

Chapter 3

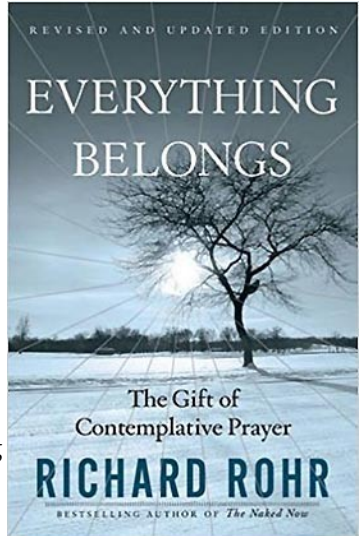
EVERYTHING BELONGS

The Gift of Contemplative Prayer by Richard Rohr
Book Review/Summary by David Bradshaw

Introduction

This timeless classic by Richard Rohr is just as fresh and relevant today as it was groundbreaking when first written fifteen years ago. The book's premise is simple, yet counterintuitive; either everything belongs, or nothing belongs. Either our Creator accepts all of us as-is by way of grace, or nobody is ever good enough to be accepted based upon our works.

In his familiar and endearing Franciscan spirit of inclusivity, Rohr invites us to join him in exploring an exciting new path toward greater self-understanding as well as intimacy with God and all of creation.



To fully grasp the truth of God's amazing grace is a lifetime project which requires transcending your 'rational' mind, according to Rohr. We desperately need to connect with our 'contemplative' (or reflective) mind to begin to 'see' everything and everyone with a new set of eyes.

From this fresh, spacious place of contemplative grace we can more fully embrace and represent our loving God in a new "Third Way" - beyond the confining left-right political, economic and religious systems.

The world system, and much of the religious world, has followed a success formula which is based on a foundational premise that we must first accept certain basic beliefs, then behave in a certain acceptable way, in order to finally be good enough to belong to the right group or culture. (believe-behave-belong)

But within the pages of this book you'll discover why this logical and perhaps even rational formula is nevertheless 100% backwards. The truth, which is repeatedly taught by Jesus, is that you and I (and everyone else) belong first - regardless of our belief and/or our behavior. (belong-believe-behave)

Take a moment to reflect on the implications this simple perception reversal of your relationship with God and with others. This means that nothing can or will ever separate you from the love and acceptance of your Creator. Nothing. Not sin. Not bad behavior. Not bad beliefs. No-thing! This just may be the most liberating statement of God's grace we will ever attempt to comprehend in this life.

This summary is a humble effort to highlight 101 of the key, bite-size truisms I found, which may help you also discover that “Everything really does Belong!” (Even and especially those things which still may appear to be just plain wrong!)

The book is divided into six chapters building toward the stated goal of revealing The Gift of Contemplative Prayer. Are you ready to jump into a bold, life-changing and transformative spiritual journey? Great! Let's go...

Chapter I: Center & Circumference

1. The path of love and the path of suffering are the Two Great Paths of transformation. Suffering gets our attention. Love and prayer gets us to our heart and passions.
2. We are not in control of our center or circumference. The ordinary path is gradual awakening and occasional quieting. For most transformation begins at the edges, but we must not stay on the circumference too long.
3. The Two Knowings (our self and God) seem to move forward together toward conversion, transformation and holiness.
4. In God's reign “Everything Belongs” - even the broken and poor parts. Dualistic thinking starts in the soul, moves to the mind and eventually moves to the streets.
5. We live in a consumer-driven culture, often infected by “affluenza” which leads to toxic blindness. Most of us have to be taught how to see. True seeing is the heart of spirituality.
6. It's much easier to attend “church” than to practice the presence of God. We begin by accepting the edges of our life. We don't find our center, it finds us. We live ourselves into a new way of thinking (not visa-versa).
7. Our journeys around and through our realities or “circumferences” lead us to the core reality, where we meet both our truest self and truest God.

