



Moving Through...Unexpected Gifts

Acceptance
Confession
Amends
Gratitude
Hope
Perseverance

a companion to the video series available at
www.nacr.org/community-and-confession
or www.twotp.com

by Kelly Hall

A joint project of the National Association for Christian Recovery (www.nacr.org)
and The Work of the People (www.twotp.com)

Introduction by Teresa McBean

Watch:

Community with Gregg Taylor

Gregg is a community architect and pastor for Houston reVision, an organization that leverages the power of community to connect gang-affected youth and kids on the edge with adult mentors, positive peer experiences and life-changing resources in order to help them revise the stories of their lives toward a hope-filled future. He is also the Chairman of the Board of the National Association for Christian Recovery.



Acceptance; amends; confession; gratitude; hope; perseverance...oh, how we long for you in our lives! Imagine a world where these words are regularly practiced. Who doesn't want some of THAT? In this series, you will watch, read, and experience a variety of perspectives on these very concepts. But first, let me give you an example from my own life that I hope offers encouragement to you, enough so that you'll dare not assume these are concepts beyond your grasp. We invite you to take a risk and believe, listen, study and accept the possibility that these are more than abstract concepts or fine ideals, but are alive and well and available to you as personal experiences. After several tough weeks in our recovery community—including the "sudden" death of two young men who lost their battle with addiction—I was a crying mess of sorrow and prone to seeing the world as a dark place inhospitable to the ways of God (and concepts like this series will discuss). Worship felt hollow; I struggled to connect with people in my community. When I fall into this pit of despair (seeing as how I am 40 + 20 years old and seasoned in the ways of commitment to recovery regardless the results) I have some practices that I lean on to mend my broken heart. Among these disciplines is my daily meditative walk.

The thing about spiritual practices that I find so challenging is that they are rarely ideally executed. My imagination ignites with the idea, picturing long meandering strolls on the James River trail near my home. I romanticize taking a backpack loaded with devotional supplies, a thermos of coffee, a freshly baked muffin (gluten-free) and a camera to capture the beauty that I know God is waiting to woo me with—nice fantasy, but not my real world. My actual walk on this particular day included my daughter's two dogs—a dainty Cava-poo named Charley and a feisty Shitzu/toy Australian Border Collie rescue, Lexi, the size of an award winning butternut squash. These two tiny munchkins are a handful on a good day, but I wasn't having many good days. Nevertheless, I found their matching leashes, laced up my sneakers, threw my camera strap over my shoulder and headed out.

Towards the end of a laborious uninspired walk, the pups and I were overtaken by a young man whipping past us riding a long board at breakneck speed. Following the slope and curve of the hill with the expertise of one who is used to leaning in, this tattooed risk taker held a cigarette that dipped toward the ground as he hurtled past me. In that moment I had no cues to indicate that he was a vessel God was about to use well, and I confess, I silently judged his self-destructive tendencies.

After the dogs and I made our own turn and navigated down the slippery rock strewn road, it wasn't long before Charley and Lexi strained on their leashes and came to alert. This is NEVER my happy place. It usually means a dog is ahead and the two of them act embarrassingly like a pair of wolves when confronted with another dog that isn't in their pack of two. Sure enough, I looked up to see my nightmare on four paws—a pit bull/beagle mix running towards us full throttle. He, in turn, was being followed by an elderly woman (ok, someone my age) who I assumed was a careless dog owner with no consideration for others and the skateboarder dude, longboard tucked under his arm, no cigarette in sight.

It turns out, as usual, my judgmental presumptions were wrong on all counts. An elderly gentleman in the neighborhood had recently rescued this muscle-bound beast from a shelter as a gift for his ailing wife—who promptly passed away and left him in charge of this bundle of energy. The two pursuers were distraught, fearing that something might happen to this master escape artist, leaving the mourning man without anyone to care for.

The older woman and young man, unlikely teammates by any standards, bonded in a chase to corral the dodger as he circled my two dogs in a frenzy of barking. Without provocation, my mutts did a completely unexpected thing. They promptly sat down and stared in silence—pretending at a certain mannerliness and grace that I had never witnessed before and doubt will ever see again. Eventually, rescue was achieved although it was not easy. So much for meditative walking with a decent view and coffee! The great thing about any meditative walk is that eventually you turn toward home with or without the ambience. After all that excitement, Charley, Lexi and I did just that. The adrenaline rush faded and my mind returned to the original intention: meditation. How would I understand this walk if I practiced a surrendered willingness to be present in the truth? I reclaimed my purpose in prayer: I walk with intention, knowing that all I can do is put one foot in front of the other, the rest is out of my hands.

