

Living in Deep Time by Krista Tippett

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Image by Steve Pavey / Hope in Focus

Richard Rohr

Living in Deep Time

Men of all ages say Richard Rohr has given them a new way into spiritual depth and religious thought — through his writing and retreats. This conversation with the Franciscan spiritual teacher delves into the expansive scope of his ideas: male formation and what he calls “father hunger”; why contemplation is as magnetic to people now, including millennials, as it’s ever been; and how to set about taking the first half of life — the drive to “successful survival” — all the way to meaning.

Transcript

Krista Tippett, host: I’m not sure any living spiritual teacher has been recommended to me by more people across the years than Fr. Richard Rohr. Especially striking is how many men — diverse men — have told me they had trouble connecting to religion and spiritual practice, but that this Franciscan changed their lives, deepened their spirituality, helped grow them up. So, at long last, I’m here to draw him out.

And it’s a conversation with expansive scope, much like his teaching and writing — on why contemplation is as magnetic to people now, including millennials, as it’s ever been; on male spirituality and the epidemic of what he calls “father hunger;” and on the work of moving into what he describes as the second half of life. The first half is necessarily about survival, “successful survival,” and preoccupations like titles and prestige and possessions with a dualistic, either/or sensibility. But all of that doesn’t take us all the way to meaning, which is not a linear matter of age and time.

Fr. Richard Rohr: To be a contemplative is to learn to trust deep time and to learn how to rest there and not be wrapped up in chronological time. Because what you’ve learned, especially by my age, is that all of it passes away. The things that you’re so impassioned about when you’re 22 or 42 don’t even mean anything anymore, and yet, you got so angry about it or so invested in it. So, this word “contemplation,” it’s a different form of consciousness. It’s a different form of time.

Ms. Tippett: I’m Krista Tippett, and this is On Being.

[music: "Seven League Boots" by Zoe Keating]

Ms. Tippett: Richard Rohr is founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. His many books include *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, and most recently, *Divine Dance*.

Ms. Tippett: Well, I would like to start where I start all of my conversations, just hearing a little bit about the spiritual background of your childhood.

Fr. Rohr: Really?

Ms. Tippett: Yeah.

Fr. Rohr: Well, I'm 73, so I was raised in what we Catholics call pre-Vatican II Catholicism. And not only pre-Vatican II conservative, but I was raised in the state of Kansas by German farm parents. So I had a very traditional upbringing, but it also provided a wonderful safe container as I like to call it. And in some ways, it no way prepared me for what my life has done or what's happened to it, but in other ways, there's a straight line from that very grounded beginning and where I am now.

Ms. Tippett: And how did you discover the Franciscans, or how did they discover you?

Fr. Rohr: Now again, this is — we're talking about the mid-1950s.

Ms. Tippett: [laughs] OK.

Fr. Rohr: And if a young boy had had any kind of inner God experience, and you were a Catholic, the only thing to do was to be a priest. Now, when I was in the eighth grade, I read a beautiful little book, probably fanciful by today's standards, called *The Perfect Joy of St. Francis*. And I said, "Oh my, I want to live a life like that." Then it so happened that a Franciscan from Cincinnati in full brown robe and white rope came and talked to our eighth-grade class, and he gave me this address off in Cincinnati. I went and joined, and it's a decision I've never regretted. I've had a wonderful life.

Ms. Tippett: So you — I wrote this down somewhere. You entered the Franciscan Order, became a friar, I believe — was it 1961?

Fr. Rohr: That's when I took first vows. That's right.

Ms. Tippett: And took first vows. And how old were you then?

Fr. Rohr: Oh, we'd never let someone do this today, so I'm embarrassed to say it, but I was just 19. I think they wanted to get us before we met a girl or something. [laughs]

Ms. Tippett: [laughs] But as you describe in your writing, the Franciscans then gave you a broad liberal arts education.

Fr. Rohr: Yeah, they really did.

Ms. Tippett: And you describe how this actually set off a very different second journey into rational complexity and also a different spirituality, it seems.