8. Jesus' most common (almost exclusive) self-name is "The Human One" or "Son of Humanity" - 79 times in the four gospels. Jesus' reality, His cross is to say "Yes" to what His humanity asks of Him.

9. Too often Christians have been worshiping Jesus' journey instead of doing His journey. Why? Because the first feels very "religious" while the second feels very human and not glorious.

10. "First there is the fall, then the recovery from the fall. But both are the mercy of God." -Julian of Norwich- We tend not to see the transformative pattern of death and rebirth until the second half of life.

11. It is much easier to belong to a group than to know that you belong to God. Being over and against is easier than being in love, in relationship.

12. You have to develop ego before you can learn to let go of it. Jesus lived for 30 years before He began public ministry and started talking.

13. The Third Way is the contemplative gift of holding the tension of opposites. These people are risk takers and reformers without a private agenda, jobs or security to maintain, to fearlessly do God's work.

14. God is always bigger than the boxes we build for God, so we should not waste too much time protecting boxes. People who've learned to live from their center in God know which boundaries are worth maintaining and which to surrender.

Chapter II: Vision of Enchantment

15. We cannot attain the presence of God because we are already totally in the presence of God. What is absent is awareness! There is nothing to attain or learn - but there are some things we need to unlearn.

16. Human culture is in a mass hypnotic trance. We're sleep-walkers. All religious teachers have recognized human beings do not naturally see, we need to be taught how to see. "Stay watchful" -Jesus

17. Experiencing radical grace is like living in another world. Prayer is a way of living in the presence of God. Spirituality is about seeing, not earning or achieving, relationship rather than results or requirements.

18. To see how everything belongs we must trust the flow, trust life, the life so large and deep and spacious that it even includes its opposite – death.

19. The parable of the sower explains the types of soil. Most spiritual work is about readying the student. Both soil and soul have to be a bit unsettled and loosened up. When the student is ready, the teacher will show up.

20. The “beginners mind” requires a willing heart to change, to see our own mixture of good and evil, wheat and tares, saint and sinner. The only perfection available to us is honest acceptance of our imperfection.

21. If you must have perfection to be happy with yourself, you have only two choices; blind ourselves to our own evil (deny the weeds) or we can give up in discouragement (deny the wheat).

22. Beginners mind is a posture of eagerness, of spiritual hunger, which is hard to maintain without some pain/suffering. We dare not rid ourselves of pain before we have learned what it has to teach us. (That’s why the poor have a head start).

23. The sign of Jonah is Jesus primary metaphor for transformation. Jonah was swallowed whole, taken where he did not want to go inside the belly of a whale for a while. Only when he understood his calling was he spit upon the shore.

24. We must learn to stay with the pain of life, without answers, without conclusions, and some days without meaning. That is the path, the perilous dark path of true prayer.

25. “It is grace that forms the void inside of us, and it is grace alone that can fill the void.” -Simone Weil- Grace leads us to a state of emptiness, that momentary sense of meaninglessness in which we ask, “What is it all for?”

26. When we avoid darkness, we avoid tension, spiritual creativity and finally transformation. We avoid God, who works in darkness, where we are not in control! Maybe that is the secret: relinquishing control.

27. Liminality - a threshold, central to initiation rites and a good metaphor for preparation for transformation - especially from a boy to a man. Boys naturally want to ascend, religion has to teach him the language of descent. Humility & honesty are the foundation of all spirituality.

28. Liminal space induces a type of inner crisis to help us make a needed transition. Birth and death are only understood by experience. Liminal space is always an experience of displacement in the hope of a new point of view. The word translated repentance (metanoia) is literally “beyond the mind.”

29. Like travel, transformation is a kind of journey, a willingness to go some place else. Liminal space is to pull us out of our private, absolute center. Until we have points of comparison we don't understand much.

30. High religious positions can be the blindest of all, mistaking symbolism for substance, rituals for reality. That's called idolatry - when we worship and protect the means instead of the end. Religion should be understood as the 'fingers pointing to the moon,' not the moon itself.

