

# Percolating on Faith | Faith and Doubt | Pt2

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Faith and doubt, theology, inclusive language, agnostic vs atheist, spiritual crisis, spiritual journey, faith language, religious tradition, personal growth.

## SPEAKERS

Blake Smith, Charmaine Chvala-Smith, Tony Chvala-Smith

### Blake Smith 00:07

Hey, Faith Unfiltered Podcast listeners. This is your host, Blake Smith. We're going to pick up on part two of the Percolating on Faith interview between myself and my guests, Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith, where we're talking about faith and doubt. If you haven't listened to part one yet, you can find it at [faithunfilteredpodcast.org](http://faithunfilteredpodcast.org).

### Blake Smith 00:27

I often say it's both a blessing and a curse to have to be at a church that has such an open theology and a place for people to find their space in that community. But it is important. It's so, as I talk to more and more people who are on some of those spaces that we wouldn't normally associate with, the community of faith, and finding out how important and meaningful that is for them to be able to be there, it enforces how much of the blessing part that is for us.

### Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:03

Yeah,

### Tony Chvala-Smith 01:03

Yeah, right.

### Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:05

And I think so that we don't self-exclude, one of the things that that might be a good antidote is to instead of think of, instead of focusing only on what do I not believe in now, is to focus on, what do I believe in now? You know, maybe your journey, experience or learning, has meant that God is, the God you started with is too small, you know. So, maybe this sense that God, or you and in your story about world faiths, you know? [yeah] Sometimes this is about letting God be bigger than the definitions that we either started with or that our church or our culture may have about God. And so, you know, how do we affirm what we do believe? So, yeah, we may have given let go of some things about our ideas about God. So, God might not be so male as we might have thought when we first started believing, or as predictable or as angry or as judgy, but what we may have come to is this idea of view of God that's now more about mystery or about justice, or maybe God is a term, instead of using the God term, which may not, we may feel awkward with because we feel like we'll be misunderstood or that we're not being honest with ourselves if we use the word God. You know, there's other things that we might believe

about the sacred, about the holy, and we might use terms like goodness or connectedness - that which connects all of us and all of creation. So, you know, there's, there's ways of saying, What do I believe in, and how do I value that? How do I live into it, or give, and maybe give other people other options to begin to let God be something more.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 03:26

This can be a place too, where actually taking the risk to learn some things from past Christian tradition could be helpful. For example, medieval theologians, many of them, came to refer to, think of God as esse ipsum, being itself is the you know, not derived being like me, but ultimate being that grounds everything else. And they understood, they understood that the other terms they use for God, most of them understood that those were metaphors for this ultimate source of all being that they encountered in worship and Scripture and daily experience and so on. So, there are, there are other ways if the term God starts getting in the way, there are other ways to refer to the ultimate that are equally rich and meaningful and actually part of Christian tradition, which we just don't, we typically don't know very well, so...

**Blake Smith** 04:28

That's really helpful. I, just as you're talking, I'm thinking about another one of the struggles that I went through early on was the whole idea of inclusive language, and having been brought up in a part of the church where there was only one term for God and not understanding why that wasn't okay anymore. That also came, that, my change in thought, and that came again with relationships with people, but I'm thinking now as we're talking to folks who are either in crisis, spiritual crisis. I appreciate, Charmaine, that you even said, you know, we might not call it faith. For people on this journey, they may already be at a place where faith is not the, is not the word. But the idea, then, of having this opportunity to or permission giving again, to think of the Divine or the sacred, did something other than God, because God itself as a word has a lot of imagery with it that might be exclusive.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 05:31

There may be too much baggage. Yeah, yeah.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 05:34

And, and a side note, in American Christianity, the term God is often now seen as a mascot for the nation, and that hasn't that has nothing to do with the Bible, nothing to do with Christian tradition, nothing really to do with Community of Christ theology, but it's certainly in the culture that you know, in In God we trust. Well, which God, yeah, which God, right? And what do you mean by God? So yeah, that finding other terms might be helpful when, when a term gets to be laden with baggage.