Fr. Rohr: I always feel like I was born at the perfect time. I was raised, of course, in the older, more stable world of the 1940s and '50s. And that gave me enough security and groundedness, so when everything blew open in the '60s, that's when I was studying philosophy and theology in this marvelous form that we were given, where we were really, as you said, given a liberal arts education, exposed to all of history and all of Christian history too. We studied historical theology, not just giving you the Catholic conclusions, as it were, but the whole process of — how do we come to this notion of grace? How did we come to this notion of Trinity? Or whatever it might be.

And little did I think, even though it was a very stringent form of education — god, we studied a lot — but little did I think how well it would serve me that I can speak now with a certain kind of self-confidence that I'm not un-Orthodox, or I'm not crazy — maybe I am — but I have this assurance that I'm speaking out of the perennial tradition, that these are not just my ideas. And that gives you a great confidence. A lot of people don't get that kind of education that they're speaking out of the perennial tradition.

Ms. Tippett: And I mean — I've read you across the years.

Fr. Rohr: Oh, I'm honored.

Ms. Tippett: I dipped into a number of books getting ready to be with you today. I felt like there were so many different directions we could take this conversation.

Fr. Rohr: Oh, I know.

Ms. Tippett: I kind of decided to at least begin with your work on *Falling Upward*, the second half of life. And I think that that's kind of a personal choice because that's kind of where I — that's the juncture I'm at in my life, in a sense. But of course, it's not strictly chronological, which we'll talk about.

Fr. Rohr: That's right, it isn't.

Ms. Tippett: Because really, it's a template for a spiritual journey.

Fr. Rohr: Very good.

Ms. Tippett: And so — you know what? You just described — and you used some of the words and the images that are important to you in this — and this, I guess, was a phrase of Carl Jung, who popularized this notion of two halves of life, and that the preoccupations of the first half of life are there, and that they have their place. It is the raft but not the shore. But it is the raft. And you've been talking about both your traditional, very stable identity, the container of your identity, of your upbringing, and then what the Franciscans gave you, is that container or identity that is that critical work, essential work, although everyone doesn't have such stability in their container or identity as you did, which is what we all struggle with.

Fr. Rohr: No, no. I know. What I've been using lately, Krista, is — it's almost a simplistic metaphor, but I've been telling the students at the school, "Picture three boxes: order, disorder, reorder." And that if you read the great myths of the world and the great religions, that's the normal path of transformation. Now what conservative people want to do is just keep rebuilding the first box, "order, order, order," at all costs, even if it doesn't fit the facts or fit reality. What's difficult — and you just alluded to it — is so many people formed in the last 30 years were born into the second box of disorder.

Ms. Tippett: Right — don't have that order to begin with to reject and improve on.

Fr. Rohr: Yes, exactly. It's much harder to grow up if you were formed after 1968. And yet, what I always tell the folks is there's no nonstop flight from order to reorder. You've got to go through the disorder. Your "salvation project," as Thomas Merton called it, it has to fall apart because it's not really love of humanity or God or truth. It's pretty much love of yourself. You don't know that, and that's not wrong. In fact, it's quite appropriate. But what the great religions are talking about and I'm certainly talking about in the book *Falling Upward* is this necessary confrontation with the tragic, the absurd, what St. Paul would call for Christians the "folly of the cross." Yeah, that disorder is part of the deal. And that's so counterintuitive, I know.

Ms. Tippett: And you also say in a very — and it just makes so much sense — it's such an interesting, different way to analyze this — but that we live in a first-half-of-life culture that most groups and institutions...

Fr. Rohr: And church.

Ms. Tippett: Right, including religious institutions — are in that order box. And as you say, 1968 happened, but these hallmarks of that striving, as you say, "to survive successfully," which has absolutely its place, we didn't necessarily outgrow that or move all the way to meaning in our institutional life or even — and culturally.

Fr. Rohr: If I said before that the conservative, which is where I was first raised, if they keep rebuilding the first box, so many progressive, academic, liberal, educated folks, they just keep sloshing around in the second box and almost resist any sense of order.

