

The Two Halves of Life

Companions to Rohr & Brooks — reading for Session 3

In Session 2 we stood before two summits. Two well-known authors map that same journey from different angles — Richard Rohr names the inner and spiritual shift; David Brooks names the moral one. These short companions are doorways into their books, written to ready you for Session 3.

They are not substitutes — read the books themselves where you can.

Part One • Richard Rohr, Falling Upward

Assigned reading this week: Falling Upward, Part One (or a faithful 10-page summary). Bring one sentence that landed to Session 3.

The Big Idea

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest, argues that a full life moves through two distinct halves — not halves of time, but halves of task. The first half is about building: forging an identity, a career, a reputation, a set of certainties. Rohr calls this building the container of a life. The work is necessary and good; no one gets to skip it. But the container was never the point.

The second half is about discovering what the container was meant to hold — meaning, depth, a truer self, the freedom to give rather than to prove. The trouble is that we rarely cross from the first half to the second by succeeding harder. We cross through some kind of falling: a failure, a loss, a humbling, a crisis that cracks the container open. For many men, retirement is exactly that kind of fall — the title goes, the structure goes, the old certainties wobble.

Here is Rohr's radical reframe: the fall is not punishment, and it is not the end. It is the necessary descent that makes a truer ascent possible. We do not climb over the loss; we go *down* and find that the way down is the way up. We fall upward.

For Your Jubilee

This is why we name the losses honestly rather than rushing past them. The man who refuses the fall — who white-knuckles his first-half identity — stays stranded on the first summit, defending a container that has already emptied. The man who lets the fall do its work finds the second half can be deeper, freer, and more generative than the first. In Rohr's terms, retirement is not decline. It is curriculum.

▮ *“You must go down before you can go up.” — Richard Rohr, Falling Upward*

As You Read

- **Your container.** What identity, role, and certainties did you spend your first half building?
- **Your falling upward.** Where have you already lived this — a loss that, in hindsight, opened something?
- **Your contents.** What might be waiting to fill your container in the second half that the first had no room for?

BRING TO SESSION 3

One sentence from Part One that landed — and your honest answer to: which loss am I still refusing to grieve?

Part Two • David Brooks, The Second Mountain

Optional companion. If Rohr names the spiritual shift, Brooks names the moral one — what you live for. Read the Introduction and Part One if you can.

The Big Idea

In *The Second Mountain*, the writer David Brooks pictures two kinds of life as two mountains. The first mountain is the one our culture hands every young man: get the education, build the career, establish an identity, achieve, acquire, succeed. Climbing it brings real happiness — but a conditional, self-focused happiness that always depends on the next win. Brooks calls the climber of the first mountain the *résumé self*.

Then something interrupts the climb. Sometimes a failure or grief; sometimes simply reaching the top and finding the summit smaller than promised. A valley opens. In that valley, Brooks says, a person learns that the first mountain's happiness was never enough. Some men descend into bitterness. Others discover a second, higher mountain — a life organized not around the self and its trophies but around commitments: to a spouse and family, to a vocation, to a community, to a faith.

The reward of the second mountain is not happiness but something Brooks calls joy — a deeper, self-transcending gladness that comes from being given to something beyond yourself. The self that climbs it he calls the *eulogy self*: the person described at the end not by accomplishments, but by character and love.

For Your Jubilee

Retirement is the valley between the mountains. Your first mountain — your career — gave you a real and honorable happiness; do not despise it. But the question of the second half is not “how do I get back on the first mountain?” It is “what is my second mountain?”

Notice where Brooks' four commitments point: marriage and family, vocation, community, and faith. They map almost exactly onto the domains your Harvest Charter will build — *Three at the Table* (your marriage), your triad and community, your calling, and your faith foundation. Brooks is describing, in advance, the road this program walks.

| “Happiness is good, but joy is better.” — *after David Brooks, The Second Mountain*

As You Read

- **Happiness vs. joy.** Where have you tasted the difference between the first mountain's happiness and the second mountain's joy?
- **Your valley.** The valley is where the second mountain first becomes visible. What is yours showing you?
- **Your commitment.** Of Brooks' four — marriage/family, vocation, community, faith — which is calling you most loudly right now?

Two Men, One Map

Rohr: the container cracks, and only then can it be filled. Brooks: the climber descends into the valley, and only there does the higher mountain appear. Different metaphors, the same truth — the second thing is the deeper one, and you reach it only by letting the first one end. That is the truth Session 2 asked you to feel. Let these readings settle it before we walk into the valley together in Session 3.

References

These companions paraphrase the authors' ideas in our own words and contextualize them for the Jubilee season. Read the sources themselves — they reward it.

- **Rohr, Richard.** *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life.* Jossey-Bass, 2011.
- **Brooks, David.** *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life.* Random House, 2019.