# *Chapter One*
# *Introduction: The Age of Us*

*"This book is for people who want to take up the great questions of our time with imagination and courage, to nurture new realities in the spaces we inhabit, and to do so expectantly and with joy." —Krista Tippett*

OPENING QUESTION

"Listening is about being present, not just about being quiet. I meet others with the life I've lived, not just with my questions." Krista Tippett begins nearly every interview by asking her guest about the spiritual or religious background of their childhood—and in this introductory chapter of her book, she begins to share some of her own story.

*Take a few minutes and have each person answer the question What was the religious or spiritual background of your childhood? Listen for the questions that reside in your own story of this part of your life, questions you might have followed your whole life long.*

DISCUSSION STARTERS

"We watch our technologies becoming more intelligent, and speculate imaginatively about their potential to become conscious. All the while, we have it in us to become wise. Wisdom leavens intelligence, and ennobles consciousness, and advances evolution itself."

*How would you describe the qualities of the wisest people you've known? What makes them wise as opposed to merely intelligent or accomplished? What was the imprint they made on the world around them?*

According to Tippett, the great questions of religion and philosophy are being reframed in this century of vast open questions and technology that binds: What does it mean to be human? What matters in a life? What matters in a death? How to love? How to be of service to one another and the world?

*Reflect on the way your understanding of some of these elemental aspects of human experience has shifted with new technological and spiritual tools at hand.*

Mystery will be a theme in these chapters. Tippett calls mystery "a common human experience, like being born and falling in love and dying."

*Are you comfortable with the concept of mystery? Tippett and her conversation partners describe mystery as an adventure—and as a companion to truths deeply held. Does this ring true in your experience?*

Einstein once said that the qualities of "spiritual genius" (exemplified by figures such as Gandhi, Moses, Jesus, Buddha, and St. Francis of Assisi) were more necessary to the future of human dignity, security, and joy than objective knowledge. Of her life of conversation, Tippett says, "Spiritual geniuses of the everyday are everywhere. They are in the margins and do not have publicists. They are below the radar, which is broken."

*Is there someone in your world who exemplifies this observation?*

Tippett says, "We are in the adolescence of our species, not by any measure in full possession of our powers." She goes on to compare our twenty-first-century citizenry with the teenage brain: dramatically uneven; immensely powerful and creative at times and in places, reckless and destructive in others.

*What effect might this kind of "long view of time" have on your approach to this moment in time we inhabit?*

Giving examples such as battles with illness, childhood pain, disability, and even birth itself, Tippett marvels, "We are made by what would break us. . . . What has gone wrong becomes an opening to more of

yourself and part of your gift to the world. This is the beginning of wisdom."
*Does this idea ring true for you? Can you share a personal example, whether dramatic or ordinary, when the thing that went wrong carried with it a hidden gift? Can you translate this to the public sphere in terms of common life as well as individual life?*

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Change has always happened in the margins, across human history, and it's happening there now. Seismic shifts in common life, as in geophysical reality, begin in spaces and cracks."

"The interesting and challenging thing about this moment is that we know the old forms aren't working. But we can't yet see what the new forms will be."

"The question of what it means to be human is now inextricable from the question of who we are to each other."

"Our spiritual lives are where we reckon head-on with the mystery of ourselves, and the mystery of each other."

"The human condition, in all its mess and glory, remains the ground on which all of our ambitions flourish or crash."

"History always repeats itself until we honestly and searchingly know ourselves."

"My work has shown me that spiritual geniuses of the everyday are everywhere. They are in the margins and do not have publicists. They are below the radar, which is broken."

"The digital world, though a new Wild West in many ways, is on some basic level simply another screen on which we project the excesses and possibilities of life in flesh and blood."

"We create transformative, resilient new realities by becoming transformed, resilient people."

"Listening is about being present, not just about being quiet. I meet others with the life I've lived, not just with my questions."

"Great leaps, however exhilarating, are hard on mortal creatures."

"There are places in human experience that politics cannot analyze or address, and they hold more possibility for change than we can begin to imagine."

"Our spiritual traditions have carried virtues across time. They are not the stuff of saints and heroes, but tools for the art of living. They are pieces of intelligence about human behavior that neuroscience is now exploring with new words and images: what we practice, we become."

"We have outlived our faith in facts to tell us the whole story or even to tell us the truth about the world and ourselves."

"The world right now needs the most vivid, transformative universe of words that you and I can muster. And we can begin immediately to start having the conversations we want to be hearing, and telling the story of our time anew."

"I've come to believe that our capacity to reach beyond ourselves—experiencing mystery or being present to others—is dependent on how fully we are planted in our bodies in all their flaws and their grace."

