

Rip Esselstyn:

We were lucky enough to have Rich join us at our second and seventh annual Plant-Stock events, and they were epic. But what's going to be beyond epic is our ninth annual Plant-Stock event, which is going to be streaming live and online around the country and the globe, straight from the Esselstyn family farm after a two-year hiatus, August 14th-16th. That's just a week away.

Rip Esselstyn:

With this new format I couldn't be more excited, because everyone gets a front row seat to all the action. We're going to pair the science with the practical application, which means time in the farmhouse kitchen cooking up a storm with Ann and Jane. We're going to have a world-class video crew that's going to give you a backstage pass to not only the farm, but also the homestead, inside and out.

Rip Esselstyn:

You're going to hear from the broc stars of the plant-based movement, including my father; Dr. Saray Stancic; Dr. Michael Greger; Dr. Michael Klaper; Brenda Davis; Tracye McQuirter; Marco Borges; and a slew of others. And if you can't watch it live, don't sweat it. Video access is going to be available, with every ticket, for a year. Partial proceeds will benefit the Esselstyn Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public charity, and if you're having a tough time financially, we get it. Financial assistance is available. Just visit plantstock2020.com to learn more.

Rip Esselstyn:

I want to welcome you to the Plant-Strong podcast, where each week we celebrate the heroes of the Plant-Strong movement. Today is a very special episode, because instead of looking forward I actually take a look back, and shine the light on Rich Roll. Rich and I both abandoned our, what I'll call steady and stable, normal careers around the exact same time, back in the 2008-2009 timeframe, to release books and venture into uncharted career territories that didn't even really exist at the time. We both had young families, and let me tell you, it was terrifying. But, when you believe in something so much, and when you're being pulled so strongly in a direction that resonates with your whole being, you have to act. Fortunately, both Rich and I did.

Rip Esselstyn:

I recorded this interview at Rich's house when I was out in L.A. last fall, so while you won't hear any dialogue around the current issues that we're facing today, you will hear thoughtful conversation on fear; vulnerability; suffering; epiphanies in life; learning to give and receive love; meditation; and the bravery it takes to shed our old skin and start anew.

Rip Esselstyn:

It's transformative. So, even though we look back this week, as you're listening to both of us reminisce, ask yourself: Are there changes in my own life that I want to make? Is there a cause I believe in so much that I'm willing to give up virtually everything? What are my own fears that might be preventing me from going after these goals? How can I get out of my own comfort zone?

Rip Esselstyn:

I hope that you, like Rich and myself, recognize and act on those unique moments in your life, those epiphanies that can ultimately alter the course of your life for the better. Perhaps, maybe even this

conversation will lead to an epiphany. We certainly hope so. So, enjoy my talk with Mr. Peace and Plants, Rich Roll.

Rip Esselstyn:

So, Rich.

Rich Roll:

Rip.

Rip Esselstyn:

Thank you for having me out to your place. I've never been out here before, and it's quite dreamy, to say the least.

Rich Roll:

Well, I appreciate you making the trip all the way out here. We don't exactly live close to town. I don't know where you're staying, but I guarantee you it was a hike to get out here. So, thank you.

Rip Esselstyn:

Actually, believe it or not, it was only a 30-minute drive.

Rich Roll:

Oh, wow.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah, yeah.

Rich Roll:

That's great.

Rip Esselstyn:

First, I want to just say how insanely proud I am of you. When we first met, it was 2009 at that crazy little Vegan World Fest, and I think you had just been named one of the fittest men on the planet. I had just written The Engine 2 Diet book. And to see just how far that you've come since that moment in time is ... It's kind of mind-boggling to me.

Rich Roll:

Let me just say, first of all, I want to thank you, because you've been ... You've set an incredible example and you've been an unbelievable mentor, and have really paved the way with this movement. The advocacy and the work you do has inspired me for many years. It's been a long journey, and it's cool that we're both in it to win it and still here. And so, it's an honor and a privilege to talk to you today.

Rip Esselstyn:

And the work you're doing, the number of lives that you're reaching and the good service that you're doing, it is ... Anyway, it's just ... I'm constantly going, "Wow. Rich. Way to be."

Rich Roll:

I appreciate that, and I appreciate you being a champion of this vision that I had from the beginning. I'll never forget, I sent you a manuscript of Finding Ultra before it came out. I think I was at a movie and you called, and I ran out of the movie theater to take your call. You were so effusive with your praise, and so encouraging, and that meant a lot to me at that time.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. And so that book, Finding Ultra, it ... The reason why I called you immediately, because I finished reading, I think it was like a galley copy or something like that, and you laid it out there. You laid it out there in a big, wonderful, courageous way. The way you were so incredibly honest, the way you left yourself just open to so much vulnerability-

Rich Roll:

That was definitely the feeling. It was a very kind of vulnerable place to be, to tell your story in that way. But I also knew ... I mean, first of all, backing up. I was aware that Scott Jurek was writing a book at the same time that I was writing my book, and here you have the world's greatest ultramarathoner, vegan, just an incredible human being.

Rich Roll:

And I'm over here. I've never won a race. I'm this ultra-athlete, vegan person, but I'm thinking, "Why would anyone read my book when they can just pick up Scott's?" And I was very aware that the value of what I could share was directly proportionate to the extent to which I was willing to be vulnerable and talk about things I wasn't proud of, to try to connect emotionally with the reader.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right. Well, you did that in spades. Before this interview I reread the book and, again, I was just like ... It was so well-written. Again, the way you open yourself up, downright incredible. It made me kind of go back through my childhood, my life, and explore places where I was vulnerable, or not vulnerable. It just made me think about how many, especially I think, boys and men these days, they don't allow themselves to be vulnerable. For whatever reason, we've kind of grown up thinking that showing signs of vulnerability is like a weakness, when in reality it's probably one of the greatest strengths.

Rich Roll:

Yeah, it's scary. We're raised from the beginning to put on the face, the mask, and go out into the world and be this warrior type personality. I've discovered, through pain, that there's a lot of strength to be mined in that vulnerability. That's a lesson that I had to learn, though. It didn't come naturally to me.

Rich Roll:

I learned it in recovery, initially, by learning to share my own story and being empathetic and a good listener to other people's stories. I realized how much courage it takes to do that, and also how much freedom it avails you. Like, if you can really put yourself out there in that way and clean that closet out of whatever skeletons you have, then there's a lightness, I think, that comes with that, and it's very empowering.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Do you now, in your life, go out of your way to be vulnerable, just to strengthen or deepen relationships?

Rich Roll:

I think I'm always doing an inventory of where I'm at, and where I'm hiding things, and where I'm being ... You know, it's a process. It's not like, "Oh, I was vulnerable here, and now I always am." I have to resist the urge to present myself in a light that perhaps isn't totally genuine and honest.

Rich Roll:

But I also think, now, there is a sense that vulnerability can be this superpower. You see a lot of people doing what I call performative vulnerability, like on social media, to get the "likes" or whatever. I think that's something unique that I would not have expected, and I think there are issues with that because there's an ego attachment to that, right? So, it's about them turning the page on that, and going even deeper, and going even deeper. It's a practice.

Rip Esselstyn:

I'm sure many of you have read Rich's book, *Finding Ultra*, and remember his infamous episode, when he got winded just by climbing the stairs because he had gotten so out of shape physically and emotionally. It almost seems unthinkable that a former collegiate swimmer could barely climb the stairs at the age of 40, but that was his reality that he had to confront. It was a life-changing moment and a wake-up call to make some serious changes in his life.

Rip Esselstyn:

It also marked a significant moment of realizing that he may be living out a dangerous legacy: that of his late grandfather, Richard Spindle, who also was a world-class swimmer but had succumbed to a heart attack at an early age, long before Rich was even born. Was Rich sealing his own fate? And, I had to know, does he feel like his grandfather, Richard, is guiding him? Do you still feel an attachment?

Rich Roll:

I do feel that. Like, I just took you over to my container office, and I have a team photo of him, and also a picture of him in high school in his swimming trunks, you know, the full body things from the '20s. So, I look at him every day and I think about that. You know, this is a guy who I'm named after, and if you look at the images you can see my likeness within him.