**Blake Smith** 06:03

Yeah. Speaking of, speaking of terms, one of the things that would be helpful, I think maybe for the listeners. I know it was for me as I grew in my understanding, but the distinction between agnostic and atheist. I hear folks who are self-identifying because they no longer believe in this traditional idea of God, but are somewhere in maybe a spectrum of understanding. Can you delineate [sure] between those? Maybe that might be helpful.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 06:32

And so, now you're going to get a Greek lesson.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 06:34

Oh!

**Blake Smith** 06:35

He is multilingual.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 06:38

Greek lesson is free of charge today. So, so atheism from two Greek words, "a theus," *know God*, right? In other words, an atheist absolutely thinks there is no reality connected to the word theus, God. Agnostic, "a gnostos," *not to know*, different. There may be a God, I just don't know for sure. That's agnosticism. It's not making an unequivocal statement. There's no such reality as gods. It's more like, I'm just not sure. I don't think I know, and that would be an agnostic, yeah.

**Blake Smith** 07:17

That's helpful, because I hear people use, I mean, go immediately to atheist, and yet, as they talk and share about what's important to them, there is the presence of something other.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 07:29

Yes. [yeah] and, and it may already have another name. It may already be something like goodness or connectedness. And so, they may not be quite as atheist as they think, but maybe they want that title too, and maybe that is exactly where they are, and that's ...

**Blake Smith** 07:50

Right. And I don't mean in any way to diminish someone...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 07:51

Oh, not at all.

**Blake Smith** 07:54

who self identify that way, because that's important. But I just, I think the clarification...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 07:59

appreciate that. And because I think sometimes think people think that if they are questioning, then they must be agnostic or atheist, and so to have that distinction, I just think is... I'm really glad you brought that up. I think one other piece that is difficult for people who are in this process of, I'm going to say, growing in faith, stretching, shedding, shedding their skin and finding new layers in themselves, of spirituality, of connectedness, of hope, of yeah, of knowing, the power of love with a capital L, you know, all of those things that can be part of this journey is, is that you may find that you're have a bunch of feelings you're not sure what to do with. And one of them can be and this is often those who've had more are more intellectually inclined, and that's where the change is coming from, is from the new ideas they have. Sometimes it's from people who've had new kinds of experiences, but that we can end

up feeling judgmental or superior to the people around us who have, who we don't think have been on this part of the journey, and we might see our new information as making us wiser or smarter than the people around us. And so, sometimes we may want to tell other people what they should think or feel or experience, and without realizing that we are undermining their experience, that we are diminishing theirs. But we may be very afraid of our own being diminished, and that may be part of the sometimes aggressiveness that we feel in this part of our journey, is that we correct other people, or tell them that we shouldn't do that, or you shouldn't think this, and that's just something we have to be careful of when we're in this time of struggle and letting go and picking up new things, is to trust that other people's journeys are just as valuable as ours are.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 10:34**

You know, I hate snakes, but I love that image of shedding skin, that the spirit, the spiritual, the spiritual life, the spiritual journey, is about about shedding, shedding skin, again and again and again, so...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:48**

Well, and I, Tony, you had been talking about this, yeah, kind of this threefold pattern and kind of a psychological development.

**Blake Smith 10:56**

Don't do it. Don't do it. Just for the record, my grown adult children know that the day they say they don't believe in Santa Claus is the day they don't get any more gifts.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 10:56**

All right. Well,...

**Blake Smith 10:56**

It's amazing how strong their belief is.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 10:56**