"I hear the word *love* surfacing as a longing for our public life everywhere I turn."

"I believe that mystery is a common human experience, like being born and falling in love and dying."

"I define hope as distinct from optimism or idealism. It has nothing to do with wishing. It references reality at every turn and reveres truth. . . . Hope, like every virtue, is a choice that becomes a habit that becomes spiritual muscle memory. It's a renewable resource for moving through life as it is, not as we wish it to be."

"A long view of time can replenish our sense of ourselves and the world. We are in the adolescence of our species, not by any measure in full possession of our powers."

"I have yet to meet a wise person who doesn't know how to find some joy even in the midst of what is hard, and to smile and laugh easily, including at oneself. . . . [Humor] is one of those virtues that soften us for all the others."

"I'm not surprised by the fact that inexplicable and terrible things happen in a cosmos as complicated as ours, with sentient beings like us running the show. But I am emboldened by the fact that surprise is the only constant."

"I am emboldened by the puzzling, redemptive truth to which each and every one of my conversations has added nuance, that we are made by what would break us."

"What has gone wrong becomes an opening to more of yourself and part of your gift to the world. This is the beginning of wisdom."

# *Chapter Two*
# *Words: The Poetry of Creatures*

*"The point of learning to speak together differently is learning to live together differently." —Krista Tippett*

OPENING QUESTION

Words matter. For as Tippett says, "The words we use shape how we understand ourselves, how we interpret the world, how we treat others."

*What was your upbringing in relation to words? Were they largely utilitarian, used simply to transmit information? Were they wielded as weapons? Engaged playfully or poetically? Presented recklessly or carefully?*

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Tippett says we can be led astray, and have become unconvinced, by "mere fact." In conversation with her, the poet Elizabeth Alexander emphasizes our longing for "words that shimmer"—language with power and precision that get at "undergirding truths."

*Where do you experience words used in this way? Where do you look for contrasts to "mere fact"?*

"I can disagree with your opinion, it turns out, but I can't disagree with your experience. And once I have a sense of your experience, you and I are in relationship, acknowledging the complexity in each other's position, listening less guardedly."

*Have you ever participated in such an exchange of experience and story with someone of a different perspective? How did that change what was possible between you?*

"Listening is more than being quiet while the other person speaks until you can say what you have to say. I like the language Rachel Naomi Remen uses with young doctors to describe what they should practice: 'generous listening.' Generous listening is powered by curiosity, a virtue we can invite and nurture in ourselves to render it instinctive. It involves a kind of vulnerability—a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. The listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other, and patiently summons one's own best self and one's own best words and questions."

*Tippett notes that many of the ways we are taught to argue, debate, and advocate actually work against these qualities of the "basic social art" of listening, which we also need in our social toolkit. Does this make sense as you reflect on the ways you are equipped to enter public conversation? How challenging is the thought of truly being willing to be surprised by people on very different places on the political/cultural spectrum? What kind of inner preparation would that require?*

"I've learned this: a question is a powerful thing, a mighty use of words. Questions elicit answers in their likeness. . . . It's hard to transcend a combative question. But it's hard to resist a generous question."

*Tippett proposes that we shy away from taking up hard discussions with different others, in part because we live in a culture that frames issues in terms of the most strident, extreme people and positions. Imagine a gathering, in the words of Tippett's guest Frances Kissling, of people on both sides "who absolutely refuse to see each other as evil." Imagine the questions you impulsively want to ask "the other side," and the ways you might reframe your questions more generously, to invite honesty, dignity, and revelation.*

KEY QUOTATIONS

"From Genesis to the aboriginal songlines of Australia, human beings have forever perceived that naming brings the essence of things into being."

"Tolerance doesn't welcome. It allows, endures, indulges. . . . Tolerance was a baby step to make pluralism possible, and pluralism, like every ism, holds an illusion of control. It doesn't ask us to care for the stranger. It doesn't even invite us to know each other, to be curious, to be open to be moved or surprised by each other."

"Words are crafted by human beings, wielded by human beings. They take on all of our flaws and frailties. They diminish or embolden the truths they arose to carry. We drop and break them sometimes. We renew them, again and again."

"We are starved, and ready, for fresh language to approach each other."

"Profound truth, like the vocabulary of virtue, eludes formulation. It quickly becomes rigid, gives way to abstraction or cliché. But put a spiritual insight to a story, an experience, a face; describe where it anchors in the ground of your being; and it will change you in the telling and others in the listening."