Ms. Tippett: I think of how the word "disruption" has become this catchword of the technological revolution. [laughs]

Fr. Rohr: Yeah, yeah. That's a perfect example of it. And that makes it hard — frankly, I'm no psychotherapist, but when I see the high amount of eccentric, unstable, mentally unhealthy people I meet today in almost every context, there's got to be some connection. That I find I give these retreats, and I talk about prayer and healing and transformation, but it's very hard to heal people in an unhealthy, unhealed culture. You send them back, and the incoherence of our system — sort of showing itself in our politics today — just undoes whatever moment of sanity, whatever moment of truth or freedom you might offer a person.

[music: "Tinder" by Origamibiro]

Ms. Tippett: I'm Krista Tippett, and this is *On Being*. Today, with Franciscan priest, writer, and teacher Richard Rohr.

[music: "Tinder" by Origamibiro]

Ms. Tippett: Let's talk a little bit about what — so the move, the move from the order that is necessary to — from the raft to the shore, let's say. Because part of the reason, as you say, this is a choice each of us has to do this kind of shift to meaning, this trajectory to meaning. We are free to walk that path or not. And it involves crossover points, which involve — you used this phrase — "necessary suffering," which is not something as human creatures we are drawn to do willingly. We often have to be kind of brought to our knees. It's moments of transition.

Fr. Rohr: I'm afraid so.

Ms. Tippett: It's moments of crisis; it's thresholds; it's facing our shadows.

Fr. Rohr: Yeah. There's no other way, Krista, the human ego will give up control and hand over control until it has to. [laughs] Why would we? And, you know, the 12-steppers have discovered this. They call it the first step, the admission of powerlessness. But who of us would take on suffering voluntarily? It pretty much has to be forced onto us.

Ms. Tippett: And it is, not a constant of life, but a very predictable occurrence in life again and again.

Fr. Rohr: Very predictable. I mean, the Buddha is even supposed to have said suffering is part of the deal. [laughs] It's part of the deal.

Ms. Tippett: That's a translation from the Pāṭhali, I'm sure. [laughs]

Fr. Rohr: [laughs] My translation, yeah.

Ms. Tippett: So, just to echo what you just said, I mean, Joseph Campbell is someone who, at another era in American life, kind of gave voice to this. And you quote from him, and there is this beautiful quote from him, about that mythological trajectory. And I've just been bumping into this everywhere I turn, so I'm going to read it.

Fr. Rohr: Really?

Ms. Tippett: Yeah, just suddenly in the last month.

Fr. Rohr: Wow.

Ms. Tippett: "We have not even to risk the adventure..."

Fr. Rohr: Oh, yes.

Ms. Tippett: "...for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path." Here it is. "And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a God; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world."

Fr. Rohr: Isn't that brilliant?

Ms. Tippett: It is brilliant.

Fr. Rohr: Oh god, to say that much in one paragraph.

Ms. Tippett: Yeah, that's right. Now, but what I also have been thinking about — and it very much seems relevant to me in the context of your work of really bringing these ideas and templates, this ancient wisdom or modern realities to modern people — one of the catchphrases that came down in American culture from the encounter with Joseph Campbell, a lot of it through Bill Moyers, was "follow your bliss."

Fr. Rohr: Oh, yes.

Ms. Tippett: Right? And to me, that also is a kind of shorthand that epitomizes the first half life as opposed to that hard, risky work beyond it. "Follow your bliss" is not a good shorthand, and it's not enough, but it's a very kind of American saying.

Fr. Rohr: Yeah, it is. It appeals. We can hear it. But Jesus would be a little beyond that when he says, "Take up your cross," which is not so attractive. But he's much more leading us into the second half of life.

Ms. Tippett: Right. It seems important to me that you stress — although, there is a true progression of life that comes with age, which is about an accumulation of experience — but that this is not necessarily chronological and that everybody doesn't become an elder. Some people just get old. And it's also possible to be old and childish.

Fr. Rohr: [laughs] It sure is.