My walk reminded me that the practices of acceptance, amends, confession, community, gratitude, hope and perseverance surround us. They are simply everywhere, available for accessing if we are not too tired, too hungry, angry, lonely, or blind to notice. Strangers going about their business abandon their own agendas and unite in a mission so one grieving widower might be reunited with the only other living being he had left to love. Even ill-mannered pets with small dog complexes will occasionally demonstrate grace under pressure. Glorious! Am I over-spiritualizing? I don't think so. In fact, I rediscover God's Spirit time and again in the small kindnesses and sacrifices of strangers, in the faith of men and women who are, as Nadia Bolz-Weber says, "all the wrong people."

We've asked some of them to share their experiences with you.

May God bless you,

Teresa

Acceptance

Watch:

Acceptance with Phil Bjornberg

Phil is a Missional Transitional Deacon at Trinity Episcopal Church, Portland, CT



Acceptance with Donna Clark Love

Donna is a Recovery Coach and an internationally recognized expert and trainer in the area of Bully Prevention.



Going Deeper

What is your earliest memory of acceptance? Rejection?

We all struggle with one another. Is there a person in your life, or type of person you struggle to accept?

What do you find hardest to accept about your life?

When did you come to know you are accepted by God?

How does your acceptance by God and yourself translate into how you accept others?

Reflection by Kelly Hall

During the course of my Spirit-led recovery program in my mid-to-late 30's the topic of acceptance was brought into discussion. And, when I say discussion, I do mean within a prayerful, surrendered state of learning with God.

Yes, really. And yes, it was a trip.

As memories arose around the word acceptance, one in particular peaked my curiosity. Sometime around 7-8th grade I was invited to a "Pizza Pig Out" at a local church. I should tell you now that I wasn't raised Christian. And, you should also know that at the time, my family was going through some hardships. My parents were divorcing, and one of them was a recovering alcoholic. We were ejected from a comfortable financial living environment into poverty. So, I was naturally excited about free pizza, and agreed to go because I was hungry all of the time. I don't know if it was the mindset of not having food or just really not having food...but food was a topic that I was always considering. Maybe I am over-analyzing this...I was a teenager, and they said "pizza".

So, I went.

We gathered in a giant room where they plated up dinner. All the other kids were hanging out and having a good time, and although I was too, I was mostly focused on getting and enjoying my food...and whether or not I could sneak back around to get more food. (I can still feel that feeling, that deep want to have what I cannot have, the extraordinary. Have you ever felt that for anything?) After the dinner part of the night, they began to usher us through a roped off "exit" through the sanctuary. Everyone was corralled for a youth sermon.

They talked about going to hell. (What? We just ate, and it was heavenly.)

They talked about the fires of hell and the way one would hope and pray they could melt and be done with it, but hell just didn't work that way. You just kept on burning.

It was graphic.
It was intense.

I started to feel like I was experiencing it first hand. At some point, thankfully, they offered some magic words to escape eternal torture. All we had to do was accept Christ in our hearts! "Come up to the front, if you are ready to say these words and have Jesus pull you out of that fiery pit: Jesus, I accept you in my life. Please come into my heart."

It was so weird. Kids started flocking up with tears in their eyes and their arms in the air asking Jesus into their hearts. Suddenly, that pizza wasn't sitting so well with me anymore, but I stayed by my seat. I remember repeating

the pastor's words in my head thinking just in case...I didn't even know anything about Jesus besides the little guy in the mangers

I saw around at Christmas time. Perhaps a lot of those kids who attended that night had a true acceptance experience.

I didn't.

Even with a parent in rehab who would recite to me the Lord's Prayer and the Serenity prayer each night before bed (and, I repeat, we weren't Christians but this was part of his program), to my greatest knowledge, I did not accept Jesus into my heart. Seems like a weird and slightly hateful thing for God to bring up my non-acceptance when wanting me to learn about acceptance.

Maybe I am a slow learner.

It didn't help that I felt rejected as a person after coming through my parents' and family issues—not to mention just average teenager issues. One of my parents mistreated the other, and the other one rejected both mistakes admitted and the following amends. I didn't feel like I was accepted or a part of anything. My DNA was at war. So, how would I understand acceptance? I didn't even know to look for it. But, God did. I began to remember the feeling and knowing of being accepted, because next we traveled further back in time to an even younger me.

The closest I can come to describing it is oneness. When I recall my early childhood (before the fall) I could be found outside climbing trees and swinging on rope swings. Playing with the cool winds of fall. Facing strong gusts, opening my mouth, and letting it puff my cheeks and dry out my throat until I coughed. I never felt alone in my youth. I never felt separate. Everything was right and good. The gold to red to browning of fall's leaves; the numb of winter's grays, browns, and blacks; the perking up of spring's greens; and, the rise of summer's heat and humidity. It all belonged.