Rich Roll:

He was my mother's father. He was a champion swimmer in the late '20s and early 1930s, captain of the University of Michigan swim team, which was like the Texas or the Stanford of that era. His coach was Matt Mann. The natatorium at University of Michigan is called the Matt Mann Natatorium. He was a contemporary of the Johnny Weismullers of his day, and he held an American record in the 150-yard backstroke, which was an event back then. He narrowly missed an Olympic berth, never smoked, was never overweight, remained fit, swam in Lake Michigan all the time. And, nonetheless, succumbed to a heart attack at age 54.

Rich Roll:

I never met him. He died when my mother was in college, and I know that that was a very traumatic experience for her and part of the reason why I was named after him. And here I am, not even attempting ... As a child, it wasn't like I knew that much about him. I don't even know that I knew he was a swimmer, but I just gravitated towards it and it was this daunting realization that, in many ways, I was walking a similar path.

Rich Roll:

So, I actually think about him more now, because he was 54 when he died. So, it's even more prescient, perhaps, even than when I was on that staircase or having that ... in the wake of that, trying to reconfigure my relationship with food and lifestyle.

Rip Esselstyn:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). The first time that you had that, if you want to call it maybe that epiphany, where something kind of guided you, I think was a certain awakening with alcoholism. I think you were at Spring Brook, and one of the counselors there, I think, said: "You know, Rich, change your perception, and you can change your reality."

Rip Esselstyn:

I'm just wondering if, looking back over your life with regards to the alcoholism, do you feel like there's one moment when that kind of took hold of you? Or was it like going back to when you were chugging a beer with Bruce Kimball on that recruiting trip? I knew Bruce Kimball, not well, but ... and that story you told in the book where he did, I think, a back flip or a front flip-

Rich Roll:

He did a back flip holding a cup of beer, and didn't spill a drop. That is something that I will never forget.

Rip Esselstyn:

I think you say in the book, "the ultimate party trick."

Rich Roll:

Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

Rip Esselstyn:

But is there a point where you can single pinpoint, "Oh, yeah. That's when I was having issues with alcohol."

Rich Roll:

There isn't one moment where I can say, "Here's where I crossed over." It's a very gradual process. But I knew, in my heart of hearts and on some unconscious level very early on, that I had an unhealthy relationship with alcohol, because I was the guy who never wanted to leave the party. I was the last one to leave. I was the guy who wanted to go out on a Tuesday night, when everybody else was studying in college. I was always kind of pushing the edges of that, so I knew that it was a little bit different for me than it was for other people.

Rich Roll:

I think, in a self-preservation way, that prevented me from going down the rabbit hole with hard drugs, because I was aware. Like, "I know this is a problem, and at some point I'm probably going to have to quit or this is going to get bad. So, I'm not going to try cocaine. I'm not going to do those other things, because that will just bring this whole house of cards falling on top of itself immediately, and I want to keep drinking."

Rich Roll:

You know, that was my mindset. It was a gradual process, this erosion of my soul and my ambitions, and my ability to even exercise self-care. My window became very limited to, "Where's my next good time?" and that's really all I cared about. But it took a long time before there were serious external ramifications like DUIs, and run-ins with bosses, and things like that. I mean, that all happened, but it was many years after that.

Rip Esselstyn:

Epiphanies. They are like a crazy lightning rod of much needed change. I remember an epiphany I had to write *The Engine 2 Diet* after our early Plant-Strong success at the Austin Fire Department. We had gotten a slew of media attention, and afterwards we got bombarded with letters, with postcards, with emails and phone calls, about a bunch of firefighters in Austin, Texas, eating a bunch of plants.

Rip Esselstyn:

It was about two-and-a-half months after we appeared on the front of the Metro section of the New York Times, and at some point I just realized, "You know what? It's okay that I'm not a doctor, that I'm not a nutritionist, that I'm not a life coach. I, just by being who I am, an ex-professional athlete and a firefighter, have the potential to reach and change people's lives because of who I am."

Rip Esselstyn:

That's what gave me the confidence to go ahead and write my first book, *The Engine 2 Diet*. So, my question is, what epiphanies have you had? Take a step back and really think. Have you experienced any magical moments that sparked change? Sometimes it's a song, or even an event that happens. Other times it's through a person that you cross paths with at just the right time. This happened to Rich when he was in rehab for alcoholism.

Rip Esselstyn:

Another thing that happened at Spring Brook is, one of your counselors, his name was Stan, said: "You only have to change one thing, Rich." And then he said, "Everything."

Rich Roll:

Right.

Rip Esselstyn:

Is that a daunting thing, or is that a good thing when somebody says, "You only have to do one thing, and that's just change everything."

Rich Roll:

Right. It's like a Zen koan. I'm like, "What do you mean? How do I even do that?" And I think it was just a way of saying, "The way you're living your life is not working, dude. You need to open yourself up to the possibility of doing things differently. I know you think you're this smart guy, but your best thinking landed you here, so take a seat and shut up, and be open to what we have to offer you." I needed that. I needed to hear that.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Well, as you know, I've become good friends with a guy named Adam Sud, who's been on your podcast. Adam, as you know, became addicted to Adderall, and he felt like Adderall was the key and made him everything that everybody wanted him to be, the person that his father wanted him to be. And it led him to a very, very dark place.

Rip Esselstyn:

I think, on reflection, he was perfect. He was that perfect individual snowflake, but he just didn't have the perspective and he couldn't see it. I look at Adam now and I see just such a beautiful, amazing human being, right? I mean, you, right? I look at you, and just see a beautiful, loving, sharing, amazing, amazing man, but for whatever reason sometimes we can't see in ourselves what other people see.

Rich Roll:

Right. Well, there's been a lot of growth to get me into this place, I can tell you. I think the thing that's beneath what you're saying is the fact that drugs and alcohol, they're not necessarily the problem. They're like the symptom of the underlying problem. They're actually the solution in the early days.

Rich Roll:

I was a very insecure, quiet, introverted kid who had difficulty making friends, and alcohol was my solution. It brought me out of my self. It allowed me to be a social animal. It taught me how to interact with other people. It ultimately turned on me, and it was a very unhealthy vehicle for learning those things. But that's the way it goes, right?

Rich Roll:

I know that Adam's experience with that was similar, and when it all comes crashing down, you have to relearn all of those skills in a healthy way, and that's kind of the journey to wholeness that anybody in recovery takes.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. I'm kind of diving into your book, here, a little bit. I don't know how often you do this, and if this is ... If it's uncomfortable or not, but I just-

Rich Roll:

It's totally fine.

Rip Esselstyn:

Again, because I just read it, I'm fascinated with it and I just have some of these burning questions. This in an intense moment in the book, and you describe that fateful day when you took a match out and you burned your inventory list of all your resentments, your fears, your harm to others. Then you collected

the ashes after you burned it, and to this day, I'm assuming, you're still keeping them in a Tibetan singing bowl at your bedside nightstand.

Rich Roll:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rip Esselstyn:

Why?

Rich Roll:

I think it's just a very tactile reminder of where I was, and what I had to endure and go through to get to the next place. I would say that just because you do an inventory like that, it doesn't mean it's a ... It's not a one and done thing. I've got to keep doing inventories. But that was a very seminal moment, where I did feel like I had kind of crossed the Rubicon and was embracing this new way of living, and a lifestyle based on-

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Rich Roll:

... facing this new way of living and a lifestyle based on spiritual principles in a way that I wouldn't have been able to prior to that.

Rip Esselstyn:

Another quote that you have in the book, "I have come to appreciate that great beauty lies in destruction. The wedding that almost destroyed me was necessary to my ultimate salvation. And for this, I will always be eternally grateful." I'm just wondering, do you feel like you've had several brushes with destruction or?

Rich Roll:

Oh yeah, for sure. The other thing I always say is pain has been my greatest teacher. There's something about a very painful moment that allows you to wake up and be teachable. Of course the teachings are always available, but the receptivity generally isn't, and that's why it's so hard, so difficult for people to change. I mean in your life, you're helping people change lifelong habits all the time, and you've had a lot of successes, but I'm sure you've had experiences with people who are resistant to it or just can't make it work. And there's something about a scary episode, whether it's bottoming out on drugs and alcohol or having a health scare that suddenly wakes people up and allows them to step into a different reality for themselves. I just wish it was more accessible. Like how can we unlock that for people so that we don't have to suffer in that way in order to get the message? You know what I mean?