So, and this may be a place where I'm going to pull up some pictures.\* So here we go. So basically, where I learned this was through reading a bit of a philosopher religion named Paul Ricoeur. And some people who are were influenced by Ricoeur. Ricoeur is a really dense read, and so sometimes it's easier to read the people who've read and understood Paul Ricoeur, but, and also, if you, if you Google, for example, Paul Ricoeur's "First naivete," AI will come up and actually give you a very accurate summary of Ricoeur's ideas about this. And so Ricoeur is a, was a French philosopher of religion, was a French Protestant, brilliant thinker, I think he taught at the University of Chicago for a while, and he came up with this in terms of trying to understand the development of how we relate to Scripture, but it has much, much wider implications for the faith journey. And so, he refers to our starting point is the first naivete, right? And it's, you know, it's what Charmaine learned as a kid about creation. And, you know, what Tony first learned when he joined the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and learned the, learned the slides and the "one true church," and Joseph Smith was a flawless individual, all that stuff, right? So it's, it's pre-critical innocence as a way to think of it, or childlike simplicity. You accept what you just have accepted, what was taught as the way reality is -- religious reality -- and you feel at home with it. You use faith, language in an un-selfconscious way.

There is an underlying fear of criticism of that, because it's you're, it's your, there's a tenderness about this, right? And [it's important] yeah, yeah. It's you know, especially if you've, if you, if this has happened to you as a young adult, like it did to me, you're, there's a fear of it being criticized, because it's now completely changed your life framework, and you don't want anything messing with that. And then your, your use of faith language, terminology, theology, theological terminology, and I'm going to use some Thomas Aquinas, is what's called univocal. The word means what it says. Baptism means baptism. Faith means faith. You know, it, there's no, there's no stretchiness with the language here. It's, it's, it's very, you know, as, as kids learn language, it's, this is what it is. And so, an analogy I can use with this is, and I don't want, I want to be careful here, Blake, I don't want to mess up your faith in Santa Claus. But...

**Tony Chvala-Smith 11:55**

Stay stay with, stay with Dr Ricoeur and me here for a little bit. So, you start off, and as a kid, Santa Claus is real. How could it not be real? Right? Right? So, now we're going on to the next thing, which is, I'm not sure what Ricoeur calls this, I just call it the critical moment, and it may be longer than a moment. So, new information, new experience, leads to questioning and loss, a sense of grief and loss. I no longer have the childlike simplicity. I no longer can believe what I used to believe about X, Y or Z or Zed if you're Canadian.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 14:33**

Or believe the person everything that the person says you know that told me about that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 14:38**

So, you have, you experience this critical distancing from ideas and or the community. Now the critical distancing actually, if you look up Ricoeur under AI, that will come up, but it's, it's, it's a great term, because you you all of a sudden feel estranged from home, right? You're no longer the, you may keep going to church, but you're not at home there anymore you feel distant and separated from...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:03**

Different, too different.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 15:04**

And now, instead of the unconscious, un-selfconscious use of faith language, you know, self-consciously, often reject or disdain faith language, right? This is, this becomes, this can become problematic here. The next place, you're, you're, you become critical of people in stage one. Those people, they're so naive. And we have, we haven't gotten stage three yet, but you confuse stage three with stage one. We'll get there a minute. And sometimes the danger here is being judgmental. And, and faith language here starts to become meaningless to you. It's just, it's just gibberish the church made up and so on, right? And so, now this is where you, you know as a who knows how old you are when you discover Santa Claus is really mom and dad. It's a stupid deception. Stay with me Blake, Blake, a minute, he's twitching there [laughter] So, now this this critical, this critical time or moment, one of the dangers here is that it gives you a sense of power, and it's very easy to just stay here for the rest of your life.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 16:25**

Power as in being superior, in judging people, is not being as ...

**Tony Chvala-Smith 16:30**

... enlightened or developed, Yeah.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 16:34**

And, and, but it's also all these other things that we've been talking about, this place where you're open to new ideas, you realize that letting go of some things doesn't kill you, [yeah] that it's okay to let go of some things and to pick up some new ideas. And it can be a very invigorating place. And so, that's another reason why sometimes people end up staying here.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 17:00**

Yeah, but you don't have to just stay here, [Right] So we're going on to what Ricoeur calls the second naivete, and this is post critical. It doesn't mean you stop being critical. It means that you've moved beyond the critical moment to a kind of what Paul Jones, the theologian, Paul Jones, referred to as re-symbolizing you. You've begun to realize, you know, there's, there's deep meaning in the stuff that I once believed. I don't believe it quite in the same way, but I wonder if there's new ways to express it, and that would be called re-symbolization. Questions are, questions, are no longer to be feared, and they're no longer now power tools you can use over other people. They are not, the questions become an integral, natural part of your faith journey. There's, there's new depth and comfort with ambiguity that is those, I can hold two things at the same time, right, two seemingly contradictory things at the same time,