"I can disagree with your opinion, it turns out, but I can't disagree with your experience. And once I have a sense of your experience, you and I are in relationship, acknowledging the complexity in each other's position, listening less guardedly. The difference in our opinions will probably remain intact, but it no longer defines what is possible between us."

"To me, every great story opens into an equally galvanizing exchange we can have together: So what? How does this change the way you see and live? How might it inform the way I see and live? I believe we can push ourselves further, and use words more powerfully and tell and make the story of our time anew."

"The thing about the raw materials of the life of the spirit is that they are always changing. What you see in the past is dependent on what you are able to see now."

"The art of starting new kinds of conversations, of creating new departure points and new outcomes in our common grappling, is not rocket science. But it does require that we nuance or retire some habits so ingrained that they feel like the only way it can be done."

"Listening is an everyday social art, but it's an art we have neglected and must learn anew."

"Generous listening is powered by curiosity, a virtue we can invite and nurture in ourselves to render it instinctive. It involves a kind of vulnerability—a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. The listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other, and patiently summons one's own best self and one's own best words and questions."

"My only measure of the strength of a question now is in the honesty and eloquence it elicits."

"If I've learned nothing else, I've learned this: a question is a powerful thing, a mighty use of words. Questions elicit answers in their likeness. Answers mirror the questions they rise, or fall, to meet. So while a simple question can be precisely what's needed to drive to the heart of the matter, it's hard to meet a *simplistic* question with anything but a simplistic answer. It's hard to transcend a combative question. But it's hard to resist a generous question. We all have it in us to formulate questions that invite honesty, dignity, and revelation. There is something redemptive and life-giving about asking a better question."

"Here's another quality of generous questions, questions as social art and civic tools: they may not want answers, or not immediately. They might be raised in order to be pondered, dwelt on, instead. The intimate and civilizational questions we are living with in our time are not going to be answered with an-

swers we can all make peace with any time soon. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who became my friend across time and space all those years ago in Berlin, spoke of holding questions, living questions."

"There is value in learning to speak together honestly and relate to each other with dignity, without rushing to common ground that would leave all the hard questions hanging."

"The crack in the middle where people on both sides absolutely refuse to see each other as evil—this is where I want to live and what I want to widen."

"It is language that reframes behavior—taking a sense of necessary actions out of the realm of guilt and into good."

"The point of learning to speak together differently is learning to live together differently. It's a dance of words with arts of living."

# *Chapter Three*
# *Flesh: The Body's Grace*

*"Physical, emotional, and spiritual are more entangled than we guessed, more interactive in every direction, and this knowledge is a form of power." —Krista Tippett*

OPENING QUESTION

Medicine became an art of treating our parts, not our whole. Religion divided us inside with high mystical notions that we are souls trapped in bodies, and theologies that made flesh and sin indistinguishable. Strangely, interestingly, the Enlightenment fed into this too. . . . "I think, therefore I am" became a simplification of what makes us human and a demotion of our spiritual and physical selves in that picture.
*What messages did you receive in your early life about body, mind, and spirit?*

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Tippett quotes the yoga teacher Matthew Sanford, who says he has never known someone become more at home in their own body, in all its flaws and its grace, without becoming more compassionate towards all of life.
*Is there a physical activity that plants you in your body and changes the way you move through the world?*

"Our bodies tell us the truth of life that our minds can deny: that we are in any moment as much about softness as fortitude. Always in need of care and tenderness. Life is fluid, evanescent, evolving in every cell, in every breath. Never perfect. To be alive is by definition messy, always leaning towards disorder and surprise. How we open or close to the reality that we never arrive at safe enduring stasis is the matter, the raw material, of wisdom."
*Reflect on an experience that has opened you to the wisdom of your body and made you more broken and more whole at once.*

Tippett makes the argument that our bodies carry wisdom, and that "we can insist on delight as a virtue."
*Are there areas of life where this rings true for you? Have you experienced delight to become an opening to virtue?*

Tippett calls beauty a virtue that clarifies the interplay between what is sensory and spiritual. She takes John O'Donohue's definition of beauty as "that in the presence of which we feel more alive."
*What are the sources of beauty in your life? And to echo a question Jacqueline Novogratz asks in every community she visits, what are you doing when you feel most beautiful?*

KEY QUOTATIONS

"We are matter, kindred with ocean and tree and sky. We are flesh and blood and bone. To sink into that is a relief, a homecoming."

"Our bodies are longing and joy and fear and a lifelong desire to be safe and loved, incarnate."

"I taste, touch, smell, see, and hear, and my mind entwines with my senses and experiences. I live and move and have my being, as the Book of Common Prayer more lyrically describes it. Therein, I become."