Ms. Tippett: But I also experience — and I wonder if you have this experience too — that there's an important swath of the young among us who are, even at a young age, seeking a fuller and farther vision of who they want to be and how that is distinct from what they want to do or what they've been taught.

Fr. Rohr: I gave a retreat two weekends ago in Santa Fe for 40 millennials, and what some of them have done already, for the poor in Africa, starting not-for-profits that care about this cause or that cause. And they conversed with me for a full weekend with some of the most mature, grounded, humble, responsive understanding to what I was saying, just proving the proof of what you just said. Some of the young people today feel like old souls. And some of my generation feel like old fools.

Ms. Tippett: [laughs]

Fr. Rohr: It's like, god, have they learned anything? It's frightening. And it's exciting.

Ms. Tippett: Right, it's both.

Fr. Rohr: Yeah, yeah.

Ms. Tippett: A phrase that you use a lot that I'd like you to just flesh out is an aspect of this progression towards meaning, towards spiritual fullness, is "living in deep time." Just say what you're saying there.

Fr. Rohr: OK, well, let me say, first of all, I'm not sure what I mean by that. [laughs] But a phrase was used in medieval Catholic spirituality was "the eternal now." "When time comes to its fullness," is the biblical phrase. I'm sure you've been told that in the Greek, in the New Testament, there's two words for time. Chronos is chronological time, time as duration, one moment after another, and that's what most of us think of as time.

But there was another word in Greek, kairos. And kairos was deep time. It was when you have those moments where you say, "Oh my god, this is it. I get it," or, "This is as perfect as it can be," or, "It doesn't get any better than this," or, "This moment is summing up the last five years of my life," things like that where time comes to a fullness, and the dots connect, when we can learn how to more easily go back to those kind of moments or

to live in that kind of space.

Now, I think that's what the tradition means by the word "contemplation," that to be a contemplative is to learn to trust deep time and to learn how to rest there and not be wrapped up in chronological time. Because what you've learned, especially by my age, is that all of it passes away. The things that you're so impassioned about when you're 22 or 42 don't even mean anything anymore, and yet, you got so angry about it or so invested in it.

So already, the desert fathers and mothers discovered this word "contemplation" because I believe they found the word that most believers use, the word "prayer," to be so trivialized, so cheapened by misuse. Prayer was sort of a functional thing you did to make announcements to God or tell God things, which God already knew, of course. And they created another word to give us access to this deep time, and that word that kept recurring throughout the 2,000-year history of Christianity was the contemplative mind. It's a different form of consciousness. It's a different form of time.

Let me add one thing. We used to, in Latin, use this phrase *sub specie aeternitatis*, and the old professors used to say, "Sub specie aeternitatis." And what it means — "in the light of eternity." In the light of eternity, this thing that you're so worried about right now — is it really going to mean anything on your deathbed? [laughs] And for some reason, that had the power to relativize the things that a young man would get so impassioned about, positively or negatively. And those were various ways of directing us toward deep time.

[music: "Opus 28" by Dustin O' Halloran]

Ms. Tippet: You can listen again and share this conversation with Fr. Richard Rohr through our website, onbeing.org.

I'm Krista Tippet. On Being continues in a moment.

[music: "Opus 28" by Dustin O' Halloran]

Ms. Tippet: I'm Krista Tippet, and this is On Being. Today, with Franciscan priest, writer, and teacher Richard Rohr. His books, workshops, and daily email meditations are considered essential by people across the spectrum of spiritual orientation. We're discussing male spirituality and how he became so formative for diverse men, including many who previously struggled with the very idea of religion or spiritual life.

[music: "Opus 28" by Dustin O' Halloran]

Ms. Tippet: I also experience in your writing — this is the way I wrote it down, and I don't know if you say it this way — but one of the qualities of the first half of life or the early part of the spiritual life is dualistic thinking.

Fr. Rohr: Yes. That's almost all we have left.

Ms. Tippet: Right, and that's another way our culture is in the first half of life. But I kind of hear you saying also that contemplation is a very powerful antidote to dualistic thinking.