Rip Esselstyn:

Right. Go to that extreme before you're able to get the help. So you dedicated finding ultra to your wife, Julie. You talk about how she's the coolest woman you've ever met, how she has taught you, not only to love, but also to receive love. What's up with sleeping on a tent on the roof. Is that something that I should be doing with my wife?

Rich Roll:

Yeah. Everybody thinks that that's a referendum on our marriage. I mean, Julie and I have been together for 20 years at this point. We have a very solid marriage, which doesn't mean we don't fight, we fight, but the half-life on our fights is very short. Like we have really great communication skills and we have a healthy, robust, intimate life as well.

Rich Roll:

But I've had, especially as I get older, I've had challenges with getting restful sleep. And a couple of years ago, as you know, we have this flat roof out here and we would take the kids up there and we could project movies on this wall and we do sleep outs on the roof. And there was one night where I just slept incredibly soundly under the stars on just a sleeping bag on the roof and woke up feeling more refreshed than I had in a long time.

Rich Roll:

And I announced Julie, "I'm going to start sleeping on the roof more, this is great. She's like, "Fine." And then I would wake up with moisture all over me and all wet. So I was like, I'm getting a tent. And it just became one thing after another. And I've been sleeping in a tent pretty regularly for the last couple of years. And it helps me sleep more soundly. Something about the cold... We're in the desert here. So even on a hot day, it's cold at night, being under all those covers. And I just wake up feeling better than I do [inaudible 00:26:26].

Rip Esselstyn:

You drag a mattress in there? You want to [inaudible 00:26:27].

Rich Roll:

Yeah. I got a mattress in there. It's not like I'm sleeping on the ground. Yeah, I've got a little twin mattress in there.

Rip Esselstyn:

That's pretty treat.

Rich Roll:

It's good man. I like it.

Rip Esselstyn:

I've had my best sleeps on camping trips in sleeping bags, on a pad. Yeah. Where you're like in tune with mother nature.

Rich Roll:

Right. So I feel more connected to the earth that way. It's kind of a primal thing. And I also think it's a little bit of a stoic practice. I'm incredibly blessed to live in this amazing house in this amazing area and that does not escape me, but I sleep in a tent and you saw my little shipping container where I work out of, that's my little world back there. So if everything went away, like it all just disappeared on me, I've realized I don't need that much. I have a lot and I like nice things and all of that but I'll be okay. And I

think that that helps me calibrate my compass and how I make decisions about how I want to invest my time.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. In that thing I read just before the sleeping on the roof with a tent, you talk about how Julie also taught you how to receive love. Why do you think it's so hard for so many people to receive love? We feel we're not worthy for some reason of it?

Rich Roll:

Yeah. I can't speak for other people. I can only speak for myself, but I certainly didn't feel worthy of it. Or I felt like if somebody was directing that towards me, that it felt indulgent or undeserved, and I've had to learn how to be a gracious receiver of love and other good things in my life because I do feel like I have a deep seated sense of unworthiness that I'm constantly trying to work on and overcome.

Rip Esselstyn:

Let's talk about your plant based lifestyle. You credit that for transforming a lot of things in your life, going from a couch potato to ultra man, a triathlete, and then doing that crazy EPIC5 that you did. Do you refer to your way of eating as vegan or plant powered way, or how do refer to it?

Rich Roll:

The labels get tricky because people get really caught up in them and everybody has different definitions of what these things mean. I would say plant power, plant strong. Plant strong is your thing. I'm not completely oil free, so I don't feel like I can own that moniker. I like plant-powered, plant-based, but I got into this initially for health reasons, which we can talk about a little bit more, but as I've been doing this for over 12 years at this point, I've become a lot more interested in the environmental ramifications and considerations of our daily food choices, as well as the compassionate considerations around animal welfare, which were not considerations when I got into this and have now become very important to me.

Rich Roll:

So I do consider myself vegan, although that would depend on the varying definitions of how people perceive that term. The word vegan implies a political perspective and a certain sense of activism that perhaps I don't embody completely, but I do it in my own way, through the podcast and the other things that I do.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right. And then you also got into this obviously for health reasons and that one comment I made earlier about you going up the stairs and then having this epiphany, like, "Wow, you know what, I got to make some changes." And for whatever reason, it stuck there. I think maybe the Richard Spindle that he died at 53, 54-

Rich Roll:

54, yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

54 you said. And for a reason it impacted you. So you used the plant powered way to fuel you back to health, right? Where were you?

Rich Roll:

Well, what happened was I had that moment on the staircase, tightness in the chest and really afraid that I was on the precipice of something serious. And I did think about my grandfather, but I was very aware that I was having a moment not dissimilar to the day I decided to go off to treatment for alcoholism. Like these line in the sand moments that I think can be determinative in terms of the trajectory that you take for your life. Had I woken up that morning when I was 31 and decided I'll go to rehab tomorrow and not today, maybe I would have never made it there. I think there's something about these moments that are precious and fleeting. And if we're present enough and we have the wherewithal to recognize their significance, they do hold the power to change our lives in dramatic ways.

Rich Roll:

So when I was on the staircase, I thought of that day that I went off to rehab and I realized, this is another one of those moments. I feel that it's about willingness. It wasn't just like, "Hey, I really need to change how I'm living." It's like, I actually want to. Not only do I need to, I want to, and I need to bottle this and protect it and channel it immediately because tomorrow I might just change my mind. So I grabbed onto it. And that's what led me on this path of self discovery and this changing relationship with food.

Rich Roll:

And I have to tell you that a big part of it was me doing some research and figuring out, okay, what do I want to do? How do I do this? What's the path forward here? I was like on Facebook and I came across your page. I think we were already friends. We didn't know each other, but I knew your name from swimming. And I was just scrolling on your feed. And you were in the process, I mean, Engine 2 hadn't come out yet, but I think you were writing at the time and you were talking about plant based nutrition and what was going on in the firehouse and the work that your dad was doing. And I didn't know about any of that.

Rich Roll:

So you are my introduction to that. And I thought this guy was a swimmer at Texas. This guy was a badass. And he's doing this, that is a model that I could copy. And so you were like my light house and lightening rod for modeling a way of living that I thought that I could emulate and I didn't do it overnight. It was six or seven months of fooling around before I finally figured it out for myself, but that was the starting point.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, and it's funny how Julie, I think at first, didn't think you were serious and you had to say like, "Hey, I really want to do this," three or four times, right?

Rich Roll:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

And then you started with the the juice cleanse.

Rich Roll:

Yeah, I did a juice cleanse. I approached it like rehab. There was something about the experience of being in recovery that was very applicable to changing my habits with food in that, in recovery, you're either using or you're not, it's very black and white. It's very binary. You can't drink once in a while and claim to be sober.

Rich Roll:

So I just applied that kind of mindset to food and thought, well, I'll just think of animal products like drugs and alcohol, and I can just cut them out. And that removed the decision fatigue out of the whole thing. And I just took the tools that I learned in 12 step and applied them to my relationship with food, which also taught me the extent to which I was using food in an addictive way to modulate my emotional state, which was news to me. I didn't think that I was doing that, but I very much was, and that really helped me to not just start, but create momentum behind these new habits.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right. And then you brought Julie all the way to being all plant-based, right?

Rich Roll:

Right. So Julie was what most people would consider to be a very clean eater. She was predominantly vegetarian and everything that she bought was organic and she is a gifted cook and would prepare these amazing meals while I was going to Jack in the box at McDonald's, that was her thing. She wasn't totally plant-based. But when I made the switch and was experiencing this kind of resurgence in my vitality and my energy levels, she then initially in solidarity to me, got on board with it, to support me, but then completely embraced it herself and has gone on to write all these cookbooks and become an ambassador of the movement in her own right.

Rip Esselstyn:

Got into selling the cheese.

Rich Roll:

I know. Well, she's starting this new cheese line. She's got a commercial kitchen now, I'll tell you about it afterwards, but there's a whole thing going on there. Yeah. It's pretty cool.