"Philosophers and physicians didn't mean to divide us up. It's what we do instinctively with great truths—we take them to extremes."

"Rituals are sophisticated ancient intelligence about the body. Kneeling, folding hands in prayer, and breaking bread; liturgies of grieving, gathering, and celebration—such actions create visceral containers of time and posture. They are like physical corollaries to poetry—condensed, economical gestures that carry inordinate meaning and import. Rituals tether emotion in flesh and blood and bone and help release it. They embody memory in communal time."

"[Jon Kabat-Zinn] says that scientists make the best meditators because they are most comfortable with knowing what they don't know."

"These days I suspect that, in everything, how we inhabit our senses tests the mettle of our souls."

"We can trust the wisdom our bodies offer, again and again, and in the most ordinary circumstances. Convenience is an illusion, merely shifting the burden of process and consequences. Labor is real. But so is pleasure real and enduring. In old/new ways, we can factor in pleasure with a heightened awareness. We can insist on delight as a virtue."

"Dan Barber says that when it comes to food, the ethical thing is almost always also the pleasurable thing."

"We need our bodies to claim our souls. The body is where every virtue lives or dies, but more: our bodies are access points to mystery."

"Our bodies tell us the truth of life that our minds can deny: that we are in any moment as much about softness as fortitude."

"To be alive is by definition messy, always leaning towards disorder and surprise. How we open or close to the reality that we never arrive at safe enduring stasis is the matter, the raw material, of wisdom."

"The core of life is about losses and deaths both subtle and catastrophic, over and over again, and also about loving and rising again."

"Grief and gladness, sickness and health, are not separate passages. They're entwined and grow from and through each other, planting us, if we'll let them, more profoundly in our bodies in all their flaws and their grace."

"Might beauty be a bridge we can walk across occasionally to each other, a bridge that might help humble and save us?"

"There is light in darkness, strength in weakness, and beauty in the brokenness of human existence."

"Loving reality in all its imperfection is the necessary prelude to discovering God present and alive."

"People ask me about the common denominators of the wisest people I've encountered. Alongside all the virtues that accompany and anchor wisdom, there is a characteristic physical presence that Jean Vanier epitomizes with others I've met like Desmond Tutu, Wangari Maathai, Thích Nhất Hạnh. Here's what it feels like, what I can report: an embodied capacity to hold power and tenderness in a surprising, creative interplay."

# *Chapter Four*
# *Love: A Few Things I've Learned*

*"All I know is that, at every turn, I hear the word* love *surfacing as a longing for common life, quietly but persistently and in unexpected places." —Krista Tippett*

OPENING QUESTION

"What is love? Answer the question through the story of your life." With this as a springboard, Tippett reflects on her past, tracing her understanding of love from a childhood in church to her parents' relationship to her own marriage, motherhood, and singleness. For her, as for many, the mantra of love equaling a happy home, two loving parents, and a perfect marriage eventually broke down.
*Thinking back on your early life, what were you taught and shown love to be?*

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Many would say that love is our highest calling and greatest task, but as Tippett says, love is also "something we only master in moments."
*What would it look like to treat the moments of each day—often small and seemingly inconsequential—as worthy of a calling as paramount as love?*

Consider our current collective challenges—politics, race, education, immigration, refugees, poverty, health care—and ponder this question Tippett asks:
*"What if love, as Elizabeth Alexander asked on the Washington Mall on inauguration day in 2009, is the mightiest word? How would this word, tossed into our questioning, reframe and challenge it?"*

Through a life of peace and nonviolence, civil rights leader John Lewis has exemplified love as a way of being, not a feeling. Even in his enemies, Lewis has chosen to recognize "a spark of the divine."
*Do you have faith in the common humanity of your enemies?*

Of course, Tippett says, "'Love' is not always or often the first response to violence and violation, one human being to another, nor can we expect it to be. Anger is also a moral response."
*With love as a lens, how might one engage with anger in a generative way? Have you had or seen an experience of this?*

In a world of overwhelming bad news and rife injustice, there can be two temptations: 1) fix everything, or 2) do nothing.
*Do you identify with one of these tendencies more than the other? What do you think of Sister Simone Campbell's prompt to "Just do one thing"? How would it change you and your actions if you saw that intention as* agape*—practical love that might be shown to a neighbor, a stranger, or an enemy?*

Moments of great crisis—September 11 and Hurricane Katrina, for example—call forth practical love of kindness, hospitality, and care among strangers. Consider this question that flows out of Tippett's reflection on the ethos of Dorothy Day:
*Why can't we live this way all the time? What would it look like to try?*

KEY QUOTATIONS

"I want to aspire to a carnal practical love—*eros* become civic, not sexual and yet passionate, full-bodied. Because it is the best of which we are capable, loving is also supremely exacting, not always but again and

again. Love is something we only master in moments."