Fr. Rohr: Yes. Do you want me to talk about it?

Ms. Tippett: Yeah, yeah.

Fr. Rohr: Well, let me say, first of all, Krista, to cover my bases, I'm not going to say that dualistic thinking is bad, per se, and non-dual is good, or I'd be dualistic, wouldn't I?

Ms. Tippett: [laughs] OK, I'll hold you to that. All right.

Fr. Rohr: [laughs] So we've got to succeed at clear-headed, non-fuzzy thinking. That's what education is about. And I want to say that, first of all, because so many people who come up to us religious folks and say, "God told me," and, "I heard from the spirit," you find out they think they're at the non-dual level, but they really aren't. Do you understand?

Ms. Tippett: Yeah.

Fr. Rohr: So the normal way to get us through the day — I just drove over here where I'm recording this from my house about 10 minutes away, and to turn right or left, I needed a good dualistic mind to even find the address or whatever it might be. So to get through the day, to be an engineer or a mechanic, a medical professional, you better have a good dualistic mind. But then you hit a ceiling, and it just doesn't work. It doesn't work.

But non-dual is where you move into both/and, where you don't look for all-or-nothing thinking. And we're seeing it in our political debates today. It's almost the only form of conversation left is all-or-nothing thinking. And it's amazing to me that we could have this many universities in this country and could have this many churches and synagogues and mosques and have so many people still at such a low level of consciousness that they read everything in terms of either/or. And that's why all of the world religions, not just Christianity, discovered that you needed a different kind of software to deal with mysterious things, holy things.

Ms. Tippett: And that software is contemplation.

Fr. Rohr: Is contemplation, the contemplative mind.

Ms. Tippett: Right.

Fr. Rohr: It's like putting on a different head, where — let me describe it this way, Krista — you let the moment, the event, the person, the new idea come toward you as it is, without labeling it, analyzing it up or down, in or out, for me or against me. It just is what it is what it is what it is, without my label. At this point in history, you have to teach people how to do that because none of us are taught how to do that. And that, for me, says that religion has not been doing its job for several hundred years because that's what we were supposed to evolve people to, a higher level of consciousness that would allow them to do things like love their enemies, overlook offenses.

Ms. Tippett: Yeah, that's non-dualistic thinking for you right there, love your enemies.

Fr. Rohr: The whole Sermon on the Mount of Jesus implies non-dual thinking. Yeah.

Ms. Tippett: Yeah, I think you said Jesus was the first non-dualistic religious thinker in the West.

Fr. Rohr: Of the West, that's right.

Ms. Tippett: And I think that the following you have, the way your words and teachings and speaking and your work touch people. I mean, I was reading — just getting ready to talk to you, I found this blog on the Patheos blog, somebody named Mark Longhurst, who — I'm just going to read a little bit of it. "Nearly 1,500 people converged in New Mexico two weeks ago for Richard Rohr's second Conspire Conference and Living School Symposium. Our vocations differed, and our geographical homes stretched from Vancouver to Tokyo, but we all shared a common thirst to drink from the well of mystical Christianity." I mean, he goes on to say that he has a Masters of Divinity, two rooms and a basement full of theology, but had never experienced a contemplative form of prayer. So what you're describing...

Fr. Rohr: A lot of clergy haven't, yeah.

Ms. Tippett: Yeah, so what you say is when you offer that, when you introduce that, there's a great longing for it and a great curiosity about it.

Fr. Rohr: It is so humbling, Krista, when you see adult people just slip into such a beautiful peace and a beautiful freedom and a beautiful compassion. It's not this emotional religion that we've come to expect, emotional religion should be, but just a quiet contentment, a quiet deepening, a quiet satisfaction that, "I think the universe that I'm a part of is beginning to make sense, and I'm a part of it. I'm a part of it, and therefore, I make sense." See, I'm convinced that the discovery of a true God and the discovery of the true self are simultaneous journeys, and they feed one another. When you meet the true self, you're most open to a bigger, truer name for God. When you meet a bigger, truer, more loving God, you surrender to that same identity within yourself.