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:02**

And you're okay with it.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 18:03**

I am okay with that.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:03**

You don't feel guilty about it.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 18:05**

Right. And a new kind of comfort with the community. You come to see the community as, as its own rich, nuanced place, where people are on a journey, and in the second naivete, you will start to feel at home again in church, but in a new way. You're not, you're not backing up to first naivete, but you start to feel at home again. These are my people. This is my place. This language I've come to understand. I can make sense of this language in some new ways. And that's the next thing. You can reclaim a more nuanced or transformed use of faith language, right? You you may have come to understand God is not a male dude in the sky, right? And so, but Father language as part of the whole lexicon of terms used for God has a certain kind of value and meaning, and I don't have to disparage it, but I also don't have to use it solely, right? And so now, instead of being afraid of critique, or you want, you want to, you want to criticize everybody. You're just, you're just open to fair critique of your position. That's, that can

be different from where the critical moment is, because the, the critical moment, as I said before, the critical moment will be hostile towards first naivete and towards second naivete, and will confuse them, so...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:28**

They can't tell, you can't tell the difference quite often when you're in the critical moment, whether someone's in the first or the or the second naivete. And, and so you may have disdain, equal disdain.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 19:39**

And whereas in the critical moment you start to think of faith, faith language as meaningless, now you come to understand that faith language is what Thomas Aquinas would call analogical. It's symbolic, metaphorical, not merely symbolic or merely metaphorical. No, no, no, no. If it's, if it's, if it's symbolical in an analogical way, it's D, it's pointing to depths. It's the only way for us to get to certain depths in a, in any kind of way at all. And so, you can come to understand, you can start using theological language again, because it's got a much bigger horizon of meaning for you. All right, now I'm, now for Santa Claus. So, now, maybe you do a little searching. You realize, Wait, there was a historical figure, Saint Nicholas of Mira. Mira was a, an area community in southeastern Turkey in the fourth century, and St Nicholas was the Bishop of Mira. And you discover that the stories around St Nicholas are that as a bishop, he tried to raise money and give money to poor families who had daughters with no dowries and no, and thus no future except prostitution or sex slave trade, basically. And so, st Saint Nicholas of Mira is, is remembered for having provided gifts of money to fams, to poor families so their daughters could be marriageable. Now, I know that's, that's fourth century marriage practices. Sorry, it's yeah. I hope that ain't going on anywhere right now.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 21:16**

It was life or death. Yeah, for for many young women,

**Blake Smith 21:19**

I hope my son in laws don't listen to this, they'll be expecting a dowry.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 21:22**

And so now you understand now when you see, when you see Santa Clauses in the mall, if you've got a mall left, if you see pictures of Santa Claus or some, or you watch Miracle on 34th Street, or whatever, that is like, that whole figure maybe has been co-opted a lot by capitalism, but it's actually pointing to a deep religious truth and an actual figure back there, who, who did some things that we ought to be doing today, that is caring, caring for those who have less.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 21:55**

And challenging the societal norms by making a way where the systems would not have made a way. And he was known for many other generous acts as well. But, so yeah, so, St Nicholas can now be a, a way of appreciating Santa Claus and letting Santa Claus stand for, you know, for, for your other siblings who do not know yet.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 22:27**

