to act as your shadow – that is, to play a role or maintain an image? Is the reward of playing roles worth the sense of hiding your true self? Or does the risk of discovering your best self, outweigh the rewards of meeting others’ expectations?
- Rohr writes, “Spiritual maturity is largely a growth in seeing and full seeing seems to take most of our lifetime.” What do you see more fully now than you did in prior years? What clues do you use to know when you might need to invite a different perspective?
- Have you experienced receiving feedback from friends or family that helped you to see or be more fully your best and deepest self? What happened? How can friends best offer feedback to you that will invite you to embrace your true self?

Soul Work • Journaling

In the week ahead, observe your responses to others. Watch for any heightened reactions that seem (in hindsight) to be out of proportion to the moment. As soon as you are able, write a description of the interaction as closely as you remember it. When your reaction has calmed, reread your account of the incident. With compassion, identify the part of your shadow self that was exposed at that point. Reflect on what you have discovered. Invite that piece of your shadow into your heart and graciously hold it there in the coming days.

CHAPTER 12: NEW PROBLEMS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

Matthew 20:1-16

Learning Goal: Jesus was a teacher from the second half of life and invites us to follow him in second half living. In the second half of life, we are transformed into a more open, inclusive, wholistic, non-dualistic way of thinking and being. We swim “in a sea of abundance, grace and freedom.”

Chapter Summary

One “problem” Rohr identifies is that our circle of real confidants and truly close friends will normally grow smaller. Yet this problem provides a new direction – that is, the smaller circle of confidants and friends is also a more intimate circle of confidants and friends who know us.

Also, the first half of life is marked by “no’s” reflective in ways we deal with people or ideas which are “different” than us. “No” is also reflective in the criteria we use to create boundaries and order in our institutions. Our institutions including the church are concerned with matters like membership requirements, policies, procedures, etc. which have legitimate value for legal and ethical reasons. Nevertheless, Rohr argues that these are ego needs and not soul needs.

“The ego and most institutions demand a tit-for-tat universe, while the soul swims in a sea of abundance, grace and freedom which cannot always be organized. Remember in the gospel, at the end of the day, the employer pays those who worked part of a day just as much as those who worked the whole of the day (Matthew 20:1-16). This does not compute except at the level of the soul. Soulful people temper our tantrums with their calm, lesson our urgency by their peace, exhibit a world of options and alternatives when all the conversation turns into dualistic bickering. Soulful people are the necessary salt, yeast, and light needed to grow groups up (Matthew 5:13-16).

How do we honor the legitimate needs of the first half of life, while creating space, vision, time and grace for the second? The second half of life is marked by soulful people who say “yes” demonstrated in openness, flexibility and practices of inclusion. Second half people may feel a real loneliness when saying “yes” while all their old friends are saying “no.” We should be prepared when old groups, friendships, and even churches no longer fully speak to us the way they used to.

We may experience a kind of “double belonging” characteristic of people in the second half – that is, no one group meets all of our needs, desires, and visions, which illustrates our newly discovered capacity for “nondualistic thinking” or both-and-thinking. Non dualistic thinking is benchmark of our growth into the second half of life. For instance, we think less in terms of “us versus them” and think more as “we” because we see ourselves as being one with our neighbor. In other words, we begin to see life more wholistically and less divisively or judgmentally.¹⁴

Scripture

Read the parable told by Jesus in Matthew 20:1-16

Discussion

- Does this parable make sense from a first half of life mindset? Why or why not? What might be some initial reactions to this parable by one who is coming from a first half of life perspective?
- Why does Rohr say that this parable does not compute except at the level of the soul? How does this parable of Jesus reflect soulful second half of life teaching? How does it reflect a non-dualistic way of thinking and living?
- How do you see yourself creating the space, vision, time and grace needed to travel more deeply into Jesus’ call to second half living - to live as your true self? What does swimming in a sea of abundance, grace, and freedom look like for you?
- As you think about your day, remember times when you were thinking dualistically (either/or) and holistically (both/and). Do you notice that wholistic thinking relieves you of the need to divide or judge? Share a situation at home or at work where both/and thinking will help you deal with a conflict or difficulty.