31. When we first have a liminal experience it can be very inflating. Like falling in love it is so exciting to finally see the truth. But without humility and honesty it can be dangerous to use the language of descent for an ascent - God can become a way for the humiliated ego to reascend.

32. The last experience of God is frequently the greatest obstacle to the next experience of God. We aren't born again. We are born again and again and again. All great spirituality is about letting go.

33. We need failure and quiet time to recognize this pattern. Without grace we will not enter into the void. Without grace the void will not be filled. Life teaches us the habit of grace.

34. Excessive drinking and drugs lower our consciousness, does not lead us to liminal experience. Instead they lessen awareness, which avoids the great letting go. Jesus refused to take drugged wine on the cross (Matt. 21:34)

35. Preoccupation with exchange/market value is an unsatisfying foundation for life. Prayer reconnects us. Everything becomes priceless if it is sacred. And everything is sacred if the world is God's temple.

36. How you see anything is how you see everything. When we see the image of God where we don't want to see the image of God, then we see with eyes not of our own. We must love and recognize the divine image, even in our enemy. Everything becomes enchanting with true sight.

Chapter III: Ego and Soul

37. The contemplative secret is to learn to live in the now. The calculating mind is opposite of the contemplative mind. The first is thought by the system, the second is recognizing by the Spirit.

38. Prayer to help draw us into a contemplative frame of mind ... "Be. still. and know. that I am. God."

39. Our culture teaches us that ego is the only game in town, and mistakes private ego as if it is full reality. The nature of ego is it tries to fix, name, control and insure everything for itself. But ego fixes us in the past.

40. The religious version of egocentricity is wanting to be right, to be in control. Jesus said "unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies..." (Jn. 12:24) As soon as we are in a judging mode we can't love.

41. Love and freedom cannot grow in self-preoccupied and calculating minds. When we live out of ego we impose our demands on reality. When we live in God's presence we await reality's demands on us. The present moment has no competition. When I'm in competition, I'm not in love.

42. "The Lord looks on his servants with pity, not with blame. In God's sight we do not fall, in our sight we do not stand. Both of these are true, but the deeper insight belongs to God." -Julian of Norwich- Like our children we cannot reject them because they are me. That seems to be how God loves what God creates.

43. "Kinesthetic knowing" - from birth to 2-3 yrs. old we know ourselves in the security of those who hold us and gaze upon us (original knowing). That's the great gift a good mother and father are - they enable us to know ourselves at a depth that cannot be shaken. When we begin to doubt, we take teddy bears and dolls.

44. When primal knowing is wounded or missing an immense doubt is created. How can we surrender unless we believe there is someone trustworthy?

45. At the end of Einstein's life: "Now I see that the only question is; 'Is the universe friendly?'" The gift of true religion is to part the veil and reassure us we live in a benevolent universe in which there's no need to fear. We live in a world of original blessing, not original sin. Abundance, not scarcity as world teaches.

46. The need to control, compare and dominate moves us deeper and deeper into the world of anxiety. We begin to eliminate people we can't fix, control or see God's image in. Around 500 AD came the proliferation of the mirror, people began to live almost entirely outside themselves - to live through others eyes, bringing constant dissatisfaction. Until we break the material world's hold on us, we will never be happy.

47. The price paid for technology is our soul. Soul does not know self by comparison and differentiation. The soul just is. It knows itself through what is now, both dark and light, no game of succeeding or faulting - everything belongs.

48. Priority of contemplation - must proceed activism or revolution or it will fail. Jesus emphasized transformation of consciousness and soul. We need less reformation and more transformation.

49. In the early stages of contemplation we wait in silence. When we are nothing we are in a fine position to receive everything from God.

50. The primary philosophical and spiritual problem in the West is the lie of individualism. "I think, therefore I am" -Descartes- Enlightenment created a false vantage point, making church and community almost impossible. Secularism is a lonely and desperate project of a disconnected life.