"Love is the superstar virtue of virtues, and the most watered-down word in the English language."

"We've made [love] private, contained it in family, when its audacity is in its potential to cross tribal lines. We've fetishized it as romance, when its true measure is a quality of sustained, practical care. We've lived it as a feeling, when it is a way of being. It is the elemental experience we all desire and seek, most of our days, to give and receive."

"The intention to walk through the world practicing love across relationships and encounters feels like a great frontier."

"I have more questions than answers. But good questions, generously posed, seriously held, are powerful things."

"All I know is that, at every turn, I hear the word *love* surfacing as a longing for common life, quietly but persistently and in unexpected places."

"We know in our hearts and minds that we are bigger and wilder and more precious than numbers, more complex than any economic outcome or political prescription can describe."

"What if *love*, as Elizabeth Alexander asked on the Washington Mall on inauguration day in 2009, is the mightiest word? How would this word, openly injected into our grappling, reframe and challenge it, informing all the other necessary computations and strategies?"

"The exacting, enlivening aspiration of love does send us inside to know and honor the particularities of our identities and our struggles. But it coaxes us out again to an encounter with the vastness of human identity."

"To insist on faith in the common humanity even of our enemies and live accordingly; to begin with the assumption that love is there and it is up to us to make it real. Could we imagine that now?"

"Love, muscular and resilient, does not always seem reasonable, much less doable, in our most damaged and charged civic spaces. But it seems to me worth insisting that those spaces where the worst has happened do not utterly define us as individuals or a people."

"Race, john powell says, is like gravity, experienced by all, understood by few. But it's never been a quality some possess and others don't—it's as much about 'whiteness' as about color. It's relational."

"Sorrow is a near enemy to compassion and to love. It is borne of sensitivity and feels like empathy. But it can paralyze and turn us back inside with a sense that we can't possibly make a difference."

"Compassion goes about finding the work that can be done. Love can't help but stay present."

"I feel more and more of us willingly seeing, choosing to care about the heart of the matter, holding the question of love, if you will, across all kinds of ingrained ideological, political, economic difference. Opinion polls, our way of taking the civic temperature, are telling this truth too in undeniable numbers: income inequality is a concern that crosses partisan boundaries. Counterintuitive impulses to care are forming left to right, religious to secular, across class and income boundaries, as though many of us are recalling that we do in fact belong to each other and are ready to make that real."

"'Deep listening' is a virtue that anchors every kind of love relationship and it is the compass Sister Simone cites again and again as a creative, openhearted anchor to her life of strong passions and advocacy. She offers these lines of self-appraisal on whether one is being true to deep listening in any situation: 'Am I responding in generosity? Am I responding in selfishness? Am I responding in a way that builds up people around me, that builds me up, that is respectful of who I am?' Such questions are tools to start walking willingly towards the more exacting question of what would it mean, day to day, year to year, to become the beloved community. And how, concretely, to begin."

"Love is hard to talk about in public, but intriguingly, when a person of integrity—like the patrolman Leroy Smith, like a Dorothy Day—speaks plain truths they live by, it adds up. We recognize what they are describing."

"Change begins to happen in the human heart slowly, over time. Only then do the movements and leaders come along and topple the structures."

"Love doesn't always work as we want it to, or look like something intimate and beautiful. There are times and places in human existence when love means life on the line, but most of us need not live that way most of the time. . . . Sometimes love, in public as in private, means stepping back."

"*Hospitality* is a word that shimmers, softly. It offers itself as an accessible entry point to love in action."

# *Chapter Five*
# *Faith: The Evolution*

*"In life, in religion, in science, this I believe: any conviction worth its salt has chosen to cohabit with a piece of mystery, and that mystery is at the essence of the vitality and growth of the thing." —Krista Tippett*

OPENING QUESTION

"Faith is evolutionary, in every culture, and in any life."
*How has your faith (or some particular concept of faith) evolved through the experiences of your life? Are there words you use, or tenets of belief, that have remained meaningful across time and yet have become filled with new and different understandings and connotations?*

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Tippett shares that the fear of the religion of her childhood was about "measuring up—about moral perfection, and the eternal cost of falling short." In contrast, she goes on to say that at this point in her life, "faith is in interplay with moral imagination, something distinct from moral perfection."
*Does this distinction make sense to you, and how? In what ways can moral imagination (as opposed to moral perfection) be nurtured?*

