

**ANOTHER
NAME
FOR EVERY
THING**

with

RICHARD ROHR

Season 2, Episode 11

Parenting

Paul Swanson: Welcome to season two of Another Name for Every Thing: casual conversations with Richard Rohr responding to listener questions from his new book, The Universal Christ and season one of this podcast.

Brie Stoner: As mentioned previously, this podcast was recorded on the grounds of the Center for Action and Contemplation and may contain the quirky sounds of our neighborhood and setting. We are your hosts. I'm Brie stoner.

Paul Swanson: And I'm Paul Swanson.

Brie Stoner: We're staff members of the Center for Action and Contemplation, and students of this contemplative path, trying our best to live the wisdom of this tradition amidst delaying the relentless dish pile, broken heaters, and the shifting state of our world.

Paul Swanson: This is the eleventh of twelve weekly episodes. In today's episode, we dive into your questions on how does the Universal Christ relate to the ways that we parent and raise our kids in today's world?

Brie Stoner: Richard, among the many questions that we received about your book and season one, we were kind of blown away by how many parents wrote in basically saying help, how do we do this parenting thing? How do we provide a good container for our kids without passing on the more toxic things that we've received? And so, to kick us off, I want to read this question from John, from Pietermaritzburg South Africa.

I'm a parent of four precious young people. Knowing the need for order in their earliest stages of life yet being aware of the limitations of that and their coming need to include and transcend the disorder that will come, how do I parent them? Put another way: I find it hard to give them order-based boundaries knowing that such boundaries are artificial. I feel like a fraud, giving them a fake sense of order when I know that life is more complex, and I want to prepare them well for that. For example, I can no longer say with integrity that there is one faith path that is "right," yet in their order stage of life, they might need that kind of solidity as artificial as I now know it to be. How do I give them the order they need while knowing that it will quite soon let them down?

Richard Rohr: So humbly asked and so filled with understanding. This parenting issue is nonstop, because we're all influenced by our own culture, the way we were parented, of course, and now with what we're saying, it does call for an adjustment. How do you give order without giving toxic order? Maybe the thing is to say it's good, this is a good way to do it. Remember it's the enthusiasm in your voice that your children are hearing. It's the energy in your voice, and if the voice is threatening, or demanding, or punitive, or moral: "This is the only way to do it. We have the true religion," that might be as good an answer as anything, and it's the energy with which you say it.

But avoid the word only, which we were mostly trained to use. That just sets them up for dualistic thinking but at the same time to communicate through the enthusiasm in your voice, and other things, that what Jesus in this case has taught our family, couldn't even speak of it in terms of our family, because that's the world circle they understand and they have to start with why Jesus is so good in our family, not that you want to say that too much either, but, you have to start there. It's okay.

So, how do you give boundaries while allowing those boundaries to be permeable somehow, to be open-ended boundaries? You'll find the vocabulary. But the way John here is asking the question, my suspicion is he's going to do it perfectly already and the fact that he's asking the question. That is my answer, as you've learned now, to so many questions, the way people ask it tells me if they're already on the road to getting the answer. It really does. I'm not opting out or copping out by saying that.

Brie Stoner: It's a bit of the Santa Claus quandary. You know, so many parents were like, "Well, do we tell our kids that Santa Claus is real, or don't we"? It's so silly, right? And I'm not recommending that everybody take this path, but the way that my co-parent, my ex-husband, and I figured a way through that was to say, well, let's just tell them the myth that it was based on. Let's talk about the real Saint Nick and what he stood for, and how a myth was created out of that, but, I think it's really difficult for us as parents to locate, especially when it comes to this order box, that do we want to include in that order box, and what do we not want to include in that order box? And it's very difficult, especially in context where the kids are hearing other Christian stories that are more maybe with the atonement spin or the, you know, the Old Testament stories, or the Hebrew Bible stories that leave you feeling like, "Did I really want my kids to receive that"?

Paul Swanson: Or even well-meaning people in your community who say things like, you know, "Jesus, Jesus wants you be nice. Jesus won't like you if you're not nice." And then you just get that sting of like, "Well, that's not the Gospel." You know, it gets messy. It can get messy really quick.

Richard Rohr: Yes, because you do want your children to be successful in social settings and have friends, and so you do want to tell them to be nice but not too quickly to tie it up with God's favor toward them.

Brie Stoner: Right. As a follow-up to that question, which is a bit more nuanced, and kind of toward how do we create that order box maybe without religion, Rosemary from San Juan Capistrano, California says:

You mentioned the three boxes, order, disorder, and reorder. You say that it is a good thing to have the order box, but what if you never had the order box? I had an order box, but I didn't raise my kids with an order box and now I have grandchildren to think about. How do you give order without a religious practice?

And I think what's interesting about that question is that I think so many millennials are feeling this allergy toward trying to be in church and yet we're having kids. And so, we're wanting to give them a sense of order, but how do you do that without being a part of a church per se?

Richard Rohr: Is that the heart of the question: can you only do it with the church?

Brie Stoner: It sounds like she's saying how do you give order without a religious practice or perhaps a religious community.

Richard Rohr: You know, in our history, religion and morality have become one in the same thing. They're actually not. But it comes down in normal practice to how do I tell them this is good; this is

bad. This is good order this is-- Usually we resort to religious language “Jesus told us,” or “God told us,” and it simplifies the process of teaching. What do you do when that isn’t there? I have to admit, it’s probably—Now, remember in all of this that I’ve never been a parent, so who am I to talk? But in all of this, it’s more difficult finding the right language when you can’t rely upon God language. That’s all I’m saying. I guess you just say things like, “This is good.” And then the smarter kids will ask, “why is it good,” or, “who said it’s good,” or “do I have to do the good thing all the time”?

So, you can certainly see in this context why God language emerged. We probably misused it a lot, but at least to try to directly speak to her question, I think you can give order without a religious practice. Now, we’re probably using the word religious to mean belonging to an organized church. I don’t think religion really means that either. What I would say—you see it in that little book *Just This*—is a sense of wonder; a sense of awe. That for me is foundational religion. And, I’ve seen a lot of people jump over wonder and awe and just say, “God says,” or as we Catholics were told, “It’s a mortal sin if you don’t,” and we weren’t raised to look for wonder and awe. So, to attune the child to wonder and awe, and respect toward wonder, that’s the religious instinct that you want to concentrate on rather than “we belong to this church.”