It wasn't until life sharpened against me...

It wasn't until battles erupted and death was looming...

It wasn't until I rejected my reality and wished away my life...

that i started to feel so far away, and unable to deal with life as it was.

This is how God taught me acceptance. And, as it turns out, acceptance is a really big deal if you want to live in reality.

This is what I learned: acceptance is the ability to let what is (things that are outside my control) be what is. If I go about my life unable to accept life as it was, then what can I believe to be true? What can I count on? If I can't accept my parents' divorce, for example, and they have both moved on and remarried, then I am in a world of tortured, unmanageable mental struggle. Insanity, honestly. Disrupted shalom, to be biblically prudent. I can't live life well if I cannot "accept the things I cannot change". I will be constantly trying to fix everything because nothing seems right—even things that don't want or need fixing! Believe me, I know because I have lived this scenario. I spent decades rejecting myself and the life that was given to me.

Accepting things that I cannot change relieves me of the lie and my entrained belief that things are actually not as they should be. Things may not be as I believe they should be or have been, and yet I still have to accept that they are the way God lets them be. And, somehow in that, I become okay. Because God's acceptance leads the charge now. If God lets me be me, accepts me just the way I am, then I get to, too.

Practice

Having a silence practice creates a sacred time and space for one to observe thought patterns and let them space out until the only thing left to observe is “no thing”—God within and without. Practicing silence with an intention toward acceptance might bring up memories from the past or current life events for you to observe. You may remember something you are ready to accept or something you are not. As much as possible while observing, try not to judge but feel with your heart, seek compassion for the situation and for all people involved. Ask God which way to go. Breathe. It may be good to keep a journal of what you see and hear during your practice.

The Art of Self-Acceptance by Joel McKerrow

I remember the day that I divorced from my body. A cut and a separation.
I was fourteen and hairy and she was fifteen and told me
that she would never date someone with a hairy back.
I crumbled. Stumbled. Ran. Headfirst out of that room.
Headfirst. It is the right word. My body did not follow. I left it behind.
Forgot that I had one.
It was easier that way.

Sometimes I wish that we were all just
science-fiction heads
held in glass jars
interacting with the world around us through mechanical arms,
It would certainly make life easier.
But I am not and you are not
and we are not made to be like everybody else,
have the same body as everybody else,
any body becomes no body when they try to be like Every body.
 My body is red hair and freckle.
 My body is hairy back and hairy shoulders.
 My body is awkward and lumpy bumpy bits.
 My body carries a culture within its wilderness.

I am learning the art of self-acceptance.

I have never looked magazine ready.
It would take a long time to photoshop the hairiness out of the pages.
It is too harsh a world with too many a critic
and too much to be insecure about in the face of so many opinions.
I cannot live up to who they want me to be,
I refuse to laser my hair away.
Refuse to give in to the ideal of smooth skin with no blemish.
No blemish. It is a lie that does not become us.
Whilst blemish is seen as a defect. A beauty marred.
Its origin came from the same root word as to make white. To shine. To burn bright.
So call me blemished.
And whilst you are it, call me flawed,
Flawed came from the same root word as a flake of snow.
 Call me blemished
 Call me flawed.
 Call me snow flake.
A beauty that shines

not out of some so called perfection, but out of the broken,
out of the marred and the scarred and the flawed and the blemished,

Within Japanese artistry there is a form of pottery known as Kintsugi.
A Japanese potter sits with a cracked ceramic
and she does not repair the broken pot,
she fills its cracks with a golden lacquer.
She does not see seamless as goodness.
The gold highlights the cracks, does not hide them
and it is this which makes the pottery even more beautiful.
The clearly visible fractured golden seams.
Look at my golden seams.

What we perceive as the things of defect are the things that make us most beautiful,
most unique.

Call me blemished.

Call me flawed.

Call me snowflake.

I am learning the art of self-acceptance.

Altogether Real, a responsive blessing by Kelly Hall

Seeker:

What is it about my perception that makes reality seem illusive,
shiftable, inflatable, deniable—altogether unreal?

God, take all the alternative things I distract myself with.
Show me the sweetness of this life you've given me.
I want so badly to accept what is right before me
as the gift that it is—real love. The kind that requires
the work of letting. The long-lasting, kind; servant-hearted,
down deep for-better-or-for-worse love. Steady going, yes.
Always with me, and yet there are moments
I forget it's there.