51. Prayer isn't primarily words; it is primarily a place, an attitude, a stance. That's why Paul could say "pray always...unceasingly".

52. We long for the whole Christ. In the West (extroverted) we have a longing for the missing side of the gospel which we find in Eastern (introverted).

53. A child's beginners mind is without ego identity to prove, project or protect. They know kinestically and respond to what is, not what should or might be.

54. Prayer is different than mere therapy. Therapy heals our disconnectedness from a specific problem, person or emotion. Prayer heals our split from life itself, our deepest disconnectedness. Prayer affirms us at our core.

55. It's no surprise that we call it "salvation", from the Latin word "salus" for healing. People show great euphoria and excitement after a born-again experience. They're right. Suddenly life is okay.

56. Salvation often feels like a kind of universal amnesty, a total forgiveness of ourselves and all other things.

Chapter IV:. Cleaning the Lens

57. "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would be seen as it is."
-William Blake-

58. "The tragedy of Christianity is that it came to see itself as replacing other religions instead of adding something to all of them." -Simone Weil

59. Christianity has created a great problem by presenting itself as a completing ideology rather than a way to see all things. Rather than revealing God in new and surprising places, too often it has led us to confine God to our place.

60. "If it is true, it is of the Holy Spirit." -Thomas Aquinas The only question is veracity, not origin. The Gospel is not a competing idea, its how we see all ideas in their proper context.
61. "God refuses to be known, except by love." -John of the Cross- If we lead with the calculating mind (vs. contemplative mind) we'll never get to love.
62. Our first job is to see clearly who we are, then act on it. Being human is just a little lower than God (Ps. 8:5) Faith gives us a kind of extraordinary dignity.
63. "Perfect love cast out all fear" (I John 4:18). The world system moves forward out of fear. In contemplative prayer we move into a different realm of pure grace and freedom where love flourishes.
64. The private ego does not deserve all this dignity...in the great wisdom traditions the wounds to our ego are our teachers and must be welcomed. They must be paid attention too, not litigated.
65. We must rediscover the gift of free will. When grace is no longer an experienced reality, it seems the realm of freedom is lost too.
66. Secular freedom is having to do what you want to do. Religious freedom is wanting to do what you have to do. Primal freedom to be yourself, to live in the truth despite all circumstances.
67. In the silence of contemplation we will observe the process whereby we actively choose and create what we pay attention to. During the first 20 minutes only our primary agenda shows itself.
68. The contemplative mind refuses to project evil elsewhere...we must be free to say "yes" before we say "no" to get ourselves out of the way - dying to self before we judge anyone else.
69. The levels of moral development (Lawrence Kohlberg) describe six distinct levels or stages. He concluded we are incapable of understanding a stage more than one beyond our own. Jesus is a sixth level person, which is why some are not able to understand His teaching.
70. The greatest barrier to the next level of consciousness is our comfort and control at the level we are at now. Our first response to anyone calling us to truth, greatness or a higher level will be anxiety. Every step up the ladder of moral development is taken in semi-darkness, by the light of faith.

71. God alone seems capable of guiding us through these transitional and dark stages. Alone we panic and run. Women tend to be better at bodily knowing than men are ... perhaps because the state of body and mind are in union. Men have paid a price for “power”. We surrendered our kinesthetic knowing and, unfortunately, much of our soul.

72. Prayer, silence and suffering seem to be the necessary teachers in all great traditions, to lead us to emotional and spiritual strength and transformation.

73. New physics tells us that matter is mostly the manifestation of spirit. Spirit, consciousness, relationship itself is the real thing. Energy is not in particles of the atom, but in the space between the particles.

74. Now it suddenly becomes easier to deal with people who are dying, because we know they are returning to Spirit! “Life has not ended, but merely changed.” Death becomes holy. We need to lose this fascination with only the young and beautiful people - as if youth and beauty were the only truth.

75. Growth in the spiritual life is not by acquisition of something new, but rather by letting go of fear and attachment to self-image. We grow by subtraction much more than by addition.