Ms. Tippett: And I think that starts to point also at the work you do with men in particular. I mean, you don't just work with men, but male spirituality, male growth. This is very striking to me, again, as I hear you, as I hear people talk about you, as people quote you to me. It's often men who say that this was their entry point, and they hadn't had an entry point to having a spiritual life, an inner life. And it's connected, as you said — you talk about the ways men in this culture have been taught and formed to strive for sex and prestige and possessions and titles, which is very much that stuff of the first half of life.

Fr. Rohr: The first half of life, yeah.

Ms. Tippett: And that, in fact, has been a straightjacket and an impediment to spiritual journey. I mean, obviously these are generalizations, but I know that it makes sense to me about the men in my life, certainly, my father and his generation, and it obviously makes sense to a lot of men you meet because I hear men talking about you everywhere I go.

Fr. Rohr: In the early '90s, I started reading everything I could cross-culturally on this rather universal phenomenon of male initiation, that on every continent, culture after culture, it was never assumed that the young male naturally grew up. He had to be taught. He had to be carefully taught, as Rodgers and Hammerstein would put it, and that was called "initiation." So I, after reading these, oh, I don't know how many books, it all began to come together because the patterns were so similar. Basically, here was the assumption that cultures came to — and at this point in history, I don't think it needs much proof — that unless the male was led on journeys of powerlessness, he would always abuse power.

And I know that seems damning, but the male just can't handle power unless he's

somehow touched upon vulnerability, powerlessness. And it's no surprise that's the first step of the 12-step program. So I created a five-day event. We started doing them here in New Mexico at Ghost Ranch in 1996 to try to compress what was often several weeks or several months, but I knew I could never get men away that long, to try to give them a distilled experience of classic male initiation. And as you said, the response has been overwhelming. It's moved into 13 different countries now and so forth.

I just got an email from the Czech Republic right before I came over here about — they're just ending them today outside of Prague, and 150 men are attending, and it's very gratifying. So I'm grateful that God gave me a language that made sense to men, because a large percentage of men don't even take religion seriously, with good reason.

[music: "Twins" by Matt Kivel]

Ms. Tippett: I'm Krista Tippett, and this is On Being. Today with Franciscan priest, writer and teacher, Richard Rohr.

[music: "Twins" by Matt Kivel]

Ms. Tippett: So I want to talk about some of the observations you make, some of the things you have heard and that are involved in your training, and actually I want to say it's — you spent a number of years as a chaplain at the Albuquerque jail.

Fr. Rohr: Yes, 14 years.

Ms. Tippett: It seems to me that this formed, this intensified your sense of urgency around this also, around men.

Fr. Rohr: Around the male issue in particular. Krista, I was jail chaplain here, a few blocks from where I'm sitting right now, for 14 years, and if there was one universal I found among the men in particular, but certainly the young women too, was it was rare, if not never, to find someone in jail who had a good father. That's what got me just driven toward — we've got to start growing up men because the male of the species does not know how to hand on his identity, his intimacy, his caring to his children.

And the rage in the young male who never had a dad or had an alcoholic father or emotionally unavailable father or abusive father is bottomless. It's just — it moves out toward all of society, a mistrust of all authority, all authority figures, all policemen, of course, because — "If my dad abandoned me, I just basically don't trust older men, and I don't like older men."

Now you can see what a bind this put us in when we defined God as masculine and called God "Father" exclusively. That's one metaphor, but it is a metaphor. And so people who never had a loving male in their life, and we come along and say, "God, the Father, loves you," they have no outlet to plug into, and that was my experience 14 years at the jail. I'd go in these cells, and I mean, these young guys would almost worship me because they'd never had an older man give them respect, give them attention, give them time.

Ms. Tippett: You used the language of "father hunger."

Fr. Rohr: Yeah, father hunger. It's driving so many things in our culture, even this whole corporate world of the younger male's need to please the big daddy and get his pat on the back or his promotion.

Ms. Tippett: I think it's such a mystery of the human condition.