Rip Esselstyn:

So you're getting back in shape. You decide I don't want to just do a normal piddly triathlon. That's not Rich Roll. So you got to dive in, you got to do something crazy. And I think it was, you were reading something about David Goggins, this beast that had done the ultra man and that for whatever reason caught your attention.

Rich Roll:

It very much did. I mean, first of all it wasn't like I felt like, oh regular triathlons are beneath me. I attempted to do the Wildflower half Ironman and DNF'd it. I did not have an auspicious introduction to the world of endurance, but I did come across this article. David Goggins has become a household name

now. This guy, his ascendancy is incredible and well-deserved, but at the time nobody knew who David Goggins was. He was doing amazing things in the ultra-endurance world. But outside of that very small subculture, nobody knew who he was and he had just run Badwater and a number of weeks later had competed in this race called Ultraman at double Ironman distance triathlon in Hawaii and had gotten second place, despite his bike break, it was this crazy story. And there was something about the fact that he wasn't a natural triathlete, not really a swimmer, but he had been able to not only finish this thing, but do well that triggered something in me and made me think that's where I need to go.

Rip Esselstyn:

And that's where you went.

Rich Roll:

That's where I went. Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

And then how many years did you do Ultraman?

Rich Roll:

My first one was in 2008 and that was just, can I finish this thing and survive? And I ended up, I think 11th that year. I did pretty well.

Rip Esselstyn:

Probably learned a lot about learned-

Rich Roll:

I learned a lot. Yeah. I learned a lot. So I went back the next year, intent on racing it. Led the race by 10 minutes after the first day, crashed my bike on the second day, which took me out of podium contention. I broke my pedal, it's like a whole crazy story, but I was able to get everything sorted out and back on the bike and complete the race. And I think I was the fastest American. I think I got sixth if I'm not mistaken that year.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yep. And then what happens? A year or two later you and a buddy decide to do the EPIC5?

Rich Roll:

Yeah. This guy, Jason Lester, who I trained with and raced with at Ultraman, who's an incredibly inspiring human being. He does all of these races without the functional use of his right arm. It's incredible. And it was his idea. He had this crazy harebrained idea to try to do 500 mans on five wine islands in five days and recruited me into this nonsense.

Rip Esselstyn:

He suggests it, are you like, "That's insane, I don't want any part of it," or are you like, "Let me think about it," or are you like, "Oh yeah, I'm in?"

Rich Roll:

No. I thought I was done. I was like, "I have proved everything I need to prove to myself, enough suffering for now." And meanwhile, I was starting to get attention, CNN did a thing on me and The Men's Fitness, 25 Fit. I was like, "I'm good." Why go out and suffer more? And it was his idea to do this thing. He didn't ask me initially and I was like, "Oh yeah, that's cool. Let me know how I can support you."

Rich Roll:

He finally asked me and I was like, "I got to really think about that." And ultimately to be completely frank, the amount of time I had been spending training, that's time away from my kids and my family and my wife. And it was like, it's time for them now. Like I need to repay that debt and be a present dad and get back to what's most important in life. So it was a family decision and Julie was very encouraging. She said, "I think you should do this." And so that's how it happened.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right. So I have something here where basically, Julie, if I'm not mistaken, you were, I don't know if it was your training for the Ultraman or maybe EPIC5, but you bonked 60 miles away, you had to make it home. And you're like, "What am I doing?" And then Julie gave you one of her, I guess, patented pep talks. And the next day you went out and you ran 40 miles and you were there. I'm wondering, does Julie have to pull you aside very often and give you these kind of pep talks?

Rich Roll:

Well, she's very good at seeing the big picture and for context during this time and for an extended period of time, it was very difficult financially. I was practicing law less and less. I'm doing more and more of this training. It doesn't make any logical sense. There's no career path here. And so it was really hard.

Rich Roll:

And so back to this issue of masculinity, I called into question my trajectory many times, like, why am I doing this? Like, why do I feel compelled to do this? I should be trying to get a job at a law firm. I should be doing this. I should be doing that. It's very emasculating to not be able to provide to the extent that you feel capable of. And every time I had those sort of crises of faith, she was the one who said, "No, to me, it's clear the path, you have to follow this path." The answers that you're searching about yourself and about how we're going to move forward as a family are going to be answered by continuing to pull on this thread, not by retreating and going back to what you know.

Rich Roll:

And so by holding that line, which by the way everybody thought we were insane and we had friends and family members constantly saying like, "What are you doing? This doesn't make any sense." But it was her conviction that allowed me to continue along this path that like allows me to even be talking to you today.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. I think what you said in the book was "Yeah, when your purpose aligns with your faith." And it's like, it happens. The universe opens up-

Rich Roll:

It doesn't happen the way you want it to, or it certainly doesn't happen on your timeline. I can tell you that.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, so you just mentioned that you had a period there where financially it was kind of rough. Did you retreat to, was it Hawaii or something like that, or maybe retreat's the wrong word, but-

Rich Roll:

Yeah, we were very close to losing our house. We had had cars repossessed, it got so bad at one point that they took our trash bins away. We couldn't pay our bill to have our trash collection taken care of. I mean, it was bad and it was hard and it was embarrassing, really embarrassing.

Rich Roll:

And on that notion of like, when your heart is true, the universe will conspire to support you. That's in my book and the book had come out and I felt strongly about that. And I poured everything into getting the book out there when it came out, trusting that if I do this and put my all into it, that some door will open at some point. And the path forward will be revealed and that wasn't happening. We were in the aftermath of the book coming out and I could go speak at a veg fest for no money, but I was struggling to figure out how I was going to put food on the table.

Rip Esselstyn:

And the thought of going back and doing anything entertainment allows-

Rich Roll:

At this point, it would have just felt like defeat. So I was fully invested at this point and trying to figure out how I was going to create a career out of this. And we've had discussions about this over the years. And you created a model for how you had done it. And I needed to figure out my own version of that for myself and was struggling.

Rich Roll:

And then I got a call from a friend and he had read Finding Ultra and he was inspired and he's a big successful business guy who had bought this property on the north shore of Kauai called Common Ground and he was trying to figure out what to do with it. It was organic farm. And he's like, "I don't know why I want to do this, but I feel like I want your help in helping me figure out how I can turn this property into something more than just a farm. I want to do a community space, or I don't even know. But I just feel like you would be a good person to help me figure that out."

Rich Roll:

And I don't know why. I was like, "It's not like I have experience in property development or anything like that," but this was the one phone call and opportunity that we had. And he was willing to fly my whole family out to Hawaii and pay us for basically consulting. And we went and did it and lived in these yurts on this farm for a couple months.

Rip Esselstyn:

What did you do here? Did you rent this out?

Rich Roll:

So, no. I wasn't sure that we were going to be able to hang on to the house and I thought maybe we were just moving to Hawaii now, maybe we're going to keep living in these yurts and we're not going to go back. It was a very uncertain time. And I was very grateful for that opportunity. He literally saved us. But after being on that remote island for a period of time, I started to get a little bit antsy. I was feeling very disconnected and I'd worked so hard to try to begin a conversation around these ideas that I felt strongly about and cultivating a little bit of community around that. And it felt like I unplugged that plug. And that's when the idea to start the podcast happened. It was just a creative impulse, like a way to continue the conversation that the book started.

Rip Esselstyn:

And my oh my, what amazing conversations he's been having the last seven years. What started as a podcast with his wife-

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:46:04]

Rip Esselstyn:

What started as a podcast with his wife in a yurt in Hawaii has turned into one of the most popular podcasts on the planet with thought leaders, actors, authors and more. He's now inspired millions of people through his thoughtful dialogue around plant-based nutrition and activism. And most certainly, there have been episodes that have also left a lasting impression on him.

Rich Roll:

I had this conversation with this guy called Rip Esselstyn at some point. What episode was that?

Rip Esselstyn:

Oh, [crosstalk 00:00:43].

Rich Roll:

It's not like that. Everybody who comes on the show has something to offer and I learn from that person, but it's not like it ends up on a list and that becomes a daily habit. It's more like it goes into the gray matter and gets synthesized in some way.