Days I cannot account for it. Times
where love no longer feels like enough—
I know experience teaches me otherwise but tell me, God:

How do I reconcile love, measure love,
without the ability to feel it?
Is love based on feeling?

Why
can't
the flow of love
be
just
right?

I need to snap out of it, God; see and believe
that the life I'm living is good and right and pure
and perfectly fitted to me.

That in spite of all my groveling, whining, and disheveled dramatics—
I am growing.
I am expanding in grace through it.

I am learning myself; my approach to surrender, my willingness
to “accept the things I cannot change”—which, thankfully
includes the presence of love, Your positive reinforcement of me
regardless of my feeling it.

Love gives me hindsight
to move toward acceptance of what comes,
even the hells.

Yes, Your love finds me,
even in the hells.

God:
Separate from Me, the unreal becomes real. Illusions,
human solutions can become a great comfort to a broken heart,
a challenged mind. They can even work.
But, without recognition of Me, the vision is incomplete.
Without the knowledge of My substantiation, humans starve for other.

Bring Me all of your issues. Just put them down right here.
I know how to handle it.

My Love is freely yours, always.
Always!
It resides in you, living and breathing...
it calls Me to Myself to enliven you.
Even when you numb out, even when you dumb down
I still AM there...giving. I do not disrupt the flow,
that's not Me.

The flow
of love
is always
just right.

Your awareness may not be,
your feelings may be deceiving.
Nevertheless,

I love you.
I am growing within you, shaping you from the inside out
teaching you to accept Me more and more,
to trust Me with more and more...

Especially through the hells!
Yes, My love is available even in the hells.

Confession

Watch: Confession with Matt Russell

Matt is an Assistant Professor of Recovery Ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary and a Senior Associate Pastor at Saint Paul's United Methodist Church in Houston, TX.



Watch: Confession with Dale Ryan

Dale is an Associate Professor of Recovery Ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary and the Director of the Fuller Institute for Recovery Ministry.



Going Deeper

The spiritual practice of confession is often approached with fear, and rightly so. The things those of us in recovery bring to the confessional are things we have worked through and established to be our responsibility. We have come to say to another person what's "on us". This requires faith and the willingness to be vulnerable. This flexes our faith, and is motivated by hope.

Matt Russell mentioned that "confession is God's whisper, cry...pleading to come back home to him and community". Dale Ryan says "confession is a truth-telling that is appropriate when you have hurt yourself or someone else". Spend time considering your need for the spiritual practice of confession.

Are you estranged from yourself? Have you had enough?

There are several ways to take a "fearless moral inventory" as mentioned about the Fourth Step of the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. There is one thing that is true regardless of which way you go about it: you have to start somewhere. Consider one relationship where you have deep resentments and bitterness. Start asking yourself "What am I responsible for?" and "What am I not responsible for?" Be as specific as you can. Start writing and see where that takes you.

When it comes time to confess, choose wisely. Remember, Dale mentioned that "part of the hard work of confession is finding places where dangerous spiritual practices such as [confession] are safe to do."

Tell the truth, to your best ability. If you lie, try telling the truth again. The flip side of purging our biggest shames, pains, failures, and regrets goes unknown to us until we give up and release. Confession takes courage, soul-searching, and integrity. Are you ready?

Confessing our fears leads us to a place where we can experience God's presence. Confessing our shame leads us to hear God say, "I love this kid like crazy, they really make me happy." —Dale Ryan

Reflection by Kelly Hall

Confession is not a well-practiced concept in my family of origin (unless you consider the forced confessions made against our better judgment due to being busted, and this usually required some sort of legal proof). It was through my family that I learned the exact opposite of a confessed life—"lie until you die".

My maternal grandmother kept secrets. Lots of them. She also has a very hard time being wrong, of which she was often, just like any and all of us. Unfortunately, her aging mind under the circumstances of her life could not keep all of her secrets straight. Soon, once-kept lies started to reveal themselves to the family. The loosing of these lies began to injure many of us, and hearts were broken.

There were several times during the intrusion of these lies into my family that I would call my grandmother, whom I love so very much, to see if she'd like some help considering her options. Turns out she did want help, and we talked through how to listen well, apologize (maybe for the first time ever) and make amends. Sadly, she was unable to use her new tools of humility, and to this day sits alone in her house driving herself mad about all the things we now know while trying desperately to figure out new cover stories to regain control of her reputation with her offspring.

This really hurts. It hurts that she is hurting and it hurts that others are hurting. It hurts that she will not take steps towards wholeness. Thinking of her, and on occasion calling her to chat, gives me cause to run a thorough moral inventory of my life. It is a good opportunity to check in and see where I am falling short of integrity, where I try to be right about everything, and where I am being stubborn and/or afraid.