Fr. Rohr: I know, I know.

Ms. Tippett: That also, in some place you describe someone speaking to you about this father hunger and kind of in the middle of their life and realizing, calling it, saying they realized it was a chasm, a canyon, the emptiness and pain left of a relationship with the father that wasn't there. And the mystery that we can get very old, and that can still be with us. That this is not something that you just outgrow.

Fr. Rohr: No, no.

Ms. Tippett: And it's incredible how we can be defined by these broken relationships across a lifespan.

Fr. Rohr: Yeah, I've had men older than me weep with me, still wanting a daddy, because they never had a father figure. It's heartbreaking, really.

Ms. Tippett: You say something that I just want to understand, where you say that "when positive masculine energy is not modeled from father to son, it creates a vacuum in the souls of men, and into that vacuum demons pour." And you say among other things, they seem to lose the ability to know how to read situations and people correctly. Why is that? Obviously, that can be crippling professionally, personally, but why — what is that connection?

Fr. Rohr: Here's the answer that comes to mind now. I don't know if it's the best one. But young men who haven't been validated by an older male — because we look to our same-sex parent for validation — and when dad doesn't tell me I'm a man or a good man or acceptable son, I think your first 30 years of life are so frantic, you don't have time to read inner emotions. Your emotional life — there's no subtlety to it, there's no nuance, there's no freedom, there's no grace, there's no time.

I often see it in airports. In 46 years, I was on the road, and you'd see these people rushing through airports, neither looking to right or left, like a deer caught in the headlights. When you're a deer caught in the headlights, trying to survive, I don't think you develop an inner world. Do you understand? It's just the whole life is externalized, and the soul is not born. And that's why, again, suffering for so many becomes the only path because it's the only thing strong enough to lead you into the world of grief, for example, or sadness or pain. And those tend to be the holes in the soul that awaken the inner world.

And so an important part of every initiation rite was grief work, letting men get in touch with their unfinished hurt and begin to talk about it with other men. That's when the floodgates opened, and all of this success that they shined with externally they finally could admit was all a charade. Everything changed after that.

Ms. Tippett: I guess that's another mystery of the human condition, that if we can let ourselves feel what we think might kill us, it's the only way to grow to a place of being able to integrate it rather than be haunted by it.

Fr. Rohr: I have found in the men's work that a lot of men are afraid to expose this to their wives. I'm not sure exactly why vulnerability is such a scary thing for a man. What I found

on the men's retreats and the male initiation rites is that when a certain level of trust, vulnerability was achieved, men found it more open to talk to another man about this than even a woman.

Now afterwards, they would go home and blurt it all out to their wife, too, but as much as they love their wife, I think so many men are afraid of looking weak or vulnerable around their wife or their girlfriend, yeah.

Ms. Tippet: Just coming back to this both/and thinking that is a quality of the second half of life, of spiritual deepening, you talk about this quality of "bright sadness" that in that deepening, there is a gravitas and a lightness both. Say a little bit about the bright sadness.

Fr. Rohr: I remember some of the times when I was most happy, after — I used to spend the whole of Lent in a hermitage alone, and I'd come back just sort of glowing, like a bliss ninny, for the next couple weeks. But when people would look at me, I remember again and again, they said, "Richard, you look sad." And I said, "Oh my gosh, do I?" Because in fact, I'm feeling exactly the opposite. And I don't know how that transferred to my face as sadness, but when you live at this deep time, deeper level of communion or love or grace or whatever you want to call it, there is a heaviness to it that — "Is the rest of the world not seeing what I'm seeing? Why are they so caught up in trivialities, and why are they making one another suffer so much?"

So it's the strangest combination of being able to hold deep sadness and deep contentment at the very same time. So I discovered that in myself, and my most wonderful moments were also my most sad moments, which leads you to a kind of participation in what I called earlier "the one sadness," that your very fact of enjoying grace and love carries with it a dark side that I didn't deserve to know this, I didn't earn this, and most people think I'm crazy if I try to talk about it. So the two intense emotions very often coexist in the contemplative mind.