Rich Roll:

I mean, I've learned a lot about ... I was very conscious from the beginning that look, it's not going to be a fitness triathlon podcast. It's not going to be strictly a plant-based podcast. I want to have a very broad aperture to learn from all different kinds of people to continue my own personal growth trajectory. So yeah, I've had people on, entrepreneurs, business people, musicians, actors, doctors, athletes, all kinds of people. And I've learned something from every single person.

Rich Roll:

And the amazing thing is that, as you know, I'm sure, there's something about the formality, the structure of recording a conversation like this that makes you very present and aware of what's happening and there's a connection that takes place. After you've had that, it's like you have the shared experience with another human being and that human being is impacted by it as well and neither of you

will forget it. And so these people become important people in my life. They become friends and colleagues and mentors and advisors in different ways.

Rip Esselstyn:

Let me ask you this. What is it about you? What is it about me that we seek out suffering and pain? I think it's because of the swimming background and just we have this idea that, no pain, no gain, and that we feel like, "Okay, if I can be totally obliterated at the end of the day, I've had a successful day training."

Rich Roll:

Yeah. I mean, I think that's part of it. That's probably the unhealthy part of it. I have to suffer. I don't feel like I did anything today that's worthy, but I think the healthy part of that is that human beings are hardwired to ... I think we need challenges, difficulties in a physical sense through suffering in order to connect with who we are. It is a teacher. And I think when you are in that place of pushing yourself and your heart rate is elevated and you're in some level of discomfort, it's empowering and it makes you present.

Rich Roll:

And it's this experience that ... How do I put this in words? ... that I think reveals character and is a very honest truth teller about who you are and where you're at in your life. It creates an honesty, right? There's a purity to it. And I think we're all living comfortable lives of luxury in [inaudible 00:49:55] and cubicles and driving in air conditioned cars and sleeping in air conditioned bedrooms and we've lost that tactile relationship with our bodies and with the earth.

Rich Roll:

It's no mistake, therefore, that hundreds of thousands of people run marathons every year and you're seeing the tough mudders and the Spartan races and all these and the explosion of the ultra running subculture, all of these are indicia to me that we've become too comfortable and that there is something about that experience that fundamentally makes us human.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Do you feel any urge, desire, itch to put a carrot out there again for you? Are you just satisfied going for your runs and your bikes in this amazing area here?

Rich Roll:

Well, I do, I do, you know what I mean? I, like you, we probably both have buddies that think about that one weekend a year they get to go to Vegas and play golf with their buddies. I don't fantasize about that. I fantasize about what would it be like if I just moved into a cabin in the woods and all I had to do is train all day long every day? That sounds to me like heaven, you know what I mean? I need that in my life. I live a very busy, complicated life now, and I don't have the time bandwidth to do that. And I have to make peace with that.

Rich Roll:

I still carve out enough time for self-care to get out on the trails and have that experience in my life. And I do have a yearning to go and test myself, but I don't know that I need to go and do some super crazy

thing that no one's ever done before, but I do feel like it's important for me to stay connected to that world. Whether it's once a year, once every two years, getting out of my comfort zone and doing something that scares me a little, I think that that's important.

Rich Roll:

How can you be more honest with yourself and how can you test yourself in a way that that scares you and makes you uncomfortable? And I think the more that you do that, the more alive you feel and the more present you are in the other areas of your life.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, you look at that event that Jesse Itzler has every year.

Rich Roll:

I did it. I just did it in Utah.

Rip Esselstyn:

How was it?

Rich Roll:

It was incredible. Jesse Itzler, he's an amazing human being. He doesn't have to do any of this stuff. He's got a great life and he's all set, right? But he created this event called 29029, which involves ... He rents out a mountain that's a ski resort [crosstalk 00:52:36]-

Rip Esselstyn:

Why is it called 29029?

Rich Roll:

Because that is the elevation of Mount Everest.

Rip Esselstyn:

Oh, okay.

Rich Roll:

And the idea is you hike up a mountain and then you take the gondola down and you repeat until you have achieved the altitude of Mount Everest, 29,029 feet. And on paper, it doesn't sound that hard. You're like, you just hike and you take the gondola down. How hard can it be? I did the one in Utah this past summer. And it was a 2.3 mile hike up the mountain with, I can't remember how much elevation gain, but you had to do it 13 times in order to achieve that, and you have 36 hours to do it.

Rich Roll:

It was hard. It was hard. And what was cool ... I mean, I was doing it with my hardcore endurance buddy, so it wasn't going to break us. We were having fun and taking our time. But what was great about it was that it wasn't a race. They don't even keep track of who's in the lead or anything like that. It's irrelevant.

It's 250 people that are there to have a shared collective experience doing something difficult and getting out of their comfort zone.

Rich Roll:

And the majority of these people hadn't really ever done anything like that before. These aren't hardened iron man athletes. These are every day executives who are trying to connect with themselves in a different way. And to see these people endure ... This isn't a 10K that's over in half an hour. These people went through the night. They didn't sleep. They just went 36 hours straight until they finished it with headlamps on [crosstalk 00:08:07]-

Rip Esselstyn:

You did it, too?

Rich Roll:

We did 10. And then it was 10 or 11 at night. And we hit the hay and woke up the next morning and completed it. But it took from six in the morning to 10 at night to get [inaudible 00:08:19].

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. And you don't just sign up and do this. I mean, did you train specifically for this?

Rich Roll:

I mean, I should have. I didn't really. I mean, I'm out trail running all the time, but I didn't do training specific for this.

Rip Esselstyn:

How ugly did it get for you?

Rich Roll:

It was-

Rip Esselstyn:

Did you have to dig into the pan cave?

Rich Roll:

It was hard. I mean, the altitude was tricky for me. I mean, a little bit into the pan cave, but it wasn't ... You would've killed it.

Rip Esselstyn:

Oh, no, no, no, no.

Rich Roll:

You should do it, too. It was fun.

Rip Esselstyn:

No, [crosstalk 00:08:56]-

Rich Roll:

[crosstalk 00:54:56] world record holder.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah. I'm glad I got that one, but no, I swim. I do a little bit of biking. The running I'm not doing so much of.

Rich Roll:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Dogs love adventure as much as humans. And while they may not be doing a Mount Everest challenge up a mountain like Jesse Itzler, they do need the energy and fuel to run, climb and play just like we do. Wild Earth Dog Food provides that source of energy with whole, plant-based, clean protein in their formula so that your dog can live a life of adventure right alongside you. Try it today by visiting the episode page at plantstrongpodcast.com to claim up to 50% off your order.

Rip Esselstyn:

I'm just naming off some people here, because I just have found them to be so moving, like Paul de Gelder, right, the shark attack.

Rich Roll:

You should talk to him for your podcast.

Rip Esselstyn:

I did, season one.

Rich Roll:

You did? Okay.

Rip Esselstyn:

I did. I did. He was spectacular. One of the things ... Let's talk about this for a sec, with Colin crossing the Antarctic, with Paul de Gelder and the shark attack and now he's, as you know, the host of Shark Week on the Discovery Channel, and it seems like they're always kind of pushing him to do the next kind of crazy thing, right, for ratings and stuff like that. And Colin, is he going to have to do something to top what he just did? And it's like, at what point are you like, "You know what? enough's enough. I don't have to put my life on the line again and again and again."

Rip Esselstyn:

You certainly don't have to Everest a mountain in order to break out of your rut, but it does start with some action. For some athletes, like my friend, Paul de Gelder, who was on season one of the podcast, doing these extreme events is his chance to feel alive, especially since this is a man who faced death

when he was attacked by a shark a few years ago. Yes, extreme events like the 29029 challenge are great, but they can also be dangerous if you're doing them for the wrong reasons. Rich, of course, is no stranger to these crazy adventures. And he has a few thoughts about chasing too many big goals.

Rich Roll:

There's something about what you just said, the athlete who so attached to going further and longer and just can't ever get off that horse, that I think is or can be unhealthy. And I've had this conversation with Ross Edgley, who swam around Great Britain. Did you hear about that?

Rip Esselstyn:

No.

Rich Roll:

He swam all around Great Britain, and the iron cowboy, who did 50 iron mans in 50 states in 50 days. It's like, once you have a taste of a crazy adventure like that and you succeed, it's like, "Okay, what's next and what's next?" And there's pressure, like now you've got to top it and you've got to do this. And I think you can chase that dragon to a dark place. And at some point I think the greater journey is about becoming emotionally whole. Are you chasing that for ego or is there something you still need to discover about yourself in the world by virtue of doing that and having an honest conversation with yourself about the motivation behind it, I think is really important.