Chapter V: Don't Push the River

76. The only authority we have in other's lives is what we ourselves have walked and know to be true. Then we earn the right to speak and give hope and meaning to the next generation.

77. The final stage of the wisdom of faith is becoming the Holy Fool - one who knows he does not know - but doesn't need to either.

78. We can see a convergence of big mind (East) with small mind (West). Small mind needs big mind for context and perspective. Big mind needs small mind or it gets lost in mystique and abstraction. Rational and mystical mind both needed for wholeness, but they are not easy partners, yet all are a necessary part of the body of Christ.

79. If we can learn to trust God, the next movement of our soul is to trust ourselves - because God trusts us. God will even use sin to transform you. “Sin shall not be a shame to humans, but a glory...the mark of sin shall be turned to honor.” -Julian of Norwich-

80. The Gospel is all about the mystery of forgiveness. If Jesus is the revelation of the heart of God, it is very good news about the nature of God. The Samaritan woman is loved, accepted and then sent to advertise the good news as an apostle! (Jn. 4:18)

81. "You will know the mystery of salvation through fore-giveness of sin" (Lk. 1:77) This means being given beforehand - before you earned it, were worthy of it, or maybe even asked for it. Early Church Fathers believed in "apokatastasis" universal restoration (Acts 3:21) as the real meaning of the resurrection of Christ. God finally wins in every person's life... which led to Catholic tradition of Purgatory.

82. 2/3 of Jesus teachings are about forgiveness and 1/3 of the parables. Could God's love really be that great and universal? Is life just a great school of love? Parables seem to teach that all laborers receive the same pay (Matt 20:1-16) In the Prodigal son parable (Luke 15:28) the elder son refuses to attend the free banquet.

83. Forgiveness is God's entry into powerlessness, as we see in the image of the cross. God is a lover, "Closer to me than myself" -Meister Eckhart- Transformation happens through tears much more than through threats and punishments.

84. Religion and relationships are one, "re-ligio" is the task of putting our divided realities back together; human and divine, male and female, heaven and earth. Sinners are those who choose to keep it all divided.

85. Christianity is the only world religion that believes God became a living human being - the incarnation of Jesus. The material world now becomes the privileged place for divine encounter.

86. The biblical human is clearly tripartite, which mirrors the diving Trinity. (I Thes. 5:23) "Blameless, spirit, soul and body." Spirit tends toward the mind, universals, absolutes and God. Soul tends toward psyche, experience, particulars, "me." The soul is the lost element of human trinity...the body is the rejected element.

87. Spirit is described as "flowing water" and "a spring with you" (Jn. 4:10-14) "river of life" (Rev. 22:1-2). Life is not just about you, you are part of a much larger stream; God. Faith does not need to push the river, just trust that there is a river, it's flowing and we are in it. The river is God's providential love - do not be afraid!

88. Without awareness of the river, a sense that we are supported, we succumb to fear, so we frighten others. We all want to be around people whom we feel safe and forgiven just by being next to them.

89. When the church is no longer teaching people how to pray, it's lost its reason for existence. After prayer, the church needs to teach "the weeping mode" - which leads to owning our complicity in the problem.

90. The freedom to cry is a clear sign you have actually experienced God. Jesus called mourning blessed (Matt. 5:4) When weeping is lost, our grief seems to turn into anger, blaming and controlling mode. Francis cried a lot and Claire also.

91. Peace of mind is a contradiction of terms. Contemplative prayer must lead us beyond our mind to a more spacious place. A prayer of silence is not so much to express, but to experience dependence - like a child on a mother's lap.

92. The man/woman who cannot cry is a savage. To descend into "the tears of things" I take my boys to nursing homes. The old man/woman who can't laugh is a fool - the person of prayer can cry from the heart and laugh from the belly.

Chapter VI: Return to the Sacred

93. In sacred space the old world is able to fall apart and the new world is able to be revealed. Without liminal space we idolize normalcy.