What does that really teach you? It doesn’t. It gives boundaries, and she’s obviously heard me say boundaries are good because if you don’t learn them, when the ego is a little smarter and more rebellious, it’s much harder than to install ego boundaries; whereas, if your little boy knows that his sister has rights, and mommy and daddy have rights, that’s actually doing them a favor that, you know, other people begin where you end, and there are other people in the world, and they have feelings, and they have need for quiet, or whatever else it might be. That’s not being punitive, that’s teaching them how to live in society and to know they’re a part of an organism and not an independent organ where they can just feel what they want, say what they want, when they want. That’s creates narcissists, and we have too much of that I’m afraid.

Paul Swanson: That’s funny. That reminds me of just how my daughter, who’s four, you know, especially in the times that we live in, one of the things that we’re trying to teach her is boundaries and try and do that in a healthy way, and her mantra is, “I’m in charge of my body,” which is awesome for a four-year-old little girl to be able to say that. And then there’s also the other side of the extreme where’s it’s like, “Hey, sweetie, can you eat your broccoli? No, I’m in charge of my body.”

Richard Rohr: No kidding.

Paul Swanson: Where it’s taking these beautiful values, but like you said, trying to learn how does that fit in? I don’t know if I’m saying quite right, but you know what I’m saying? How do we instill these values in such a way that their true intent lands and it doesn’t become only a search for, say, just wonder without any kind of formal discipline?

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I really appreciate what you're saying, Richard. Isn't it Abraham Joshua Heschel who said his definition of faith is to live with awe and wonder? And so, I think as parents, that can be something we can move towards, strive toward, and have intention over, like we want to develop awe and wonder in our kids, and it reminds me of that story—I'm blanking on the name of the author on Teilhard in the Park, you know, it's this little girl who—

Paul Swanson: Oh, yeah.

Brie Stoner: Do you remember her name?

Paul Swanson: I don't.

Brie Stoner: We'll include it. We'll find it, and we'll put it in our resources for this episode, but she talks about running into Teilhard in New York City and Central Park and this beautiful example of how they developed a relationship where they would just go on walks through Central Park.

Richard Rohr: It's a made-up story?

Brie Stoner: No, it's a true story.

Richard Rohr: It's true?

Brie Stoner: Yes. And so, he—

Richard Rohr: Oh, my gosh.

Brie Stoner: --would, and as they would walk, he would just say, "Oh, look, look at this tiny snail. Look at the spiral. Isn't this the way of everything? Oh look, look at this spider web. Isn't it magnificent"?

Richard Rohr: There's awe and wonder.

Brie Stoner: And I've taken a lot of cues from that story and from Teilhard in terms of just wanting to orient my kids to nature. Like, "look, isn't this amazing," and "isn't this marvelous? Isn't this beautiful"? And then, I guess as a continuation of your question, Paul, one of the things that's really worked for me with my kids is talking about ecosystems. In other words, that's the way that I've been able to get them to understand limits. It's like, hey, everything we do impacts each other, and in the ecosystem, if you make that choice, here's how it impacts the ecosystem. And ironically, that use of a scientific term, that web-like connection to each other of, like, "Our family has an ecosystem. This household has an ecosystem." I can throw it off when I'm impatient. You can throw it off when you're not willing to, you know, be kind to your brother, that seems to connect. So, science, I think, could potentially be a really helpful tool for us when we try to create order, or at least the love of the natural world.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. That's one of the things that I do with my daughter every night, one of those rhythm things, we go and look at the moon, and I always say, "Let's go tell the moon

our troubles.” So, we go look at the moon and then we can see where it is at in its own process. And so, she’s understanding the natural world through this bonding time between us when we just either howl at the moon, or talk to the moon, or share the troubles of the day.

Richard Rohr: Wow.

Brie Stoner: Yes.

Paul Swanson: I feel it’s very connected to what you’re saying, where, like, how do we get back into rhythm and in the cosmos so that that actually helps reflect back these teachings in a more integrated way?

Brie Stoner: Yeah, and maybe to use images from the natural world to explain things that are otherwise hard to understand as a child. I don’t remember having a clear sense of my actions having influence on other people. I told my kids this story once when I was leaving, probably to come here, years ago when I was in the Living School, I said, “Okay, momma’s going to go away for a week. I’m going to go to the Living School. I’m going to be in New Mexico, but my heart has a web, a little spider web attached to it, and it’s connected to your heart—

Richard Rohr: How pretty.

Brie Stoner: --and it doesn’t matter how far away we are, that spider web is still intact. So, you can tug on it—

Richard Rohr: Your kids have to remember that.

Brie Stoner: --you can send me love and kisses, and momma’s always sending you love and kisses.” And then what’s helpful about that is then when we’re back together, you know, we have language to say, “Hey, you really tugged on my spiderweb when you said that,” or, “Hey, that really, that kind of hurt my spiderweb.” It’s like trying to get at this sense of connectivity, but—

Richard Rohr: That’s beautiful.

Brie Stoner: --trying to do it in creative ways. I mean, I’m sure our kids are just going to have a whole new layer of kinds of therapy that they’re going to do. They’ll be like, “My mom kept talking about this spiderweb. I just have nightmares of being stuck in a web. Like, what does it mean”?

Richard Rohr: Well, I’d say, too, don’t be afraid to still talk about Jesus if you are a Christian. You want to build the relationship between Jesus and universal presence, because remember, the particular is the doorway to the universal. That’s all.

Paul Swanson: Well said. One of the favorite songs in our household is Jesus Loves Me, and we mix up some of the “because who tells you.” So, sometimes it’s “the family,” sometimes it’s “the Bible,” just as a way that—

Brie Stoner: That’s lovely, Paul.

Richard Rohr: Yes.

Paul Swanson: But it's fun to see how that song, which meant a lot to me as a kid, and to see that be passed on in my daughter's eyes as she lights up when we sing it. So, just an affirmation that Jesus is still very much—

Richard Rohr: Giving other answers than the Bible. It's very clever. Yes.