Rip Esselstyn:

You feel ... You said you're 53?

Rich Roll:

Yeah, yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

At 53 with where you are right now in your life, you content?

Rich Roll:

I am. I am. People ask me, "What's next?" Or, "What's the big vision? What are you working on?" And I have ambitions and things that I'm working on and projects that excite me. But if this is all that it is, if tomorrow the lights go out, I'm good. I don't need anything more than what I have.

Rich Roll:

Look, if the podcast gets bigger, that's great. If I can get the ... but truly, I've built this thing, I have this platform, I have the privilege and the responsibility to shepherd an audience of people to a better place in their lives, to be an agent and a provocateur of positive change. And that's such a gift. I can't think of anything I'd rather do with my life. And I'm fully engaged in it. It's incredibly meaningful and rewarding, and it doesn't need to be anything other than it is.

Rich Roll:

I mean, I want for nothing. Like I told you, I just had my birthday and Julie's like, "What do you want for your birthday?" And I was like, "I don't need anything. I want to be with my family and I want to

experience love." And so my goals are, how can I deepen the intimacy that I have with my wife and my kids and raise them to be the best humans that I'm capable of doing? I get to turn on these mics and do this thing And occasionally people ask me to come and talk to them or whatever. It's all gravy, man.

Rich Roll:

And so I guess it's my version of what Paul de Gelder had to say. I don't fear death because I feel very alive and fulfilled in what I'm doing. I don't feel like I have unfinished business. And I'm grateful for what I have. And I didn't have to get bitten by a shark to experience that, you know what I mean?

Rip Esselstyn:

You got bitten by other things, but yeah. You recently did your big live podcast with Paul Hawkin. Was that just lights out gangbusters? Were you thrilled with how that turned out?

Rich Roll:

It was incredible. It was incredible.

Rip Esselstyn:

Does it make you want to do more of those?

Rich Roll:

Yeah. I mean, the idea was knock it out of the park with that one, establish that I can fill a room of 1100 people so that I can engender the confidence of venue bookers across America and set up a tour for next year. Yeah, I'm still ambitious. That's kind of the evolution of the podcast. And I think a big part of that is the fact that it makes this digital thing analog, right? We're having this conversation and it's real for us, but it's an abstraction for everyone that's going to listen to it. How can you cultivate greater community and connectivity amongst the people who are impacted by it? Well, you do that by bringing them together, right? And that's what I wanted to do. And we learned a lot through that experience. I mean, to have Paul, that guy's amazing. What a beautiful human being he is and the work that he's doing, so the whole thing was really an extraordinary experience and I can't wait to do more of it.

Rip Esselstyn:

And then here, right, in the studio, I mean, you have people, maybe the vast majority of your guests now probably come here, right? They do it here?

Rich Roll:

Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Rip Esselstyn:

That's pretty cool.

Rich Roll:

Yeah. It wasn't always that way. I was a traveling salesman for a long time.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah, I know.

Rich Roll:

Occasionally, I still take my kit when I get on a plane and go somewhere so I can grab interviews here and there. But for the most part, 95% of them now [inaudible 01:02:58] come here to do it.

Rip Esselstyn:

And so I'm looking at this chalk wall here, and you usually have the person that you interviewed, their name right there and maybe some drawings. Do you do that?

Rich Roll:

Yeah, I do that.

Rip Esselstyn:

You do?

Rich Roll:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

And so does that kind of help get you into that head space?

Rich Roll:

A little bit. I think it's a nice touch for the guests too, because they come in and they're like, "That actually took time for that guy to do that. I feel welcome. It's going to be okay." It's a way of saying this is a warm place where you can feel comfortable.

Rip Esselstyn:

When you look in the mirror, do you like what you see?

Rich Roll:

Most of the time.

Rip Esselstyn:

I hear you. I'm the same way.

Rich Roll:

I mean, look, I'm very much a work in progress. I got plenty of flaws and things that I could do better for sure.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. At some point recently, I think I heard you say that ... I think it was on one of your maybe your Instagram stories or something like that, about how the podcasts have just been a diversion from you writing, I think, another book or more books. And I heard that and I was like, "Bullshit." Now, just hear

me out here. And I was like, "Bullshit." I go, you've probably got ... and I don't know, I'm just making shit up right now, but 10 million, 20 million downloads of your podcast over the years. There's no way-

Rich Roll:

It's a little bit higher than that.

Rip Esselstyn:

Okay.

Rich Roll:

Times that by four.

Rip Esselstyn:

Wow.

Rich Roll:

Three or four.

Rip Esselstyn:

Wow. Okay. That's phenomenal. But I don't see any book having that kind of reach. If your goal is to reach people, I think what you're doing with the podcast is spot on, right? I mean, so-

Rich Roll:

Yeah, I mean, that's true. That's the most powerful argument against writing another book. I flick on a mic and I reach way more people than ... If I was to write a book, I've got to take a year and a half and focus intently and deeply on that. And it might reach a fraction of the audience that I'm reaching every single week on the podcast. However, I still think that the written word has its place and there is an ephemeral quality about the podcast. Nobody goes back and listens to episode 10. That's ancient history, right? But there's a permanence to a book and a tactile experience that comes with that that I think is important. And I do feel like I have a facility for writing and I do have things I want to say. And it's hard when you're doing the podcast. I mean, this really is a full-time job, pretty much, so carving out the time to do it, it just becomes harder and harder and easier to dismiss.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Well, and then the write-ups you do for each guest.

Rich Roll:

I spend all this time on that. I don't think anyone reads it or cares, but I care.

Rip Esselstyn:

Oh, I want you to know that I do. And I'm like, "Wow. I mean, Rich really put some time and thought and energy into that." And it's usually, I think, a very beautiful synopsis of the interview and actually, it makes me hungry to want to dive in and listen to it.

Rich Roll:

I'm glad to hear that. But I've often thought, "Why did I start doing that?" because then I establish that I do that and now I have to keep doing it, whereas everybody else with a podcast just writes a sentence or two sentences. And now it's like, "Oh, I have to do this flowing thing." I'm putting up a show tonight. Before you got here, I probably spent two hours on writing that little write up about the guest that's going up tonight. And then I think, "This is crazy. This is a crazy use of my time," but I don't know. I can't stop doing it.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, I enjoy reading it.

Rich Roll:

I'm glad. I feel better.

Rip Esselstyn:

You and I have been in the plant-based space for well over a decade, right? I feel like we are at a pretty amazing place where this thing is going to just bust wide open. We're going to see a tsunami fall upon us. Are you feeling the same way?

Rich Roll:

100%, 100%. I mean, look around. The mainstreaming of the plant-based movement is undeniable, whether it's the Gamechangers documentary or it's the proliferation of all these plant-based food companies. I mean, the plant-based food sector, the plant-based milks, plant-based dairy products, the meat analogs, all of this, this is the fastest growing, most robust part of our economy right now in many ways. There are venture capital funds established solely to invest in these types of companies.

Rip Esselstyn:

Totally.

Rich Roll:

That is something that would have been unheard of. And I know when you and I first started trying to figure out how to blaze a career in this world, a lot of people were like, "You can't make a living doing this, right? You can do it as a side hustle, but you're going to have to get a job at some point." And to see this embrace of this lifestyle that both of us have been advocating for so long at such massive scale is unbelievable. I mean, if we haven't reached the tipping point yet, we're inching up to it pretty quickly here.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. I read an article just the other day that talked about how by 2030, livestock, just animal agriculture will be obsolete, right? It's going to be death by a thousand cuts.

Rich Roll:

The podcast that I put ...

Rich Roll:

Right.

Rip Esselstyn:

It's going to be death by a thousand cuts.