For many, the move from childhood into adulthood is synonymous with a shift from mystery to certainty. However, Robert Coles pinpoints the childhood quality of a "questioning spirit" as being an important trait in those who are thought of as the great figures of religion.
*Have you experienced Robert Coles's sense that mystery can be a great companion? What makes it challenging? What makes it comforting?*

Consider the "Nones," those who respond "none" when asked about their religious affiliation by pollsters. Tippett says this nonreligious space is far from being absent of spirituality; that many Nones are theologically searching, spiritually curious, and service oriented.
*Explore the phrase "spiritual but not religious." What does it mean in the world you see around you? How is this development interesting/relevant/uncomfortable for you? What challenges/opportunities does it create for your religious/spiritual identity and understanding?*

Many scientists are not religious in a traditional sense—and yet Tippett finds that they often have a more robust vocabulary of wonder and mystery than many religious and are contributing to our understanding of enduring questions of meaning—where we come from, what it means to be human, how free we are to create our lives, how we understand our place in the cosmos. She quotes a geneticist who describes a spirituality of the scientist that is akin to the spirituality of a mystic.
*Are you aware of, perhaps in a new way, science as a core human endeavor, and as something that is resonant with spiritual questions?*

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks sums up the Jewish imperative saying, "To be true to your faith is a blessing to others regardless of their faith."
*Have you had, or seen, an experience of this?*

KEY QUOTATIONS

"If God is God—and that in itself is a crazy shorthand, begging volumes of unfolding of the question—he/she does not need us craven. He/she desires us, needs us, grateful and attentive and courageous in the everyday."

"To invoke some of my favorite classic approaches to a definition, if God is the 'mind behind the universe,' God honors our minds. If God is the 'ground of being,' God blesses our wholeness."

"Faith is evolutionary, in every culture, and in any life."

"Wisdom, of the everyday sort, is about how we reckon with the surprises and mysteries that make life life as opposed to stasis. Mystery lands in us as a humbling fullness of reality we cannot sum up or pin down. Such moments change us from the inside, if we let them."

"Wondering is a useful way to begin to speak of a shared vocabulary of mystery we might embrace across our disciplines, our contrasting certainties, and our doubts."

"Once upon a time I took in mystery as a sensation best left unexamined. Now I experience it as a welcome."

"Spiritual life is a way of dwelling with perplexity—taking it seriously, searching for its purpose as well as its perils, its beauty as well as its ravages."

"Spiritual life is a reasonable, reality-based pursuit. It can have mystical entry points and destinations, to be sure. But it is in the end about befriending reality, the common human experience of mystery included. It acknowledges the full drama of the human condition. It attends to beauty and pleasure; it attends to grief and pain and the enigma of our capacity to resist the very things we long for and need."

"At this point in my life, I find 'sin' a useful inheritance from my religious mother tongue, not merely a condemnation of this act or that act, this transgression or that wrong, but a piece of psychological clarity."

"So much of what we orient towards in culture numbs a little going in and helps us avoid the reckoning we actually long for—the push to self-knowledge and deeper lived integrity."

"Maybe this is another way to think about original sin—the ingrained lure of the possibility of going numb, a habit of acquiescence to it."

"The phrase 'spiritual but not religious,' now common social parlance, is just the tip of an iceberg that has already moved on. We are among the first peoples in human history who do not broadly inherit religious identity as a given, a matter of kin and tribe, like hair color and hometown. But the very fluidity of this—the possibility of choice that arises, the ability to craft and discern one's own spiritual bearings—is not leading to the decline of spiritual life but its revival. It is changing us, collectively."

"I don't find it surprising that young people born in the 1980s and 1990s have distanced themselves from the notion of religious declaration, growing up as they did in an era in which strident religious voices became toxic forces in American cultural life."

"The growing universe of the Nones—the new nonreligious—is one of the most spiritually vibrant and provocative spaces in modern life. It is not a world in which spiritual life is absent. It is a world that resists religious excesses and shallows."

"The Nones of this age are ecumenical, humanist, transreligious. But in their midst are analogs to the original monastics: spiritual rebels and seekers on the margins of established religion, pointing tradition back to its own untamable, countercultural, service-oriented heart."

"Religion, in the sweep of the drama of human history and the contemporary globe, has a power to magnify the worst of what humanity is capable of as well as the best."

"Fear comes out in public looking like anger, when it comes to nations as well as individuals."