Do not take the little Santas off your Christmas trees. We're not telling you that. Now, you can look at those little Santas and say, Oh, that's like, that's like Eastern Orthodox language. That's like an icon that allows me to see through to the reality that was behind that, which was was deep Christian concern for the poor and Caritas charity in the sense of outgoing love for them, expressed tangibly, and that that then allows you to re-symbolize the Santa Claus story. And you don't, you don't have to, you don't have to dis Santa Claus anymore. You can understand that it's, it's a, you know, it's a, it's a whole new, a whole new way of understanding it, right? And so, that's kind of how second naivete works. And, and you don't get the second naivete by just like going on a retreat. This is the second naivete retreat. And by the end of this weekend, you'll all have second, second naivete. No, it kind of bad though. You have to hang in there with the community, and you have to when you're in the critical moment or critical time, critical decade, whatever it is for you decades, the one thing you have to practice there is a certain kind of waiting and humility and a recognition that you, that you, that it's possible to critique your critique. In other words. So, that's kind of one of the ways you get there. But in other words, this is, this is a way. Thank you, Paul Ricoeur, a way for us to think about moving, moving through the experience of faith and unbelief and doubt and growth and struggle and wrestling and, and then the challenge for us as a church is making the church a safe place for this to happen.

**Blake Smith** 24:06

So and thank you also for saving a little piece of Santa Claus for me. So I appreciate that.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 24:23

And because, because I did, I'm expecting a Christmas present, Blake.

**Blake Smith** 24:27

There you go. There you go, I owe you something. I don't know.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 24:32

Well and, and in a shorter version of this, something that for those who are on the journey and who may find themselves in the critical moment, or maybe in the second naivete, if you're still questioning yourself about am, am I faithless? You know, am I? Because even though the critical moment may make us feel superior, it also often makes us question, Where am I really? And, is it okay to be where I am? But one of the things that one can remind oneself of is, is to look back and to say, Huh, when I first started this journey, I sensed God's presence, but look at the things I believed then. And then you take another step, you know, you know, a decade later, and say, Oh no, I still was experiencing God in that moment, even though some of my ideas had already changed. And now my ideas have changed a whole lot, and I might even, disdain is such a good word, disdain what I, what I had when I began. But I still sense God's presence with me. I still believe that God is with me, or I see other people who are in this part of their journey as well. And I still have this sense that that something is with me, that there is a presence that is holding me and, and so, that that does two things. It helps us be centered in where we are and be okay with where we are, but it also helps us to not judge ourself or others who are in a different place, and kind of reminds us that God may not be as hard on us as we are on ourselves, and that whatever we perceive the holy or sacredness or the power of love to be, that it may be bigger than our faith, our faithlessness, our doubts, our questions, or those core things that we've taken along, that we do believe.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 26:47**

And Charmaine has helped me experience a second naivete about snakes today too. Oh, that's, that's what those creatures are for. Oh, I love that. Love that image.

**Blake Smith 27:01**

So, I want to ask a question about those folks who are most likely part of our listening audience that struggle living in the questions, but need something a little more concrete. Some, some answers. What might we say to them?

**Tony Chvala-Smith 27:18**

A place I would start is that we're, as community we're not, we're not answer-less, right, right? In other words, we, we have an understanding and an experience of God as love itself, calling, beckoning, embracing, transforming, healing. That's part of an answer. We have the story and stories and symbol of Jesus as the the kind of our window into what divine reality is like. That's that's an answer. We have our own experiences. Our experiences, will say, of the Holy Spirit, whether it camp or reunion or I was a counselor at Senior High camper. I was a camper once upon time, and this happened, and it was so real to me. Yeah, it really was real, in other words. And so then in terms of church stuff, we've got, like, enduring principles and Sacraments and so on. So there, there, there are various answers available. And I think the most important one is that we believe in a God who, in a Doctrine and Covenants section, says, recently, God, God delights in each faithful step, in each in each trusting step you take. And so we, we have, we have places to stand. We're not, we're not just sinking in a marsh here. We have places to stand.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 28:45**