Rich Roll:

The podcast that I put up earlier this week was with Pat Brown from Impossible Foods. That's the drum that he's beating. And his ambition, his mission is audacious, to end animal agriculture, but look at the impact that his company has already had in that space, and ask him, and he'll tell you, he's just starting. As well, Ethan Brown and everybody else who's in that space.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Well, and the other thing besides, I guess you call these plant-based meats, but there's also going to be, there's this thing called precision fermentation, where it's almost like you're actually growing beef, chicken, whatever, and it's right now, it's just the cost to grow it. It is so ridiculous. But the prediction is by 2030, it'll be 10 times cheaper than what it is right now to basically grow a cow, cut it up, all that stuff. And I mean, so whether it's plant-based, whether it's actual animal that's grown in a cell, in a lab, actual animals out in the fields, wherever they are, in pens, that's going to be obsolete. No more, no more. You're right, it will be eradicated just like smoking cigarettes is. Less than 20% of the population is now smoking cigarettes, right? 93% of the population now is what? Now eating meat and meat byproducts. So, that would be cool if 2030, we can get-

Rich Roll:

Strange times.

Rip Esselstyn:

Below 20% of America eating meat.

Rich Roll:

I know. It's crazy.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah.

Rich Roll:

It's crazy.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. And then, everywhere I look, climate change, right?

Rich Roll:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

People weren't talking about this 10 years ago.

Rich Roll:

No. What's great is that now, there are so many entry points for people to embrace this lifestyle. So, somebody who's not compelled by the health argument or by the compassion argument very well may be moved by the environmental concerns of our food choices or any version thereof. So, I just think it broadens the lens and allows more people to see the incredible benefits of living this way.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. And I'm wondering like in how many years is it going to, there's going to be such a stigma associated with eating meat that it's similar to smoking cigarettes. It's like, "I'm cool. I'm cool, dude."

Rich Roll:

Totally. And on top of that, how about the civil rights argument? I think that we will look back on the way that we've treated all these animals and just be appalled. Right? And think, how could people have done that? In the way that we look back on the way that we've treated indigenous cultures.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yep. Yep. Absolutely. Like you said, when you first interviewed me, I think it was in late December, maybe 2016, you said, "It checks every box."

Rich Roll:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Right? It checks every box.

Rich Roll:

It's like, it's rigged. Nature rigged it. And they're like, why can't you see what's right in front of you?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah, totally.

Rich Roll:

And now people are waking up and realizing that.

Rip Esselstyn:

One of the things that I'm trying to get better at, and I'd love to get your advice opinion is being mindful in maybe starting a meditative practice. The only form of meditation that I do these days is I go out and I swim. I go out for a bike, maybe a run. So, it's like meditation in motion.

Rich Roll:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

But I don't ever really sit still.

Rich Roll:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

And I'm wondering what, any recommendation, how do I start? Are the benefits instantaneous? Does it take a while?

Rich Roll:

The benefits are not instantaneous. It's sort of like getting back into the pool when you haven't swum in a couple of years. You're going to have to go through some discomfort before you start to see results. Or when you begin a new dietary protocol, it's not going to happen overnight. But you're comfortable with that. You know what that process is like. I think for myself, for many years, I sort of just said, or declared that my meditation was riding my bike or going to the pool or running. And I thought that it was the same thing. I said, "That's my meditation."

Rich Roll:

What I've realized is that there is a qualitative difference between a formal meditation practice and the kind of active meditation mindfulness that you get from physical activity. And the difference really is in, there's something about cultivating a practice of stillness that allows you to be present in your life and be the observer, the objective observer of your experience from a more detached perspective. At the very least, in a very tangible way, it gives you that extra... It's almost like time slows down, and you have that extra moment.

Rich Roll:

Let's say, you're walking into a situation where you know it could be fraught with conflict, or somebody is going to push your buttons. Rather than just instinctively react, like you always do, and perpetuate whatever cycle you have with that individual, you get that extra moment. And you can think... Not think, you can calibrate your response. That in and of itself is like a superpower. Just be like, "Oh, I was going to say that, but actually, it'd be better if I said this." Or "what am I really trying to do here?" Or "where's that person really coming from?" That is a huge thing, I think. And it's just allowed me to be more aware of when I'm running a pattern, as opposed to actually coming from a conscious place or the best version of what I have to offer a situation.

Rip Esselstyn:

How long ago would you say you in earnest started your practice?

Rich Roll:

I mean, first of all, let's be clear. I'm not perfect at this. And I do it in spurts. I'll go on runs and then I'll get interrupted, and then I get back to it, and it's like... I could be a lot better with the consistency of my practice. But I do know, I mean, it was, I don't know how many years ago, but maybe five or six years ago, I started doing it with some regularity. And like I said, I'll have seasons where I'm really good, and then I get off and then I have to get back on.

Rich Roll:

But when I'm doing it consistently every day, anywhere from usually 20 minutes, but sometimes it's 5 or 10, 30 days into that, you start to really feel different. And you have to kind of do that to get to that place where you can recognize the benefits of it, just like anything else.

Rip Esselstyn:

Do you and Julie talk much about your meditative practice?

Rich Roll:

She's much further down the line. Her practice is like, she doesn't let anything interfere with her morning situation. She's really good about it.

Rip Esselstyn:

And what kind of time does she carve out usually for that?

Rich Roll:

I mean, she'll also combine it with tea and journaling, and it's a whole thing. I mean, it's probably a 40-minute thing that she does, but she'll wake up at like 4:00 in the morning, 4:30 in the morning, pretty regularly to do it.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. I know in your... You had an interview with Tim Ferriss, where he went to this Vipassana course. And I know about it because I have a younger brother, Zeb, who's been to like 10 of them.

Rich Roll:

Oh, wow.

Rip Esselstyn:

It's 10 days, a vow of silence.

Rich Roll:

Right.

Rip Esselstyn:

And you're just basically meditating. I think Tim was saying it almost pushed him over the edge, in his interview with you.

Rich Roll:

Yeah. He was like, "I don't necessarily recommend it."

Rip Esselstyn:

No. No.

Rich Roll:

Yeah, it sounded really hard. And I've heard that from other people as well. But what does your brother say? I mean, obviously, he's getting a lot out of it or he wouldn't keep doing it.

Rip Esselstyn:

Oh, yeah. Well, Zeb, he's always kind of had a bit of a spiritual kind of bent to him. And for five years, he went out and was kind of practicing Buddhism, kind of off in the wild. But he loves the experience. By the end, he just says it's like rain is falling over every pore of your body. It's magical. I'd love to do it. I just got to carve out 10 days to try and do it.

Rich Roll:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

But-

Rich Roll:

I'm tempted to. I've never done it. I've never done anything like that.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. So, yeah.

Rich Roll:

We'll do it together.

Rich Roll:

We can be competitive about it. Well, if Rip's still sitting there, I can't leave.

Rip Esselstyn:

Ah.

Rich Roll:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

All right. So, I'll just, I need to start. I need to start being mindful.

Rich Roll:

Yeah. The other part of your question is like, how do you start? And I think it's never been easier. In the same way that the whole plant-based thing has blown up, the mindfulness meditation space has exploded as well. So, there's all these apps now, whether it's Headspace or Calm. Sam Harris's Waking Up is great. He has all this really robust instruction that's very easy to understand. And he kind of takes you through the practical implications of what you're doing. You can set timers and set aside the time. It's just like anything else, you make it a priority. It's not like... It's that thing where you say, "I never

have time," but you know as well as anyone else, for things that are important, you make the time. So, it's a question of whether you're willing to make that decision to prioritize it.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. So, on a day-to-day basis right now, with everything you got going on, eating the way you eat, being mindful, trying to get out for a run or a swim or a bike, your family, doing all your work. Are you planning your days out? Are you flying by the seat of your pants? Or is there some intention behind each day and each week?

Rich Roll:

A lot of it is flying by the seat of my pants, especially since our family is now split between these two homes because of my teenage daughters' schooling. Every day it's like, "All right, what do I have today? And where's Julie? And who needs to be driven where?" A lot of it is transportation logistics, of moving kids around and things like that. And a lot of that dictates how I set the schedule. But I do have to be regimented. I know there are certain days where I'm here and that's when I schedule my podcast, and the meat. But I try not to schedule anything before 12:00 because that's when I train and do these other things for self-care. That doesn't, I don't always succeed at that. And then there's trips and things that come up. So, there is forecasting. I know these are the things that I want to be doing in the next year or several months, and I'm plotting out well into the future on that stuff. But a lot of times, my palm is in front of my face and I'm just looking at what needs to get done today.