So that's what taught me this both/and world view, that opposites do not contradict one another. In fact, they complement and deepen one another.

Ms. Tippet: So recently, I took a break. I got some rest that I needed badly, and I was staying at a retreat center, and there was — actually, it was a meditation session I went to. And the person who was leading it read a passage from your book, *Falling Upward* and read the line — and it was about facing your shadow side as the only way to get bigger and deeper. And there was this sentence that I couldn't stop thinking about, and I said, "I'm going to interview that guy in a couple weeks, and I'm going to ask him about this."

Fr. Rohr: Well, I can't wait to hear what it is. [laughs]

Ms. Tippet: [laughs] "I have prayed for years for one good humiliation a day, and then I must watch my reaction to it," which sounds so uncomfortable. There's nothing in me that wants to pray for one good humiliation a day.

Fr. Rohr: No, and there isn't in me either. I just said that to that group of millennials two weeks ago. Some years ago, I started recognizing that I was getting an awful lot of adulation and praise and some people treating me far more importantly than I deserved. And I realized I was growing used to it, that the ego just loves all of this admiration and projection. And a lot of it was projection. And I didn't want fame and well-knownness and guru status to totally destroy me, and so for me, this became a necessity, that I had to

watch how do I react to not getting my way, to people not agreeing with me, to people not admiring me — and there's plenty of them — and that I actually needed that. And so I do, I still, I ask God for one good humiliation a day, and I usually get it, one hate letter or whatever it might be. [laughs]

And then what I have to do, Krista, is I have to watch my reaction to it. And I've got to be honest with you, my inner reaction — I'm not proud to tell you — is defensive, is, "That's not true. You don't understand me." I can just see how well-defended my ego is. And of course, even your critics — and I have plenty of them — at least 10 to 20 percent of what they're saying is usually true.

Ms. Tippett: Right. [laughs]

Fr. Rohr: [laughs] And I'll recognize that very thing she's so angry at me for saying, I really could've said it better, and I didn't use the right word. Now, a lot of Christians are trained to be what we call word police. They're always getting you on the right word, and it does drive you crazy after a while. So I try to learn from my critics, and they're often the best of teachers, frankly.

Ms. Tippett: There's a question — I think this may be on your website — so let me start this way. I often come to this point in a conversation as we're ending and will ask this huge, unanswerable question about just where somebody would start, about how your sense of what it means to be human has changed, has evolved, or is evolving. It seems to me that — you said right at the beginning of our conversation that a sense of God is all wrapped up with what it means to be human. There's this question on your website, and I kind of feel like it's connected to this, but I'd like for you to think, to reflect on it, what it means, in any case. "What if changing our perception of God has the potential to change everything?"

Fr. Rohr: The Latin poet Terence is supposed to have said, "Nothing truly human is abhorrent to me." I think the truly human is always experienced in vulnerability, in mutuality, in reciprocity. When human beings try to deny their own vulnerability, even from themselves, when they cannot admit weakness, neediness, hurt, pain, suffering, sadness, they become very unhuman and not very attractive. They don't change you; they don't invite you. I think that's why Brené Brown, perhaps you've interviewed her...

Ms. Tippett: Yes, I have.

Fr. Rohr: ...why her work is having such influence. Because like few other people, she has brought this central, for me, as a Christian, central, divine, gospel notion of vulnerability to really begin to make sense to a lot of people. So that's why I'm anxious to present the vulnerable God, which, for a Christian, was supposed to have been imaged on the cross. But again, we made it into a transaction. Transaction isn't vulnerability anymore, really. Vulnerability transforms you. You can't be in the presence of a truly vulnerable, honestly vulnerable person and not be affected. I think that's the way we are meant to be in the presence of one another.

[music: "Stars Pt. 2" by Lowercase Noises]

Ms. Tippett: Richard Rohr is a Franciscan writer and teacher, and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, NM. His books include *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, and most recently, *Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation*.

[music: "Stars Pt. 2" by Lowercase Noises]

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