94. Jesus is called priest, prophet and King. We see the priesthood every Sunday in liturgy, our feasts and symbols celebrate Christ the King, but it is the prophet who leads us out of normalcy. We resist having Christ deconstruct the system. I've never in all the Christian world found a church named "Christ the Prophet." Both the church and the state are threatened by true mystics.

95. There is no shortcut from simple consciousness to enlightenment. We must go through radically unsettling transformation and liminal steps. Most problems are psychological, but most solutions are spiritual requiring a loss of ego-self power.

96. We need to look for our shadow, what we have avoided, dismissed and disdained. As we integrate and forgive our shadow life looks different. We see things as God does. God doesn't look at our faults, but at the place we are trying to say "yes" like we do with our children.

97. There's a certain fear of death that comes from not having lived yet, an existential terror about losing what you've never found. Once you've touched

the mystery of life you are not afraid of death. Like Francis, we can say “Welcome Sister death.”

98. Jesus came to promise life and love is eternal, but we can enter into it now. It’s heaven all the way to heaven. And it’s hell all the way to hell. Not later, but now.

99. Walking the Third Way - Christianity is a religion of attachment to love, risk, pain and suffering. There is also a dance with detachment, the purifying of attachment. The work of the soul is attachment, the work of the Spirit is detachment. This tension dance is often called The Third Way.

100. The Third Way is a way of wisdom of the cross. Liberals deny the vertical arm of the cross (transcendence and tradition) while Conservatives deny the horizontal arm (breadth and inclusivity). The prophet combines the best of both which makes them radical and unacceptable in both camps.

101. Before enlightenment all fear, judgment and criticism is stated in the second person “you are” - After enlightenment, we join Jesus on the cross and all criticism is henceforth stated in the first person “we are.”

Conclusion: A Contemplative Seeing of the Doctrine of the Cross

1. God is found in all things.
2. Human existence is neither perfectly consistent, nor is it incoherent chaos.
3. The price we pay for holding together these opposites is always some form of crucifixion.
4. The Pascal mystery is true life that comes only through journeys of death and rebirth.
5. We should never be surprised or scandalized by the sinful and the tragic.
6. We must resist all utopian ideologies - Jesus is an utter realist.
7. Following Jesus is not a “salvation scheme” or social order, it is a vocation to share the fate of God for the life of the world.
8. God is calling everything and everyone to Himself.
9. Institutional religion is a humanly necessary but immature manifestation of God's hidden mystery.
10. By God’s choice and grace many live in the mystery of suffering and joy of God without formally belonging to any church.
11. The cosmic Christ is no threat to anything but separateness, illusion, domination and imperial ego.
12. The contemplative mind is the only mind big enough to see this, and the only kind of seeing that is surrendered enough to trust it. “No problem can be solved by the same consciousness that caused it.” -Einstein-

Everything Belongs

(A ballad/song based on *Everything Belongs*)

Believe it or not, everything belongs,
Believe it or not, nothing's out of place.
Suffering gets my attention,
And Love expands my heart.

I want to see like God sees,
Trusting the flow of life,
So deep it even includes death.

How I see anything, Is how I see everything,
Suddenly I love even my enemy.
Grace leads me to emptiness,
Then fills the void with more Grace.

Lord help me learn to let go,
To be born again, and again, and again.
All is priceless if it's sacred,
All is sacred if the world is God's temple.

When I'm nothing before my God,
I'm ready to receive all from God.
I grow by subtraction, not addition,
by letting go, not by holding tight.

I am learning to trust God,
As I learn that God trusts me.
To sin is not a shame,
God even uses sin to transform me.

A world of original blessing, not sin,
A world of abundance, not scarcity.
My soul learns from both dark and light,
God loves all creation, rejecting none.

The work of the soul is attachment,
The work of the spirit is detachment,
The Third Way is a divine dance of both.

Life is nothing but a great school of love,
God is a Lover, closer to me than myself.
God's love is a river that's flowing,
And we're all in it, so fear not!