Paul Swanson: Without leaving it behind either, for sure. This was an interesting question we got from John from Oceanside. He asks:

I'm wondering why Joseph is almost nowhere to be found after the nativity scene. Are we to assume he was not at the crucifixion? Has he passed? Is that the actual father who had forsaken Jesus? With Mary being so prominently depicted throughout imagery and statues, what does this say about the masculine wound, or even the combined role of parents—partnership, mother and father in spiritual upbringing?

Richard Rohr: He's naming what I was trying to name in my years of men's work and what we call the "father wound" that not speaking of Joseph in the moment, but just in history in general, the passing on of the life energy, the nurturing energy, was assumed in most cultures to come through the mother alone. Now in the Bible text, we were anxious—got to blame us Catholics for this—to make Mary ever a virgin, and so we whisked Joseph out stage left, even the Gospel text seemed to.

Now, we came up with the story—nowhere to be proven—that Joseph did die a young death. We have no evidence for that, but the fact that we never hear of him, he certainly would have been there at the crucifixion, we would like to think, but we were so eager theologically to say God was his father that made him the son of God. Okay, good symmetry, good imagery, Mary, the human mother; God, the Divine Father, but what got lost is this, you know. I don't know if this man is Catholic. I've been at San Luis Rey, our Franciscan mission there in Oceanside, and I'll bet if you'd go there—I haven't been there for some years—you would find three images, maybe on the sidewalls but often toward the front, certainly of Joseph holding a baby. Mary is usually on one side; Joseph on the other.

But the other two that we added to the pantheon were very interestingly men holding babies. They're not biblical figures, but the fact-- Remember that whole thing that we create the images we need for the soul to see so we can know itself. (That's from Carl Jung.) --the two figures being one of our Franciscans, St. Anthony, and there's no historical proof that St. Anthony-- Maybe the child Jesus did appear in his arms. That's fine. But he's almost always pictured that way, and he's in most historic Catholic churches. Where did that come from? Why was that mythology so needed, so admired, Anthony holding the baby Jesus? I think a lot of people needed to see a man holding a baby. Then the other one, which was in more pre-Vatican II, but in Europe, especially the Germanic countries—Switzerland, Austria, Germany—I want to say almost all little towns, but I certainly can't say it always is.—on the outside of the church, there's a huge painting of Christopher holding a little baby. Well, he's sitting on his shoulder, and the myth of that went back to when you went out to the fields in the morning, if you could see Christopher, you would not die that day. I know those are just legends and stories, but that's why he's painted so huge. And I asked myself, "Why is Christopher everywhere?"

Now at Vatican II, they concluded that he wasn't even a real historical figure. So many people were so disappointed because he was the patron of travelers, you know, "Saint Christopher, pray for us on this journey." But why did we create that legend? A man, again, holding a little baby on his shoulder? I think to answer the question that John here is asking, is it possible for men to be nurturing, to be supportive, to be warm, are men not to be involved in the upbringing of children—and you're a marvelous example of that—but in much of the world, that is still an anomaly.

The quote I use in one of my books I learned in Japan, and they said the Japanese hate three things: They hate earthquakes, they hate fires, and they hate fathers. If you've traveled in Asia at all, the authoritarian father is what he's supposed to be. He's not supposed to touch his kids. He's not supposed to have a warm, personal relationship with him. It's done untold damage in the whole culture. Little boys who have no nurturing skills integrated with the masculine they don't know how to do it themselves. So, it just continues. And the trouble is not just with their sons, but with their daughters too. They don't know how to be nurturing.

So, forgive me if this is a long answer, but I spent years with this problem, this issue, and it really inaugurated our men's work, whereas most men's groups started by men coming together to discuss their relationship or lack of relationship with their own father. And many of the stories just made you want to sob; how real it has been. So, yeah, but we probably were already dealing with this by pulling Joseph out of the picture—we don't need Joseph, we just need Mother Mary.

Brie Stoner: It's an illustration of some of what we've talked about, about the deep wounds of patriarchy that go throughout, and on all sides.

Richard Rohr: That's right.

Brie Stoner: Because, you know, it's not just damaging to women and little girls, it's damaging to men and little boys. It's, you know, you see the impact of that even in gender norms around parenting, which is, I think, something that's very alive in our cultural conversation right now, because you do see so many more dads now stepping in and being like, "No, I'll be the stay at home dad. You go. You go. I want to empower you to pursue this career." Like, "Let's do this together. You don't have to carry the burden of the first early three years of our child's life by yourself." I know we have a long ways to go still in that.

Richard Rohr: But we're moving.

Brie Stoner: We're moving

Richard Rohr: And in this regard, our culture's ahead of most. You see it here—in Western Europe too—but here an awful lot. What are these-- Do you have one of these where you carry the baby on your chest?

Paul Swanson: Oh, yeah. What's that called?

Paul Swanson: Oh, there's so many different varieties. I'm trying to think of the one that we have. We have like two or three because they're-- But having the baby right against your heart—

Richard Rohr: Right against your heart. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: It's the magic of having a baby and being able to go for a walk and just hold that precious being so close.

Richard Rohr: It must be wonderful.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. It's an interesting thing. We talk about the gender norms of within that. As a father, if I'm bringing my kids to get groceries, everyone's like, "Oh, my goodness, you are doing such an amazing job."

Brie Stoner: For real.

Paul Swanson: My wife never gets that.

Richard Rohr: She's supposed to.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: It's, like, assumed; like it's nothing, but, yeah.

Richard Rohr: You get praise.

Paul Swanson: I get praise, and I feel good. I, like, "Everyone thinks I'm so great," and she just rolls her eyes, as she should.

Richard Rohr: "I've been doing it for eight hours."

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: You know, one other little piece on that that I think has merit is that I'm told, maybe you've read other things similar, that for the first however many weeks, months, the child doesn't know it's separate from the mother. It knows the smell of her body, the feel of her body, the taste of that milk, the "I'm one with her." This is unitive consciousness in its early stages. Then the second one to enter the scene is "who's this other person in the house"?

Paul Swanson: They don't smell quite as good.

Brie Stoner: They're scratchy, scratchy faces.