Confession is a challenging rite that we get to practice as we continue to walk towards wholeness through our recovery process. My grandmother may not choose to change at this point in her life, but with God's help I can. I hope and pray for my grandmother every day. She has been a pillar in my family and a loving, giving soul to us when we were desperate for food, money, and loving affection. I also pray for all of us who were raised in a system that teaches lying is safer than truth-telling. That the false self is more acceptable than the true self—lies, all of it.

God receives us as we are. We are God's by God's faithfulness alone. Telling the truth about what you have done, or even past shames and blames that you might have been carrying that aren't yours to carry, is a freedom practice. Releasing these pains and traumas to one other person and God can be the scariest thing ever, but on the other side of confession, liberation is waiting.

Practice

If the work and insanity that comes with keeping your secrets secret, or your lies in check is a pain you would love to live without, confession is the way. Here are a few suggestions to consider as you consider approaching this practice:

- 1.) Work steps one through four of Alcoholics Anonymous to your greatest ability.
- 2.) Meet with your sponsor (if you are in the program) or find a trusted individual who has experience with receiving fifth step work, or confessions.
- 3.) Be as honest as you can. If you catch yourself lying or wanting to leave something out, confess that, too.

The Slow Drip of Confession by Joel McKerrow

Confession is always glamourised,
 until the moment of confession.
Espoused as honourable and principled
 until the moment of disclosure.
 Until knees hit floor and shame rises like ocean sweat,
 until she looks you in the eye,
 until the words get lost in the labyrinth of your throat.
Confession is meant to be the right thing to do, but it never feels as such.
It is empty stomach.
It is gnawing.
It is crawling skin and eyes so heavy you can no longer look the person in the eye.
I looked myself in the eye this morning,
stared long at the way my eye-lash quivered,
the slope of nose and curl of hair. I looked until I remembered,
then I could not look any longer. I turned from myself.
The art of turning from yourself, it is perfected in the moments
before confession.
Things are kept in the dark for a reason,
 their exposure threatens who I am meant to be,
 the me I espouse to be,
 the me you want me to be. It is not clean.
To dismember oneself from a mask.
It takes many tools and much prying and still blood is drawn and
 drips
 slow
 to the floor.
Beneath the feet of every confession is a pool of it.
The larger the disclosure the greater the red lake, red river,
flowing out into the future.
And what is most oft not realized
 is that the river flowing is not just the confessors blood,
 it is too the one sinned against,
 they shed their pain in the moment, river red and absolution.
Have you ever forgiven someone who has confessed their curse against you?
It asks too much, confession. It asks too much.
Denial is far easier, fake wallpaper, a masquerade.
Denial is bliss.

I'll tell you though what is better...
 The moment after.
 The season post-confession.
 Blood flowing out in front of you.
The trepidation of two people moving forward,
 the realization they had been stuck for a long time,
 the revelation that light is always a greater friend than the dark,
 new birth, rebirth, the beginning again.
Confession names a thing for what it is,
 and names,
 they help you work out what is worthwhile
and what is not. But still, I must confess, I am bad at this, confession.

The Struggle: a Confession by Kelly Hall

days like this,
words stump me.
they cut straight through the stems of blooms
drawing from the depths,
and collecting from the sky—
yes, words, that would seemingly,
(for a poet, anyway)
uncurl like the long delicate arms of a ballerina
bouncing gently upon the warmth of late spring—
soft and powerful.

words.
words mean to bind me,
pull me down into flesh into bone
slow growing and groaning
the practices and intimacy of language
holding this expression of me into place
right now, on this scrap of paper
for moments longer than lips
so keen to speak of liberation
“this time” for all times.

words come close enough to pain me,
challenge and contain me,
woo and shoo me,
enliven and prove me.
save and damn me
pull together and loosen my causes.
they allow me to defy dimensions,
join my heart to God’s
for pleasure, immense and unlevelled pleasure—

oh, words! they hardly ever come alone,
but as thoughts strung together
through hearts to hands to feet
to move my depth,
to lighten my life.

You are Forgiven, a Benediction by Kelly Hall

You are forgiven...

You,
who are raised with privilege,
never allowed to fail,
abusing the law while stepping upon others,
raping the unconscious...

You,
who've been making your own way
working hard, through all the wrong places.
Who's shortcomings have gone public,
been used against you,
and led you to detach,
isolate,
shut down.

You who withhold and hide,
You who roll over and play dead,
You who yell and raise fists,
You who rather not make waves...