"The longer I live, the less comprehensible I find the notion of a God who listens, yields, takes account of our struggles. Yet at the very same time, I see that an undeniable aspect of the science of our age, mirrored in the disarray of journalism as I first learned to practice it, is the acknowledgment that the very notion of objectivity is an illusion. Simply put, the human participant is always a participant, never merely an observer. Somehow our subjectivity, our presence, our wills matter cosmically, whether we want them to or not."

"I apprehend—with a knowledge that is as much visceral as cognitive—that God is love. That somehow the possibility of care that can transform us—love muscular and resilient—is an echo of a reality behind reality, embedded in the creative force that gives us life."

"I cherish my conversations with cosmologists and physicists. They are standing on ground where religious thinkers reigned until very recently in human history, the sphere in which we imagine the nature of the cosmos and our place in it."

"This is not a question physicists might pose, but it is a question they plant in me: might our evolving insights into the laws of physics eventually fill in for what our imagination and our words have always called God?"

"Both the scientist and the mystic live boldly with the discoveries they have made, all the while anticipating better discoveries to come."

"I honor the integrity and necessity of doctrine and theologies that have emerged in conversation across generations and across time. But so many of our categories, defined and wrapped in forms and institutions that no longer quite work, had become too narrow. Certain kinds of religiosity turned themselves into boxes into which too little light and air could enter or escape."

"Dogmatic atheism is no more intellectually credible than dogmatic faith. Both presume a certainty in things unproven that a spirit of inquiry, a virtue of investigation, inclines to nuance."

"Our traditions are vast repositories of conversation across generations about the intricacies of really loving one another and of living in hope."

"Religious institutions are struggling to reimagine their institutional health and their contribution to the unfolding world. This struggle itself is leading to invention and renewal of sacred spaces as common spaces where the virtues we're better understanding can be practiced and applied."

"In so many ways I see the new dynamics of spiritual life in our time as gifts to the wisdom of the ages, even as they unsettle the foundations of faith as we've known it for what feels like forever."

"Our greatest aspirations and virtues have always relied on a measure of inner equanimity. And this is something many of us are learning to tend better, more consciously, precisely as the noisy world feels like it is pulling us apart."

# *Chapter Six*
# *Hope: Reimagined*

*"Hope, like every virtue, is a choice that becomes a practice that becomes spiritual muscle memory. It's a renewable resource for moving through life as it is, not as we wish it to be." —Krista Tippett*

OPENING QUESTION

Reflect on whom you listen to, what you follow and trust, as you develop your sense of the story of our time and what is possible in it.
*Is there a disconnect between the media narratives you follow and what you know in the world and people around you? Does the world you know reveal practical sources of hope alongside what is hard? Do you take the generative realities and possibilities around you as seriously as bad news?*

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Sharing an example of her experience with the L'Arche community, Tippett speaks of hope in terms of moving forward, in terms of "signs, not solutions."
*What are some signs—markers, guideposts—that help you see and trust in redemptive possibilities for you and the world?*

According to Tippett, "We are fabulous and contradictory through and through, living breathing both/ands."
*Is this true of you and people you admire? How might this be a source of hope?*

Brené Brown says that her research and that of others shows that "hope is borne of courage."
*How does this make sense to you? How have you been formed by what scared you, by moving through experiences where you didn't always know you could get to the other side?*

Tippett calls the Internet "a new canvas for the old human condition" and suggests that it is up to us to turn this technology in its infancy to human purposes.
*Does this idea give you ways to think differently about what you fear about our online lives? Have you had an experience of the Internet amplifying something—good or bad—that made you more self-aware and/or more compassionate towards others?*

After reflecting on some whose lives and deaths have made the headlines Tippett muses, "Our world is abundant with quiet, hidden lives of beauty and courage and goodness. There are millions of people at any given moment, young and old, giving themselves over to service, risking hope, and all the while ennobling us all."
*Who in the world you know fits this description?*

Tippett writes, "I have seen that wisdom emerges precisely through those moments when we have to hold seemingly opposing realities in a creative tension and interplay: power and frailty, birth and death, pain and hope, beauty and brokenness, mystery and conviction, calm and buoyancy, mine and yours."
*What seemingly opposing realities are you navigating now in your personal, civic, and/or professional life? How could you find ways to accompany others—and ask for companionship—to make this more bearable and hope more reasonable?*

KEY QUOTATIONS

"In a century of staggering open questions, hope becomes a calling for those of us who can hold it, for the sake of the world."

"Hope is distinct, in my mind, from optimism or idealism. It has nothing to do with wishing. It references reality at every turn and reveres truth. It lives open eyed and wholehearted with the darkness that is woven ineluctably into the light of life and sometimes seems to overcome it. Hope, like every virtue, is a choice that becomes a practice that becomes spiritual muscle memory. It's a renewable resource for moving through life as it is, not as we wish it to be."