Richard Rohr: "They don't smell the same as mama, but they seem to be nice to me. They seem to be okay." So, when the father chooses them, this is the first experience of election, of free love. Mother's love. I assume, I rely upon, I mean people have a mother wound are really wounded. I mean father wounds are terrible, too, but when you can't assume your mother's love is reliable, it's foundational to the psyche. But that someone else freely delights when you enter the living room and smiles from ear to ear, that's election. And that's the power-- I've even gone so far as to wonder is that the reason we called God "Father"? He's the one who chooses to love us. He doesn't have to, as it were, as it were. And I don't know if the

metaphor works in all cases, but for some people, that's been very helpful.

Brie Stoner: It brings to mind what a tender and sensitive time it is when a couple gives birth—

Richard Rohr: Oh, yeah.

Brie Stoner: --because everything is new, everything is overwhelming, and I think it also speaks to our desperate need for community. I think many couples when they have children or when women maybe give birth alone even, there's a desperate need for community to come around and to normalize some of those phases. I know that there's a lot in conversation right now around women and postpartum depression and just how real it is and how hard it is. So it's like just is a one more—as if we needed more—one more reminder of how desperately we need community and how much we are such an isolated culture in the United States that we think we have to do it all on our own and how damaging that is.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And I think. Too—I'm so glad you brought up postpartum—and I think one thing that also has kind of gotten under the radar, too, is men who have been told like once they have a child, they're just going to love it immediately. And for some men it doesn't happen for weeks or months.

Richard Rohr: Really?

Paul Swanson: I even talked to one guy who said it took them two years before he really fell in love with his child.

Richard Rohr: Really? I've never heard that before.

Paul Swanson: And that wound that gets carried with that as well.

Brie Stoner: Shame or like a sense of guilt around it.

Paul Swanson: "I'm not the dad I should be." And so, just being able to have these conversations to remove some of that isolation and try to normalize what does it mean to be a parent in today's world?

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I kind of feel like this is a little bit like Paul's question says that where he says the combined role of parents, partnership, mother and father in spiritual upbringing, which is to say we're not great in our culture at recognizing that parenting is a communal thing. You know, the whole phrase like it takes a village.

Richard Rohr: It takes a village. It does.

Brie Stoner: It's a real thing. It actually does take a village. I remember having a conversation once with a dear friend of mine who was feeling a tremendous amount of anxiety as her young son started, it must've been preschool, and I had a conversation with her where I said, "Okay, you know, the grass, the sun, the stars, the trees. If you can start to imagine that we're being held by a great community, then you can start to imagine your young son as being held by a great community as well. He's not unseen. He's not alone." You u know, we do think of ourselves so separately—

Richard Rohr: We do.

Brie Stoner: --that then as parents when you see your kid going off, you're like, "Ah," as opposed to being able to relax into a trust that, you know, there's a great cloud of witnesses that are there and then there's a very real physical cloud of witnesses, and parents, teachers, friends.

Richard Rohr: We're an exception to history that we have replaced the extended family with the nuclear family.

Brie Stoner: Yes.

Richard Rohr: And then jobs, we go off and take this new job in Ohio where aunts and uncles aren't there. Grandma isn't there. This is unnatural. We've taken the village apart. Yeah. Yeah.

Paul Swanson: And sometimes we'll also get trapped in that isolated mindset. Like, I think about whenever I bring my kids to the CAC, it's almost like, you know, we're giving away free money, or something. Just people come out of the woodworks just to hold my son or to play with my daughter.

Brie Stoner: Give me that baby.

Paul Swanson: And there's something about that, right, where I think you can get so insulated where you think, "This is all up to me to just raise these kids." You need those reminders of community who are just going to show with that free grace of love and support.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. So, from community support to resources questions, Catherine from Thomasville, Georgia says:

I have a four-year-old son who I can already tell has a tremendous capacity for spiritual thinking. However, most of the books and other Christian materials for children are not in line with the Universal Christ that you teach and that my husband and I know in the world. I want to raise him in the Christian tradition; however, I find that most of the mainstream Christian teachings for children, I fear, will do more harm than good in helping them see the Christ in himself and in the world around him. How can we talk about these things with my son in an age-appropriate way? I've really been struggling with this, so I appreciate any feedback or advice.

Richard Rohr: Well, I'm going to go back to my both/and way of thinking. It's going to come from your energy by which they see you, how they see you respecting other things and people. So, I still encourage you to tell Jesus stories. The sacramental principle is—I'm saying it twice this morning but allow me to—that you must start with the particular to go to the universal. And our danger now is to jump into the universal thinking it will be understood. It doesn't give the heart space the devotion it needs; the opening it needs. So, don't throw out all Christian stories. Most of them can be used, I would think, and I'm sure there's some books better than others, but you have to experience awe, respect, reverence before one image—Jesus. "Isn't Jesus good to the little children"? Let's be about as traditional as we could be, you know, and then say, "And now we who are an extension of Jesus are showing that same respect for all God's children."

So, it's both/and. Don't throw out the baby with the bath water. I've seen, and coming from the Catholic side now, usually rather good theology we got after the mid-1960s, but it did not engage the heart of most young Catholics in the seventies and eighties. "Oh, yeah, God loves everybody." They hadn't struggled with the whole thing of being loved or how wonderful it is to be loved unconditionally. You have to want that. You have to make space for that. You have to struggle with that a bit. And I remember when I gave teen retreats to young Vatican II Catholics in the 1970s, they all love me of course, because I was telling him God loved them unconditionally even when they had premarital sex—which they just loved, of course—but it was what Luther would call "cheap grace." And this is the diving into the ocean of universality before you struggle with the truth of it, possibly being true in particularity, doesn't make for a good pedagogical method, and that's why we came up with this notion of sacramentalism. And that's it, philosophically speaking, that you need the concrete to come to the universal. You need to love your partners in one concrete love before you even know what love feels like and what it feels like when it's taken away.

And so, I'm probably saying that too much, but I think it is one danger of people reading this new book. They're so excited about the Universal Christ and if they stay with the book, I think I even get stronger on it in the latter part of the book: Jesus is the personal; Christ is the universal; when you have both working together, you have good religion.

Brie Stoner: It's so helpful, Richard—

Richard Rohr: It is. Well, thank you.