Perhaps you are awakening to your humanity after all.
To the idea that One greater would expose Himself
with great Love and affection
and an ever widening circle of grace
welcoming you to Me.

Come—even at your worst!—
tears pattering the ground,
a steady, deliberate percussive procession,
and reach for Me.

Even as you stand before the eyes of those who unjustly condemn...
I will receive you, I will reunite you to Origin through Me
Love responding to Love responding to Love—
an against-all-odds, right-fitted, all-for-one Love!

Your faith has liberated you,
and My faith has restored you.

You are forgiven,
Go in peace.

See this benediction come to life at
<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/you-are-forgiven>

Making Amends

Watch: Making Amends with Clay Everitt

Clay is a general contractor in Houston, TX and is an active participant at Mercy Street.



Watch: Making Amends with John Doss



Going Deeper

Having decided that you are powerless over your dependencies and turned your life over to God, you made a thorough moral inventory of your rights and wrongs.

How are you fairing in your inventory process?

After examining your list, and confessing your wrongs to God and another human being, there are amends to make. Are you ready?

What, if anything, is keeping you from making amends?

What is propelling you towards making amends?

The process of making amends is a selfless offering to those we have done wrong, offering no rationalization, excuses, or defense on our behalf. We offer to make things right, and then we begin the process of living amends: continuing to stay sober from our dependencies, continuing to honor the relationship, rebuilding trust all the while. You may have a template for your amend making, but here is one I picked up from Dale Ryan at an NACR Conference years ago:

"I did _____. It was wrong, and I am sorry. How can I make it right?"

We don't make any amends to gain forgiveness. We make amends as a commitment to our recovery process, to extend peace and restoration to those whom we have wronged.

Pray and journal your way through the amend making process. Think carefully about what having living amends, what Clay Everett calls "living a life to give back" means to you. Write about it, and talk with your sponsor.

Reflection by Dale Ryan

Making amends is not easy. It is certainly not instinctive for us. There is a reason why many of us need to spend so much time on Step 8 of the Twelve Steps, in which we become "willing to make amends." We need to prepare for actually making amends because there is often a deep unwillingness in us.

Something in each of us resists taking this kind of very practical responsibility for harm that we have done. For most of us the problem is simple: ego gets in the way. We fear the loss of image, the loss of respect, the loss of pride that might come when the truth about the harm we have done is acknowledged.

Some amends are, of course, more difficult than others. I think one of the most difficult amends is when we need to make amends to someone who has harmed us when the harm has been reciprocal. Our fear is that if we make amends then our wounds will be ignored. But even in the face of such fears we must proceed, even if it seems like the greater harm is the harm done to us rather than the harm done by us.

Why? Because the daily maintenance of our spiritual condition depends on engaging in spiritual disciplines of this kind. And our sobriety depends on the daily maintenance of our spiritual condition. So it is in our own best interests to make amends, even in difficult circumstances. We are not responsible for other people's spiritual condition. They may decide to make amends to us; they may not. It is certainly fair for us to want them to make amend, but whether or not they actually do so is something between them and God. It is none of our business. Our focus needs to be on making amends for the harm we have done. Sometimes that means that we will "do good to those who hate" or "bless those who curse," but that is the path that Jesus taught his followers to choose (see, for example, Luke 6:27-28)

Being "willing to make amends" is different from forgiveness or reconciliation. Forgiveness is a long, difficult and complex process. We do not need to wait until that process is complete before we make amends for the harm we have done. And reconciliation is usually an even longer and more difficult process. Making amends may be a small part of the process of the restoration of a relationship, but usually it is just one step along a long path. Both forgiveness and reconciliation are good goals. And making amends may be an important part of reaching those goals. But it is not reasonable to expect that making amends will result in complete forgiveness or the complete restoration of a relationship.

When I am preparing to make amends I find it helpful to remind myself that this is something I am doing for myself, to help maintain my spiritual condition. When it comes to actually making amends, however, the focus shifts. I need to focus now on the needs of others. I am doing this for somebody else. It is a gift. This is important because when I am actually making amends it may not feel like it is in my best interest. I may feel anxious or embarrassed. It may feel like I am just getting more shame added to my already enormous stash of shame. But rather than focus on my feelings at the moment, I need to develop the discipline of empathy. It was the absence of empathy that most characterized my behavior when I did the harm for which I am now making amends. So, disciplining myself to be empathic is critical to successful amends making. I need to listen to whatever the other person has to say

and to thank them for any response they give. I can't expect every response to be healthy or to be "just what I needed to hear."

Sometimes the result of an amends will feel wonderful. Sometimes it will not. But no matter how it feels, we will have taken the next step in securing our own recovery and we will be reaching out to another person whom God loves.