"We live in a world whose contours are formed by story, not conquest, and shaped and reshaped continuously by connection. We are the points on the map."

"Almost everything and everyone changing the world now is what we've forever referred to as 'under the radar.' The radar is broken."

"I have a heart full, arms full, a mind brimful and bursting with a sense of what is healing us even as I write, even when we don't know it and haven't asked for it. And I do mean healing: not curing, not solving, not fixing, but creating the opportunity for deepened life together, for growing more wise and more whole, not just older, not just smarter."

"I'm consciously shedding the assumption that a skeptical point of view is the most intellectually credible. Intellect does not function in opposition to mystery; tolerance is not more pragmatic than love; and cynicism is not more reasonable than hope."

"Unlike almost every worthwhile thing in life, cynicism is easy. It's never proven wrong by the corruption or the catastrophe. It's not generative. It judges things as they are, but does not lift a finger to try to shift them."

"We want to be called to our best selves. We long to figure out what that would look like. And we are figuring out that we need each other to do so."

"I want a world free of murder, but not free of murder mysteries."

"We are fabulous and contradictory through and through, living breathing both/ands."

"Hope is an orientation, an insistence on wresting wisdom and joy from the endlessly fickle fabric of space and time."

"The scenarios we spin most vigorously are about artificial intelligence, computers grown sentient, seductive, evil, in charge. I've wondered why we aren't also pondering, with any sophistication, what the point of consciousness might be. Where is it taking us? Where do we choose to take it? What might spiritual evolution look like, in the most expansive sense of that phrase?"

"Evolution, [David Sloan Wilson] points out, is not always tantamount to progress; it can also move in the direction of decline."

"A civic aspiration is a powerful thing—it gives moral imagination someplace to go."

"We know in life that taking in our losses and grieving them is a step that is not in itself productive or ef-

fective—all those ways we measure what matters. But it's an opening without which only limited growth, movement out and forward, is possible."

"That vulnerability [after 9/11] brought Americans into a new point of kinship with far-flung strangers around the world, who live this way much of the time. But our response drew us apart again."

"Failure and vulnerability are the very elements of spiritual growth and personal wisdom. What goes wrong for us as much as what goes right—what we know to be our flaws as much as what we know to be our strengths—these make hope reasonable and lived virtue possible. They are part of our gift to the world."

"Hope is brokenhearted on the way to becoming wholehearted. Hope is a function of struggle."

"Recovering necessary elements of survival and vitality is a step forward, a piece of intelligence. This is another way to talk about the move from intelligence to wisdom—seeing basic realities again, finally, but for the first time with consciousness: evolution reflecting back on itself."

"To nurture a resilient human being, or a resilient city, is to build in an expectation of adversity, a capacity for inevitable vulnerability."

"Resilience is at once proactive, pragmatic, and humble. It knows it needs others. It doesn't overcome failure so much as transmute it, integrating it into the reality that evolves."

"The Internet is our version of splitting the atom. It holds immense powers, both perilous and promising, as it upends the meaning of ancient, elemental human things like making and leading and belonging and learning."

"Hope inspires goodness to reveal itself. Hope takes goodness seriously, treats it as a data point, takes it in. This is a virtue for living in and of itself: taking in the good."

"As Maria Popova says, the Internet is in its infancy. It is at a fundamental level a new canvas for the old human condition, salvation and sin, at digital speed and with viral replication. It is a magnifying glass on every human inclination, beautiful and terrible, trivial and mean, generous and curious."

"Our world is abundant with quiet, hidden lives of beauty and courage and goodness. There are millions of people at any given moment, young and old, giving themselves over to service, risking hope, and all the while ennobling us all."

"We often don't quite trust that rebirth will follow the deaths of what we thought we knew. We sense that somehow what comes next is up to us, but we're not sure where to begin. Yet it's precisely in these moments when we let our truest, hardest questions rise up in our midst, allow their place among us, that we become able to live into them rather than away and to do so together."

"Spiritual humility is not about getting small, not about debasing oneself, but about approaching everything and everyone else with a readiness to see goodness and to be surprised. This is the humility of a child, which Jesus lauded. It is the humility of the scientist and the mystic. It has a lightness of step, not a heaviness of heart."

"The mystery and art of living are as grand as the sweep of a lifetime and the lifetime of a species. And they are as close as beginning, quietly, to mine whatever grace and beauty, whatever healing and attentiveness, are possible in this moment and the next and the next one after that."