Rip Esselstyn:

With the podcast, do you get nervous at all before any of your interviews? Or is this just so second-nature to you? You get excited or?

Rich Roll:

I do. I do get nervous in an excited way. And I think, I mean, look, I've done like 500 of these things right now. So, it's like, if I don't know what I'm doing by now, I'm never going to know. But there's always ways to do it better. And I go into every one of them with this earnest desire to make it as great as I can make it. I want it to be the definitive conversation with that human being, you know what I mean? So, I put that pressure on myself and 99% of the time, I don't achieve that, but that's-

Rip Esselstyn:

The goal.

Rich Roll:

That's what I go into it for. And whether it falls short or not, there's only so much control I have over these things, these sorts of things. I've learned techniques and ways to kind of make it the way that I wanted to make it. But I take it seriously. I do a ton of research.

Rip Esselstyn:

So, when you say you do a ton of research, like a couple hours? I mean, it just depends upon the interview?

Rich Roll:

It depends on the guest. Yeah. I mean, I do a lot of authors, so I do my best to read their books. And sometimes, I get halfway through or 70% through, or I listen to the audiobook, but I really try to be steeped in, in their world, as I can't... I just try to enter their world for a couple of days. So, I could be listening to three different audiobooks at the same time, because I know I have these people coming up. So, I just try to be kind of in it at all times. And I'll open up like 30 tabs on a browser and just go deep.

Rip Esselstyn:

So, are you doing audiobooks? Are you reading? Or because of all-

Rich Roll:

It depends on the kind of book too, but audiobooks. Because I go out and train too. So, if I'm on my bike or I'm running, I'm also preparing for a podcast by listening to what this person has to say. But I think there's also, what I've also learned is that you can prep too much for somebody, and then it's stale, because you know the answer to every question. So, there's a certain spontaneity that you want. And that only comes with the curiosity. It's hard to be curious when you know everything about the person. Right? And so, I think it's more engaging for the listener if you're well-versed, but not an expert.

Rip Esselstyn:

So, when I was starting this, I was like, "Hey, I want to get in touch with you." And asked you a bunch of questions about doing a podcast. I never actually followed up on that.

Rich Roll:

Right.

Rip Esselstyn:

Which is really stupid of me. Right? But I've had to learn and I'm, I mean, I'm learning every day. I'm learning right now. I mean, I was nervous coming into this, because you're like, this is your space. This is just... I know, I'm just letting you know. This is your thing. And I'm like, all right, do I want to talk about finding... I'll try, do I want to talk about where... I was trying to figure out where I wanted to take it. And what I've realized is, the best thing is just you and me talking. Right? It's like all this stuff I wanted to go, in the beginning of this interview right now, I'm like, "Oh, man."

Rich Roll:

You have to allow it to go where it wants to go. There's a letting go. And that comes with just showing up and being present. If I say something that triggers something that makes you curious, then that's the thread that you pull.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah, exactly.

Rich Roll:

You're in that interview where they have their list of 10 questions or whatever, and they ask you the question and you blah, blah, blah. And you answer it and they go, "Awesome."

Rip Esselstyn:

Right.

Rich Roll:

And they ask you the next one, right?

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah.

Rich Roll:

And it's so dry and uninteresting because that person is not present for what is actually happening.

Rip Esselstyn:

Well, and that to me is the most important thing in doing an interview and doing a podcast. And you have to have that. You have to let go and you have to have faith that you're going to be present. And so, what... And there's a real art in listening. Right?

Rich Roll:

Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

And not just-

Rich Roll:

Well, think about this. Have you ever been at a dinner party and been in a conversation with someone and couldn't think of what to ask the person? If you're listening and you're engaged in a conversation, you're not thinking like, "What's my next question?"

Rip Esselstyn:

Right. No, you're not.

Rich Roll:

You're just responding to what's happening. Right?

Rip Esselstyn:

Totally. When we were talking, and when you interviewed me the first time, I talked a little bit about my relationship with my father, and how he was not a fan of me continuing to be a triathlete after a certain number of years. He thought I was kind of on a fool's mission, and it was this phantom mistress, and it was not healthy, and that I was avoiding getting married, getting a real job, and all this other stuff. And my father and I have a much healthier relationship now. But when I was reading Finding Ultra, the relationship with your dad and some of the resentment I think that you had with your dad. And I just want to know. And now that I have a son, right? I mean, where are you with your relationship with your dad?

Rich Roll:

My relationship with my dad now is really good. It's really good. It's not as inmeshed as yours because you guys would work together.

Rip Esselstyn:

We work together.

Rich Roll:

You work together. But we went through a lot, and I put him through a lot, and then he put me through a lot. We've been at each other for a long time, but we finally arrived in this place of love and mutual respect, that feels really good. Part of that is a lot of growth that I've undergone, but also growth that he's undergone as well. And what's great is now, he writes books. He writes these historical biographies. So, he just wrote this book about Marshall that came out, and it's being well-received. And he's doing an event in New York with General Petraeus. It's crazy, so I'm going to go for that. And my parents came out for the live event. That was like, for them, like they're trying to wrap their heads around what I do and they don't quite get it, but they... I had my dad on the podcast. And so, he was able to experience the response to that.

Rip Esselstyn:

Oh, I got to listen to that one.

Rich Roll:

Yeah. And we talked about our... We went pretty deep into our relationship on that, which was pretty cool. So, there's been a ton of healing there and I think he finally kind of understands what I do and what I'm about. And he's proud, which feels good to me. Because he was like, for a long time, he's like, "What are you doing?" You know? I get to be proud of him in this third act with him being this author, which is great. And to have him on the podcast and try to support what he's doing is a pretty cool way of trying to pay it forward for him too.

Rip Esselstyn:

Hmm. Is he still driving a MG Midget?

Rich Roll:

He finally sold that thing, but only recently. He kept it up in Michigan for a long time. I mean, that was, I remember when he bought that thing, I was like 13 or something like that.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. I had an old girlfriend that had an MG Midget and I drove that thing around all the time. So, when I saw that when you wrote the book that he was driving or had one and still had it, I was like, "Oh, I got to find out if he still has that thing."

Rich Roll:

Yeah. Every once in a while, I see an MG on the road and I'll be like, "Dad, I saw an MG." And he's like, "An MGB or a Midget?" It's like, there's a difference. Not many Midgets around.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. Yeah.

Rip Esselstyn:

Rich-

Rich Roll:

Go-kart engine in it.

Rip Esselstyn:

So, I didn't say this in the very beginning, so I'll do it now. But the whole concept of season two of the Plant-Strong podcast is the heart of a hero. It's to have people on the podcast that are really changing the game, and changing the game and kind of showing people how to do what they thought couldn't be done. And just bringing people on board with this movement. You, I think better than just about anybody, epitomize that with what you've done with your incredibly rich, powerful podcast. And I just want to say thank you for sharing a couple hours of your time with me. I look forward to the next time that we get to see each other, whether it's an event, who knows where, but you are a truly plant-strong brother. And it's been great.

Rich Roll:

I appreciate that. That means more to me than you can possibly imagine, Rip. It really does. So, thank you for letting me share a little bit today. And on that subject of kind of the heroes arc or the heroes journey, we're all the heroes of our own lives, right? We're all the movie stars in the movie of our own lives. I think that people look at change, and they're scared of it, or they're intimidated by it, or they see that somebody else has done it, but they don't see that own, the ability that they have within themselves. And if my story or the work that I do on the podcast and the other thing stands for anything, it's that change isn't just possible, it's what we're here to do. We're here to grow, and we're here to evolve. And we're all sitting on top of these reservoirs of potential.

Rich Roll:

So, if you feel stuck, I assure you that you have the capacity to improve your lives, not just with your relationship with food, your diet, your nutrition, but in every facet and area of your life. And that is something that comes across in every guest that I've had on the show. When you ask me, what have you learned from all of these people? All of these people have demonstrated that in different ways in their own lives. And so, what I mine from that is, is that ability, that capacity resides within all of us.

Rip Esselstyn:

Yeah. You are one articulate, amazing human being, man. Hey, with that, peace, Engine 2. Keep it Plant-Strong.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:31:39]