Brie Stoner: --because it gives us a frame around which to say, okay, so part of my role as a parent in building this container can really just be oriented around the personal Jesus and the stories around Jesus and how to help him come to life in a way for children and for them to see it, and connect to it personally. And I think there's a couple of people wrote in to say, you know, "Hey, I heard you guys talking about parenting and how hard it is. Do you know that there's a good curriculum called The Good Shepherd?"

Richard Rohr: Oh, yes. That's been around for twenty, thirty years: The Good Shepherd.

Brie Stoner: There are all kinds of initiatives I think around trying to build a healthy first container. And listen, I know as a mom sometimes you cringe at some of the language that comes with that, but, I don't know, I think that's part of our role in relaxing and allowing them to navigate that and for the complexity to be there.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I mean, I think it's that tension of we've done our work in that way where we've gone through some of that order, disorder, and now we're trying to try to do more of the reordering work that it's hard to see, like, "Oh, my kid's got to go through this path too."

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: Very good.

Paul Swanson: You're trying to jump over the disorder just to land in the reorder, but it's not fair to their own development and growth.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. I love listening to my kids talk about God. I'll sometimes hear them explain things to each other where one of them will say, "God is kind of like this," and the other is, "Not really. God is kind of like that." I do think it's important for that. I just really appreciate the ways you're driving home how important the devotional center; the devotion.

Richard Rohr: Without devotion, things don't last. Really. They're flash in the pan. You know, this just struck me now, and forgive me if I'm totally wrong, but what struck me is maybe the ideal scenario would be a good Catholic post-Vatican II children's book taught by an evangelical. [laughter]

Brie Stoner. Yes! That's a good combo.

Paul Swanson: I like that.

Richard Rohr: Yeah. I mean, you're living example of it. It isn't so syrupy and sweet and individualistic, but you would bring the devotion to it, to our supposedly good theology.

Brie Stoner: Collective.

Paul Swanson: Continuing with this thread, we have a question here from Rebecca from Abbotsford, British Columbia:

My question is about the Resurrection. In trying to help children understand the communal, inclusive, transformational meaning of the Resurrection rather than the individual transactional understanding that I was raised with—

Richard Rohr: God, she got it, didn't she?

Paul Swanson: --do you have suggestions on how to translate this for their understanding? How can I begin sharing this with them?

Richard Rohr: Yeah. We're at high-level consciousness. There's no doubt about it. The notion of Resurrection, which is the icon for reorder, is not easily communicated to a child. The best we did in our Baltimore Catechism is "Where is God? God is everywhere. Why can't we see God? God is spirit." So, we were saying the same things, but what she might be really longing for is this communal and inclusive character of the Resurrected Christ.

You know what I probably didn't develop enough in the book, and I deeply believe to be true, is that light from the first chapter of Genesis is the metaphor for the Christ—this presence that allows you to see everything else that—you've heard me say it—you you don't see light, but it is through light that you see everything else. That's actually in the prologue to John's Gospel. I found it—where was it in the 14th chapter of John, or was it the 16th—last week, you know, "I am the light by which you see," by which you see.

So, it's good science. It's good conceptualization of this omnipresence of God. But a light isn't something you can grab or grasp. So again, we come to the Christ through Jesus. Jesus we can see, and touch, and hear. Now, that doesn't mean that's the only way. I know that it's going to upset some people. I've just met too many Buddhists, and Hindus, and Jews who have come to the light by different metaphors, by different stories, by different paths and

often honor the light in all things better than we do.

And so, I'm not denying the way I've been saying it. I hope I say it in the book is Jesus for me and Christ for me are both like shortcut icons on your computer. You can get there through three clicks, or you can get there through one click, and Jesus is a good one click. Jesus Christ is a very good two-click way to have the whole story. That doesn't say anything about joining a group, it really doesn't, or reciting the creed on Sundays. It's about seeing and seeing with a light that allows you to see the light in everything else. Isn't that wonderful? It's so simple it's hard to teach. It really is.

Brie Stoner: What you were saying the other day when we were doing the podcast at your house, you talked about how we need the pageantry of liturgy sometimes. It allows us to connect with it in a tactile way, these ideas. I love what you did with the liturgy at The Universal Christ conference, you know, even things like anointing the rock and taking us through the Easter liturgy. I think there are opportunities for us with kids to look at how can we translate these big concepts into things that are more practical? And you mentioned light, which makes me think the natural world can be a gateway where we can talk about "See, love is stronger than death. See, this is the way of everything."

Richard Rohr: Beautiful. And for those of you listening—did I say it in the book about Jacob's story?

Brie Stoner: I don't think it's in the book; I think it's in the liturgy.

Richard Rohr: In the liturgy. Okay. All the better.

Brie Stoner: Which is available.

Richard Rohr: Which is available as a little booklet, but we deliberately started our Universal Christ conference with doing something that initially looks pagan, or New Age, or then I just tell them to open up Genesis and read the story of Jacob. He uses a rock for a pillow. Between heaven and earth, a ladder appears with angels; angels walking between the rock and the heavens. God, that's good story, huh? And then he wakes up, says, "Eureka! I found it. You were here all the time, and I never knew it," and he anoints the rock and names the place "House of God," "Gate of heaven." If we had no other story in the Old Testament after Genesis—

Brie Stoner: That would be pretty good.

Richard Rohr: And then him wrestling with the angel later, that is just good theology.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: But we pointed out I hope in the liturgy, I know this was meant to shock you, us putting a rock in the middle of the table and anointing it. Because if Christ is that by which we see, Christ is also what we see in the material world. And so, the anointing of something is naming it blessed. Well, you can't start with a more rudimentary physicality than the rock underneath all of our feet right now; right now. It is a good metaphor. And then follow

that—I won't do it here—but to follow the rock metaphor through the Scriptures, it's central again and again up to, finally, Peter being named "the rock." This is good stuff. But that's only for people like fours on the Enneagram. [laughter] We won't tell you which one is the four if you haven't figure it out yet.

Brie Stoner: I wonder.

Richard Rohr: Who love symbols. They just revel in such things. A lot of the rest of them think, "Oh, that's only a symbol." Who was it that said, "Never say 'only' a symbol"? That's sacramentalism: never say "only" a symbol.