Soul Work • Journaling

Identify someone in your life whom you would call “soulful” - that is, someone who reflects a sense of abundance, grace and freedom. Notice how their calm and their peace impact those around them. Talk to this person about how they view conflict and what they do to bring calm and peace to these kinds of situations. Ask how they open up options and alternatives. Can you identify any of these qualities in yourself? How might you live into more soulful behaviors and attitudes more often?

¹⁴ Adapted by Eustacia Marshall from <https://hidinsight.com/falling-upward/>

CHAPTER 13: FALLING UPWARD**Ephesians 3:16-19**

Learning Goal: God is calling each of us to fall upward and into a life grounded in the love of Christ so that we may overflow with the fullness of God and see our true self through the one true mirror that reveals our inner deepest divine image.

Chapter Summary¹⁵

Father Rohr begins the last chapter by noting, “Most of us tend to think of the second half of life as largely about getting old, dealing with health issues, and letting go of our physical life, but the whole thesis of this book is exactly the opposite. What looks like falling can largely be experienced as falling upward and onward, into a broader and deeper world, where the soul has found its fullness, is finally connected to the whole, and lives inside the Big Picture.” What is inside that Big Picture? A portrait of genuine service to others. “Until and unless you give your life away to others, you do not seem to have it yourself at any deep level.”

Rohr uses Helen Keller as an example of one who gave her life in service to others. Keller was convinced that life was about service to others and not about protecting or lamenting her physical challenges. This is the great difference between transformed and non-transformed people. Great people come to serve and not to be served. By the second half of life you learn to tell the difference between who you really are and how others mirror that or not. This will keep you from taking either insults or praise too seriously. It will also shield you from being infatuated or controlled by other people’s image of you. We all must find at least one true mirror that reveals our inner, deeper, divine image.¹⁶

Like any true mirror, the gaze of God receives us exactly as we are, without judgment or distortion, subtraction or addition. Such perfect receiving is what transforms us. Soon we who are gazed upon so perfectly can pass on the same accepting gaze to all others who need it. We really do find ourselves through one another’s eyes. It’s only when we have experienced ourselves mirrored through the gaze of God, that we can faithfully mirror others with freedom, truth and compassion.

God is calling each one of us forward, into a second half of life that is grounded not just in words, but the very reality of a life that mirrors “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:18-19). In a gravity-defying parable, sculpted from the pain and promise of our first-half lives, we fall upward in order to overflow.

¹⁵ Adapted by Eustacia Marshall from Michelle Van Loon <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/pilgrimsroadtrip/2012/02/falling-upward-chapter-13/>

¹⁶ Adapted from <https://hidinsight.com/falling-upward/>

Scripture

Ephesians 3:16-19 (NRSVUE)

¹⁶I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit ¹⁷and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:16-19 (MSG)

I ask him to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God.

Discussion

- Ephesians 3:16-19 discusses being strengthened in our inner being. Have you found it to be true that your spiritual and emotional strength or growth comes from falling? Why is this so or not so?
- What does falling upward mean and how does the idea of falling upward shape your understanding of failure?
- Great people come to serve, not to be served. Why do you think falling upward inspires service? Who are you called to serve? Does the list of those you serve include people other than friends and family? How can you more faithfully "give your life away"?
- Rohr writes: "It is only those who respond to the real you, good or bad, that help you in the long run. Much of the work of midlife is learning to tell the difference between people who are still dealing with their issues through you and those who are really dealing with you are you are." What does it mean to be dealing with people who are dealing with their issues through you and those really dealing with who you are? Why is it so important to know the difference? How may falling upward help us to learn the difference?

- When discussing how other people think about us or react to us, Rohr writes that the only final, meaningful, helpful and humble question is this: "Is it true?" Why is this so? How may this question help us through the falls of life?
- Rohr writes, "Like any true mirror, the gaze of God receives us exactly as we are, without judgment or distortion, subtraction or addition. Such perfect receiving is what transforms us." What feelings does this statement evoke in you? Have there been times when you've felt this perfect receiving from God?

Soul Work • Journaling

Have you been resisting or frustrated by a fall that may actually be necessary so that you "fall upward" into inner growth/strength and discover your true self? On your journey, do you have one or two friends who have been true mirrors of your true self? If so, write a note to the friend(s) expressing your thanks and explaining why you are grateful. If your one true mirror has been the accepting gaze of God, write a prayer of thanks for that gift from God.