May God grant you the serenity, courage and wisdom you need to make your amends.

Practice

"If I get angry, or if I am in unforgiveness—those things block me from the sun of the Spirit...in that aspect, I am most grateful that through recovery I have learned that I need to live by a standard outside of myself...if I live by my standards, my little meager standards, I can never have what God so desperately wants me to have...peace and serenity." Amend making is a practice. Awkward as it may be at first, we grow through it. Pray over your inventory, ask God to make the way for you. Ask God to prepare those you will approach to make things right. Trust God the best you can.

Resentment is a Misery by Joel McKerrow

June 17th 2015.

Dylann Storm Roof walked into a church in South Carolina,
sat amongst the peaceful people before opening fire upon their blackness.

Nine people killed.

Racism had won.

That is, until the nine victims families were given the opportunity to speak to Dylan Roof.

They looked his hatred directly in the eye and spoke three words over and over.

I forgive you.

I forgive you.

I forgive you.

Three words to take the power back.

To strip away hate.

Guilt is a heavy burden.

Revenge is heavier still.

It bears you to the ground,
cheek in mud and I am barely breathing.

Resentment is a misery.

When someone stabs you in the back
the first gesture is always the reach behind

to take the knife, return the favour,

the flavour of revenge,

or not even revenge, just recompense, to make amends,

just what they deserve,

to give and to get,

an eye for an eye,

a hand for a hand,

a life for a life.

It was April 6th 1994,

I was 12 years old and oblivious.

to the 800,000 people being massacred over the next 100 days.

Cut to pieces. Rwanda was crimson.

She watched as he killed her two daughters.

Right there before her. A machete.

He cut off her arm. Left her for dead.

She did not die.
He did not know this.
He saw her ten years later.
A changed man now,
he knelt at her feet,
wept the tears of penitence,
they splashed at her ankles.
And she, one handed now,
she childless now,
she looks him in the eye and
she forgives him. Calls him son, treats him as her child.
I do not understand this.

This ferocious forgiveness.
It laughs in the face of logic and revenge and retribution,
of what one deserves.

Forgiveness cannot change the past
but it paves a way forward,
It takes what is broken and reassembles the pieces,
splashes the ankles, unravels what is twisted,
Makes clean what is stained
and aren't we all stained.

Aren't we all selfish and shadow and a broken people who
break other people.
The line of who is good and who is bad never runs between us,
it splits us, down the centre,
Every human heart, the good and the bad, the light and the darkness,
my heart is a civil war.
Split and spit and fighting hard.
This bigot heart,
this colonized,
this racist nation inside us,
I try to do better and it leads me nowhere,
I am more than aware of the gap between who I am and who I could be.
But is this not always where forgiveness meets us, greets us, calls us friend,
In the gap,
in the split,
on the line,
between good intentions and failed actions,
between who we are and who we could be.
To forgive another
to forgive myself,
to be forgiven.
To know and be known.
The chicken and the egg of grace and mistake
I find myself falling, tripping, stumbling, cascading backwards
into the arms of grace.
Grace, I heard she makes beauty out of ugly things.
Like genocide. Like lost limbs.
Like church shootings.
Like me.

A Good, Deep Heart, a Benediction by Kelly Hall

God, give me a good, deep heart.
One that approaches fear and opens,
even while trembling,
to welcome sorrow
down into its most tender places.
Yes, it pains me even to say 'let it be' here,
'be my guest' here, 'just rest here' in me—
in the most vulnerable me.

Hold me together, God
and lead me by Your way,
especially while my poet's heart sinks
searching for words of comfort—
stir murmurs of love in that fertile silence
reward sorrow with beauty
be known there, be my guest there, rest in me here...
in the most vulnerable me.

God, give me a good, deep heart.

Gratitude

Watch: Gratitude with John Doss



Watch: Gratitude with Juanita Ryan

Juanita is a therapist in private practice (www.juanitaryan.com). She is an author of seven books and over 30 Bible study guides.



Going Deeper

How are you at receiving? Not just gifts and tributes from friends, family, and strangers, but from God?

How do you respond to God's love? Grace? Light?

If you had to teach someone about gratitude, how would you explain it? Where does it originate from, and how is it shared?

Are you grateful for your life? All of it?