Paul Swanson: It's so powerful.

Richard Rohr: It is.

Paul Swanson: Not to embarrass you, Brie, but you wrote some things about Holy Week with kids that when I saw it in my inbox, it was just so beautiful to know that you are practicing this with your kids. And I do think it comes from part of your own artistic energy and theological mind that you're able to help bring these amazing concepts to kids in very concrete practices.

Brie Stoner: Full disclaimer—I think as a parent who's in this with so many other parents trying to find ways to express these things, Richard, I took a lot of inspiration from the Universal Christ liturgy that we did at The Universal Christ conference. And over the years, I've been trying to figure out this question that Rebecca asked about how do I go through Holy Week with my kids? And so, it's been interesting to me as I wrote about it on my blog to find how many people respond with just a sense of relief that maybe we could feel permission to create our own liturgies or our own traditions. So, I do think it's part of what you've gifted us with this permission to try to find ways to embody this with our children.

Richard Rohr: I hope so.

Brie Stoner: With my kids because of the time of year at spring, we talk a lot about butterflies. So we go through the process of a chrysalis and then we have a story that we tell about, you know, how a caterpillar that became a butterfly and went into the chrysalis, and everybody thought it was dead, and everybody was wondering what it was. So, it's kind of putting the concept of the crucifixion and resurrection in terms of this pattern of universal change and this pattern of universal love, and the kids get into it. I mean, this is the thing that I'm so fascinated by—I know you're going to say it's just cause I'm a four and my kids are probably picking up on it—but I think kids love that kind of pageantry and ritual.

Richard Rohr: They do. They do.

Brie Stoner: I call them liturgies or our Holy Week rituals, you know, I'll pass a Rose to my son and he'll just gaze at it. He'll tear one rose pedal off—

Richard Rohr: Oh, God, he's a four in the making. [laughter] For a male to do this--

Brie Stoner: Oh, my gosh, they're so sweet.

Richard Rohr: --they have anima already; femininity. Beautiful.

Brie Stoner: So, I think feeling permission as parents to try to incorporate these ideas into family rituals is something that you've gifted us with.

Richard Rohr: Now you're giving permission. Thank you. Thank you.

Brie Stoner: So, on onward with the questions of resources and teaching kids. Katherine from Richmond, Virginia says:

I'm enjoying the podcast episodes, and I just picked up Richard's book to dig deeper, but as I'm absorbing this perspective, I'm curious as to whether there are some picture books that explore these themes. I have young books and have found that sharing picture books together is meaningful for all of us in learning new things and inspiring our imaginations with words and images. Thank you.

Richard Rohr: So, it's up to you two. Yes. All right.

Brie Stoner: Richard, which picture books would you recommend?

Richard Rohr: I wouldn't know, really.

Paul Swanson: There are so many good ones now. We definitely live in a time where it's a lot easier for people to produce books, especially those who want to gather around these ideas. We have a few listed, and I put a few here on my phone. So, there are a few that my daughter really likes. One is *Where is God?* by Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, you know, it gets more to the universal side of what we're talking about.

Richard Rohr: And a rabbi. Very good. Very good.

Paul Swanson: And a rabbi, yeah. And then there's another one that gets more to the historical Jesus, which is *Refugee*. Have you seen that one, Brie?

Brie Stoner: Yes, I have.

Paul Swanson: Where it's about the experience of Jesus leaving and going to Egypt—

Richard Rohr: Oh, wow.

Paul Swanson: --as a refugee. And then there's some other ones that my daughter is really into right now is *Mindful Movements* which is a Thich Nhat Hanh picture book, which just shows different ways of body postures and body meditative practices. She's really into that. There are other ones too—*Peaceful Piggy Meditation* in that same vein.

Brie Stoner: Did you say, "peaceful piggy"?

Paul Swanson: Yeah. Have you seen this one?

Brie Stoner: No, but that's awesome. And then one that I was just introduced to is *The Three Questions*, which is based on a Leo Tolstoy story of where this young boy is seeking the questions of

when is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do?

Richard Rohr: Wow, that sounds wonderful.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. And so those are those are the ones that were kind of the top of my list as we were flipping through books. How about you, Brie?

Brie Stoner: You know that moment as a parent when you're trying to remember all the things that you have at home that you're not staring at?

Paul Swanson: Ninety percent of the day.

Brie Stoner: A couple came to mind. One is called I am Stardust, which is just the recognition of the interconnectedness in this cosmos. There's a book that makes me weep every time I read it, so the kids barely want to read it, because I cry every time. It's called Little Tree and it's all about the point of resistance in all of us to want to not let go and this little tree that refuses to let go of its leaves, and then through this whole course of a story finally gets to the end, finally lets go of its leaves, and finally grows into a beautiful strong tree, which is just so profound about the importance of letting go and living in the flow.

Richard Rohr: Letting go. That's lovely.

Brie Stoner: There are a lot of great books. I have picture books that are out there right now that may not be overtly spiritual but have really good messages like You Belong Here is one that's just all about welcoming your inherent value in belonging. There's an interesting book called What Do You Do with a Problem, which tackles how we view reality and what happens when we shift our view from seeing something as a problem to seeing it as an opportunity, or creativity, which is really interesting. But then I can just go old school here and say C. S. Lewis, George MacDonalds, Tolkien, and all of those great novels for me form a part of almost like a second canon to the Scriptures that I love, and my kids love. And, you know, even Harry Potter these days, it's like there are a lot of beautiful redemptive themes in there. I know these aren't picture books, right? This is like the next level.

Paul Swanson: Even with that, I mean, one of the practices of our families, we tend to read a poem before we eat. And for whatever reason, since my daughter was a baby, she's only wanted Rumi poetry. That's the one that she would, when she couldn't speak, and she would do the sign language for more—

Richard Rohr: Wow. What are your kids going to be? I wish I'd live long enough to see.

Paul Swanson: But the introduction of some of these things. I think, as ways of just beginning to expand that imagination that, that spiritual and philosophical imagination.