Yeah, and I, and I think that if we look at the bigger picture of our church and its spiritual journey, we see that it has been willing to ask the questions. You know, we often think talk about the 60s and 70s in the church as being this time when we entertain looking at our history in a different way. We, we start interacting with other Christian churches and saying, wait a minute. You know, there's much to learn here and much to share. So, our journey as a church has also been willingness to entertain the questions or the doubts and trust the God who called us in the first place, who met us in the first place. So, that might be another way to just have some comfort with the fact that we can't help but question. We can't help but doubt. We can't help but have to let go of some things and pick up some other things. But at the same time, there are these constants. You know, the idea that the nature of God's self is to be self-revealing, to invite in all within with, in hearing all within embracing that, that you know the sacraments are signs of God's presence, and wanting to be present with us in all parts of our lives. That the community is to stay close to the community as close as you can. To be reminded that there's this other way of being in the world that's related, and that people all along have carried that unease about this growing, this growing that's happening. I don't think we've used that word yet, but, but you know, the questioning brings growth, and growth means, you know, if it's kids, it means new, new shoes, you know, longer pants. You know, we, we have to end up changing when we're growing because the old things don't fit anymore. And so, you know, we've done that as a church. But then there's all these, these and those Enduring Principles are wonderful because, you know, we sometimes say they're kind of like God's thumbprint on us. And these are, you know, and so they're not rules, you

know. These are just [They're principles]. They're principles. We've moved from a rule-based to a principle-based church, and that means the principles help us, help guide us in in how we interact with the world, with each other, and ways we can understand God. So those are some of those anchoring points that can be helpful when, when the questions seem too big, or the changes seem too severe or threatening or frightening, I think, I think it's a good balance.

**Blake Smith** 31:49

Well, with you guys as teachers, as professors, I am sure, quite sure, that you would have some recommendations, maybe of some resources that people might look to and consider as they journey.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 32:06

Yeah, so here's a book I think we would recommend on the God question. It's a book titled, What is God? Not who, but what? What is God? And it's written by a philosophical theologian named John Haught -- H, A, U, G, H, T. And John Haught has written quite a number of fabulous books. One of his areas is religion and science, and God and evolution. He wrote a book a few years ago called, God and the New Atheism, in which he actually kind of takes on some of the new atheistic critiques that have come out of some scientific circles in England and other other places and and pushes back on them gently and thoughtfully. But the book What is God? gives you all kinds of new ways to think about the idea of God that move away from the personal dude in the sky image to such things as futurity, future, futureness, [beauty] beauty and so on. There was there. There are concepts we can use to get at what is meant by God that provide a whole new way to to to, you know, imagine what we mean by God, so...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 33:24

I would say on probably the other extreme, Haught is wonderful, but I would say it's good to study as a small group or group, and take it a little at a time, because there's so much there and and so digest it together with a group. It's, it's, it's, we've done it a few times with groups. The other would be books like Kate Bowler, B, O, W, L, E, R, the book entitled, Everything Happens for a Reason, and Other Lies I've Loved.

**Blake Smith** 34:06

Oh, you had me there for a second.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 34:10

And, and, but it's her own life story. And so people who are questioning, or people who don't understand this concept at all, and want to understand what people go through in this process. That would be a very good book. You know, she was a, you know, a good Christian girl and doing all the right things. She was even about to enter cemet, seminary, and she maybe she was in her first year.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 34:35

She said PhD. She was just starting to teach at Yale. Oh, yeah, Yale, Divinity School. Divinity School. She's just teaching.

**Blake Smith** 34:42

I have to say that I'm probably not the only one that heard that little slip. I think you said cemetery, not first, and then switch to seminary. And I've heard that relate. I've heard that happen a lot of times by other people, so...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 34:58

That's funny. Yeah, I. Thinking, Oh, gonna restart that word.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 35:02

I know, I could salvage this. It's like Kay Bowler, all of a sudden, is diagnosed. with like stage three or four cancer.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 35:07

Colon cast cancer, I think. And anyhow, so, so she's going through this whole process of questioning all of the different things. And she had been doing studies with the prosperity gospel churches. That's what her doctoral dissertation was on. You're right, she had finished her doctoral doc, and so, so she's going through all the questioning and having to say, Wait, you know, this whole thing about everything happens for a reason. You know, I just had a child, and the prognosis is not good, and my husband's going to have to raise this child is, is that God's will, you know? And so she's, she goes through questioning a whole bunch of things, and you can kind of see her, her journey through all of this. So, it's, it's an excellent book to get a a snapshot of what someone, why that process is necessary for many people.