Brie Stoner: And I think as a last point to this, I think we have a tendency to be obsessed with where our kids are developmentally, and what can they get? What can they understand? And your example of Rumi and poetry is a great one, because sometimes it doesn't have to be something that they can grasp intellectually or developmentally. Sometimes it's about what we're teaching them rhythmically in terms of this is valuable. Like, listen to the rhythm

of these words. There's magic in this even if you don't understand it yet. that seems really important.

Paul Swanson: A hundred percent. This morning before work I was dancing with my kids, and I think that plays into it as well—

Richard Rohr: How beautiful.

Paul Swanson: --connection to body and this whole parenting, children relationship.

Richard Rohr: God, what are your kids going to be like? You're creating their imaginarium. You're giving a whole world of acceptable imagery that influences the emotional life deeply; profoundly. Thank you.

Brie Stoner: That's really helpful, Richard, to say what we're trying to do is create a broad—what did you say—a broad imaginarium.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I like that phrase. Our next question here has to do with kids and discipline. This comes from Clay, from Texas.

I think it was the very first question of the first podcast. How do we as parents raise our children in this understanding? These deep, wonderful, often metaphoric understandings are powerful but often beyond the grasp of a child. The temptation is to revert back to the tradition in which I grew up, which has a very literal understanding in the evangelical church—heaven, hell, salvation, etc. And so, much of the reason this impacts me now is how I've discovered this in my thirties. I want to give my kids a foundation of love, truth, and a picture of who God is, but also give the space for that exciting discovery.

I'm also wrestling with how God is revealed in Christ on the cross, how that should direct my parenting. The culture/tradition in which I grew up valued good behavior and discipline and often punishment when those were not met. I admit I'm so steeped in that way that I can't really comprehend what it means to parent in the flow of love, responding to God as an all-inclusive lover rather than a holy deity that we've disappointed and of whom we need to earn approval. I want my kids to learn love, acceptance, and inclusivity. It's also really important that they learn to listen to us. They don't know if I'm saying "Stop!" as a preference because they're running across the yard, or because it's life-threatening because they're running across the parking lot. What are your thoughts on raising children and balancing that tension?

Richard Rohr: This question never stops, does it, which shows me how urgent it is for parents: how do you put together freedom with law, to pull it back to what Paul's struggling with. That's Paul's struggle, whether you thought of it that way at all, and he's dealing with it in adults, you're smart enough to say, how do we start it already with children? There was a study a few elections back—I'll let you guess which one it was—what kind of people voted for the war-like American presidential candidate and what one ones voted for the more peaceful, and it truly co-related to the way they were parented. If you were parented with a punitive, that all problems are solved by domination, control, law, order, top-down, you preferred a certain candidate. You can fill in a whole bunch of them or really a whole political party, which I won't name, all right, and if you were raised in a family that was more "talkie,"

and let me make fun of it, too, talkie-talkie, feely-feely, relationality, which, again, has its possible downsides, you voted for a different political candidate who was also conversational, dialogical and appealed to intelligence and not just feeling, I'll bet that's true. I'd be willing to bet.

Because when I meet people who are rabidly on the left or rabidly on the right, either one, you can tell it's their whole worldview. It's not just their God view or not just their politics, but how politics and religion go together.

You see the people who have a top-down domination, all problems are solved by domination from above, that's in their bones from their childhood, and it's just very hard to let go of it. If my parents hadn't been personally kind people, I think that's the worldview I'd have because that was the worldview in a German farm family in Kansas. It was the only worldview. All kids were spanked. All kids were told, "No." All kids were taught about hell. So, I was redeemed by going away and studying good theology and say, "You know, this isn't the shape of the eye of God. This isn't the shape of the world, but this is the interplay between good theology, and good psychology, and good anthropology, and how good theology can absolutely turn bad anthropology on its head. Probably one reason even we stick with theology because it alone has the power to do that. Not that we want to stay there, but it's fundamentally true.

And so, here's a good man recognizing that this happens and wondering how to say that to his children. Your very desire to say, to dialogue, to talk, to tell stories with your children, let's me know you're going to maintain. You're the father. You're not abdicating your authority, which I do think a lot of boomers did. "We're all just friends here and we're all going to discover who we think God is," like there's no tradition to be drawn upon. There's no wisdom that preceded us which sets them loose in 1970s American middle-class culture in which to make their value choices, you see? So, you think you're being free and, actually, you're limiting them; whereas, what we're talking about as the Great Tradition, the Great Lineage that has found the truth reappearing again and again and again. So, hold your role as elders. I know in your thirties it's hard to think of yourself as elder, but you are. And that's what Ken Wilber calls "actualization hierarchy." Don't abdicate that and think it's your job to be your best friend to your children, although I want you to be your best friend, but no, you are a father; you are a mother. Don't let go of that beautiful actualization of power for their good, not for their domination, but for their, in fact, evolution. Yeah.

Brie Stoner: That is so well said, Richard. Wow. I feel like that's that places a sense of responsibility in our participation in that flow and in that relationship, because I do think we want to abdicate that oftentimes into this, you know—

Richard Rohr: Most of the boomer generation did.

Brie Stoner: Yeah. Well, and the millennials, too, because it's sort of this allergy, you know, the allergy to authority, or the allergy to boundaries is so strong.

Richard Rohr: I'm glad we're saying this, because it isn't popular wisdom. Yeah. It's created an idealization of youth culture, I mean, as if every generation can start at zero and this is where we've found there's a good meaning to tradition.

Paul Swanson: Yeah.

Richard Rohr: If the word “lineage” is more healthful, use that.

Paul Swanson: Yeah. I just want to say to Clay that I’m right there with you of this kind of trying to hold both.

Brie Stoner: Yeah; ditto.

Paul Swanson: And my own experience of last night where I fell to more the domineering side—Brie and I were about barking at our kids—and how I had to come back and then also release that domination side and say, “I’m sorry, honey. I was acting out of a way that wasn’t about you. It was about me in that moment.” And I think that also helps kind of to ask for forgiveness when we do overstep in one way or the other. There’s no auto-response that’s going to be perfect every single time, and so, I think forgiving ourselves when we don’t live up to who we hope to be and knowing that we’re figuring it out.