**Tony Chvala-Smith** 36:08

And then I think there's a classic book on the meaning of faith, and that's Paul Tillich's book, The Dynamics of Faith. It's a little thin paperback. You have to give yourself some time to read it. But it's, it's really brilliant. It's, he articulates idea of faith as a state of being ultimately concerned. And so, and so, so, in other words, he gets to that, that what is the underlying actuality of the thing we call faith? And it's not, it's not first and foremost faith in stuff. It's, it's a disposition towards the ultimate. [Okay] And it, it can, it can help us get away from simplistic understandings of faith is, I gotta believe X, Y and Z, or I'm not saved, and stuff like that. And so it's, it's a really nice and thoughtful book by a theologian who was very instrumental in the 1970s and 80s in, in terms of [influencing] influencing Community of Christ leaders. So, so there's another book called, I Have My Doubts. I forget which theologians it's by, I want to say Hendrikus Berkhof, a Dutch theologian. I think maybe that's it. But theologian who titles a book, I Have My Doubts, so interesting, might be an interesting text to look at. So, so those are some things we can recommend for great

**Blake Smith** 37:38

And we'll put a list of those in the show notes, so folks can look them up and verify the authors. I also want to note that Charmaine, you mentioned the preaching charts early on in our talk today. And so, if you're listening to this and you have no idea what the preaching charts are, Episode 437 of Percolating on Faith, and we don't have 437 episodes of Percolating on Faith. It's 437th episode in the Faith Unfiltered Podcast series, and it is a Percolating on Faith episode, but it's on the preaching charts. Very fascinating work, very fascinating. And I only recently found out there was more than one. So I mean, I had only seen one in several different venues, and then I saw the work on this and the number of

preaching charts. It's fascinating the evolution of that, so. Well, I, let, let me ask, before I close but, is there anything else that our folks who are in this path or journey, whether they've just entered a time of faith crisis, or they've self-identified already as agnostic or atheist that you would want them to hear today?

**Tony Chvala-Smith 38:55**

Sure. You are seen and you are known in all the good ways.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:01**

And more, and you are accepted, yeah, and and you are part of us. You know, this is part of the journey that we're all on. And so you are representations of, of what we all are processing, what we all are seeking, what we're all looking for. It's, you know, it's good. It's, it's good to be with each other on this journey.

**Blake Smith 39:31**

Yeah, I absolutely agree. I know that some of my conversations this summer with folks along that spectrum, along that path and journey, the questions that they asked and the perspectives that they shared helped me with some of my own questions, or create new questions that I'm sure to dig into so...

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:51**

And, how wonderful that they were, they had the courage or the confidence to share that. And, and they knew you would be a good E. Here, you know, I think that's a really cool thing.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 40:03**

Yeah,

**Blake Smith 40:03**

Well, for our listeners here that aren't in that space, but are living in community where there are others, I hope that you are hearing to give permission for that, and to open yourself to the experience of richness that comes from being in those conversations. And for our listeners who are here because you are in that crisis place, and I hope this has been as helpful for you even as it has been for me, and that you hear those words, that you are loved and you are accepted and there's a place, and you're valued, and we're just so glad you're with us. Those are important words, Tony and Charmaine, as always, you guys are amazing. I love just hanging out with you, and especially when we accomplish something like this. So, from our times at Graceland in our, our group meetings that we had, supporting one another, to being at conferences and being at reunions, and then being together here, it's just fantastic. So thank you so much.

**Tony Chvala-Smith 41:04**

We always, we always enjoy time with you, and even though we're not anywhere near that season, let me just say Merry Christmas to you, Blake.

**Blake Smith 41:10**

Watch, watch your mail. Watch your mail, Tony.

**Charmaine Chvala-Smith** 41:17

And we hope you've been good.

**Blake Smith** 41:20

I've checked all the boxes I'm sure to be blessed. You guys, take care. Thank you to our listeners for being with us today. We just are always so glad that you're with us, that you choose to spend part of your day with us, and we hope that the rest of your day will be all that you need it to be blessings and take care.