Brie Stoner: I mean, I find that just underneath the surface of all of these questions and so many more that we didn’t have time to read today, is that overwhelming experience of a parent of like, “I don’t know what I’m doing, and I’m so scared that I’m screwing up my kids, and I’m so aware of my own imperfections, I’m so aware of my own impatience or my limitations.” And I do think that so much of this experience of parents is this reconciling ourselves with our being human. You have this line, “The only perfection available to us is our honest acceptance of our imperfection,” Richard, and shouldn’t that just be the mantra of every parent?

Paul Swanson: That’s good.

Brie Stoner: All right, well, just to close out on our last question, Katie from Georgia, she asks a question about parenting with a partner on a different page. She says:

What does it look like for those of us in our twenties and thirties who are raising small kids, and living in small towns, and trying to navigate our own reconstruction, our own reorder, while our kids in most of the culture around us is in construction mode?

She says:

For example, I’m in my mid-thirties, I’m married to a beautiful, loving man, but a man who couldn’t even tune into the podcast with me because the episode I happened to click on was when Richard made a commentary on sports.

Uh-oh.

Richard Rohr: Oh, God.

Brie Stoner: She says:

You should have given a sacred cow alert at the beginning because I lost the hubs on that one. We have a three- and five-year old who frequently stay with their grandparents who are devout, dutiful Baptists, and our kids attend a Methodist church for pre-k programs. I love

that they are gifted with the presence of their loving grandparents and loving pre-k teachers, but I'm also torn inside that they're being fed all the same things that I have spent years on learning. I trust they, too, will wake up on their own, but I want to hear you all discuss how to be me and others like me, and not be discouraged.

And I think we've really been talking about this, this whole episode, but I wondered if you could, just to kind of nuance her question, speak to how do we allow our own reorder to be happening in the midst of recognizing that our kids, or maybe the communities we're in, are still very much in the order side? How do we include and transcend that and make it okay without doing damage to either our process or theirs?

Richard Rohr: You feel like you're being dishonest or playing a game. This is probably the deep level meaning of multitasking, really. I really know the story has much more significance than this, and yet I've got to tell it in an age-appropriate way. Let's go back to wonder and awe. You're doing a three-, four-, five-, six-year old no favor by introducing them to critical thinking. That's stupid. Once you introduce critical thinking, wonder and awe is gone. Now, it's quite appropriate for a teenager when you can say, "Isn't this wondrous, that the atom can form in this way," and so forth. But their mind is capable of critical thinking. The little ones want to be in awe. That's their fascination with magic, with Harry Potter. You know, it's just, I love a world of magic, of wonder. Magic is the secular form of religious awe. So, maybe just offering you the word of religious multitasking will give you permission—that's what you're doing, and that's what you have to do. You have to keep growing. And the very ability that you've developed to grow is going to allow you to talk in an age-appropriate way to that child.

I really think some of the nuns who taught me back in the fifties were doing that, the way they taught us. I don't think they believed all that themselves, do you understand? But their love for us, they knew their job was to give us a container. That word container has stuck and keeps recurring in most of my later books, because I've found so many people find it helpful that you need a container, or you have to have an ego to let go of an ego. Isn't that a paradox? You have to have a structure to move outside of the structure. Talk about counterintuitive thinking. People who have no structure are forever looking for it the rest of their lives and invariably create artificial structures, you know? Oh, I don't know what it is, my drinking group is my structure, my bridge—

Brie Stoner: Workaholics. Being a workaholic, like, being obsessed with work.

Richard Rohr: Yes, make it something good. That's right. It's my work, or my business, or my sports team, forgive me. [laughter]

Brie Stoner: Sacred cow alert!

Richard Rohr: It's only one, but we're just trying to say we can make an idol out of anything, and I'd be the first to say people like me have done it with religion. I admit that, you know? Anything that becomes your only lens is a narrowing lens, therefore, and an idol.

Brie Stoner: As we wrap up this episode, just wanting to offer a closing disclaimer for all of you parents who are trying to figure this out, we're in it with you. We don't know. We're making mistakes alongside of you and trusting in the grace that somehow, somehow something is going to

come through this for our kids. So, I just want to offer our gratitude for all your questions and just admission that we are in the “Cloud of Parenting Unknowing” with you. And, just to close Richard, we’ve heard you talk a lot about how much your mother’s gaze impacted you and was such a gift to you.

Richard Rohr: Yeah.

Brie Stoner: Is there something you can say about a gift that your father gave you that was critical to who you are now?

Richard Rohr: You know, it probably affirms what I was telling you. Of course, my daddy was a seven, so he was positive by nature. His radical acceptance of us out did my mother’s love in lot of ways. My mother was a task master. Now, I was her favorite, so I got this experience of being a beloved too much. I always say I went off to the seminary at fourteen to get away from too much mother love, you know. Now, I could only recognize that twenty years later because I was enjoying it. But this is why most boys around fourteen do want to get away from their mothers. It’s just I’m so suffocated inside of her maternal nurturing power, I don’t know, I’m codependent to use our common term. Daddy’s love was never a codependency. We’d just be playing, we’d look up, and we’d see him grinning at us, you know, but it was never I need to pull you into my arms and make you mine. My dad’s love was much freer and much more able to validate from a distance.

Was it Eric Fromm, now I’m preaching again, but he said the healthiest people between their two parents have a combination of conditional love and unconditional love. And I think—my siblings and I have gotten together and talked about it—we’d all say we got conditional love from our mother, nevertheless love, we got unconditional love from our father. And it created, I think, in all four of us a basically healthy ego structure. All four of us sort of know who we are, know who are not, and we’re not begging to be noticed. I think that’s true cause we got the gaze, and if you don’t get the gaze, you’re looking for it for the rest of your life. A lot of these people who have to be on stage. It’s wonderful, I guess, to be on stage, but don’t need it too much. You’re looking, believe it or not, for the gaze of God, for something that adores you, that calls you beloved. And when you already know you’re a beloved, you don’t need it. You can do it, but you don’t need it. So, yeah, I got it from both parents, but in different ways.

Brie Stoner: Thank you, Richard.

Richard Rohr: Thank you.

Paul Swanson: And that’s it for today’s episode of Another Name for Every Thing with Richard Rohr. This podcast is produced by the Center for Action and Contemplation thanks to the generosity of our donors.

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Brie Stoner: From the high desert of New Mexico, we wish you peace and every good.