Reflection by Teresa McBean

I write about the power of trying, because I want to be okay with failing. I write about generosity because I battle selfishness. I write about joy because I know sorrow. I write about faith because I almost lost mine, and I know what it is to be broken and in need of redemption. I write about gratitude because I am thankful—for all of it. — Kristin Armstrong

I write about gratitude because I anticipate disaster at every turn. I whine too. I am suspicious (and envious) of grateful people; I conjure up images of them and wonder if they experience gratitude because they take a lot of Xanax. I'm the kind of person who wears a life jacket if the weather forecast calls for showers. I ask my husband to call 911 if I get a splinter. I would prefer to carry a first aid kit to store my charge card and driver's license, wear whistle necklaces as high fashion accessories, and slather on sunscreen instead of those expensive tinted foundations worn by most women of my age.

I am not a particularly self-aware person. For decades I assumed all rational human beings with a modicum of intelligence were naturally hyper-vigilant and anxious. In this worldview, there is scant room for gratitude. I am not the gal you tell to be more grateful and I say, "You are so right. I'll get right on it!" I don't need a lecture or more bible verses to inspire me to practice gratitude. I get it. I understand that gratitude is a "God thing" and a good idea. But just because I SHOULD embrace gratitude, doesn't mean I CAN. I lack the natural capacity for gratitude. Planning for disaster and the safety of all I love eats up a lot of time and energy.

However, God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves and he did this for me.

I was in a desperate situation one year, and not just because my stubborn adult children refused to carry the safety goggles and those little orange handled hammers that break out car window glass if you and your car happen to end up submerged in a raging river that I had lovingly stuffed into their Christmas stockings.

The economy had tanked and my husband's business was faltering. Our recovery community was in its usual state of crisis and chaos. A hurricane swept through our town and demolished our backyard, cars and a chunk of our house. I was falling apart like a cheap suit.

Independent of these various circumstances, gratitude hunted me down and grabbed me by the throat. I blame it on the meditation. For twenty minutes a day, whether I had pre-arranged a fire drill or not, I sat. I sat as an act of surrender (or defeat depending on your view). I sat as an act of defiance (no more pretending that I have the power). I sat because my knees had buckled and standing took too much energy. I stopped with the litany of requests (ok, demands) of God and sat in silent homage to him. I cannot tell you why or how but I believe that the "who" was God's Spirit. It just moved into the cracks of the foundation of my heart and soul and took up residence.

I am still an excellent problem solver, but the well worn cloudy plastic goggles have been gently set aside to make for improved vision. When my husband was laid off from a company he helped start, my mind skimmed over the injustice of it all and noticed instead the twenty minutes it took for him to line up a consulting gig that paid more and promised less stress. This new job requires that he work only forty hours a week—it feels like half a job to him. Now I slather on sunscreen because we take the kayaks out on the river in those hours he used to sit at his desk pulling out his hair and mumbling at his computer screen.

I am so grateful.

When my youngest son was in the midst of an existential crisis, I did not bow to the compulsion to rush to his aid with cookies, a new video game, and a safety video on getting rid of rodents in substandard millennial hippie artist housing. I did notice that his sister took a week vacation, packed her Mini-Cooper with a cooler and two dogs, and drove from Texas to Tennessee through tornado warnings and high winds (without a glass breaking hammer). She fed her brother salmon (rich in Omega-3's), listened, dispensed a tiny bit of advice, and threw a party for his friends.

I am so grateful.

I am aware of gratitude, not as a theological construct, but as a daily life experience. This experience (which to

this day I cannot manufacture) shows up as a gift; it changes the way I experience suffering, sorrow, and my quirky doomsday worldview. Although no amount of self-shaming or scripture compelled me to get on the gratitude train, I am startled to find myself gingerly climbing the box car's steps and taking a seat because I have been made aware.

P.S. Who knew there was no market on Ebay for safety goggles and used life jackets?

Practice

Reflect on how well you do with the spiritual practice of receiving. In the sacredness of silence, feel with your innermost self a precious gift you have been given. Breathe in deep, and when you exhale let gratitude flow from your heart through your body and push out into the world. Set it free. Write about this experience.

Today Has Not Been Easy by Joel Mckerrow

Today I am thankful for rain-spit,
for wing tip of tiny bird,
for hopeful eyes,
for moments of flow,
for touch of friend on tired arm.

Today I am thankful for shards of glass,
for splinters stuck like teeth,
for tripping over feet,
for bruised back,
for the pain of denial.

Today I am thankful for music melody,
for head placed on heartbeat,
for presence,
for the cast red of a sun disappearing,
for peach season and throat.

Today I am thankful for loss,
for the fish of a dead friend staring at me across the room,
for the tearing and the unresolved
for the 'F* you I cannot take this anymore'
for the empty.

Today I am thankful for hands held,
for pen in hand and paper being filled,
for she who could not stop listening,
for he who thanked the God inside me,
for the books floating all around.

Today I am thankful for frustration,
for grinding teeth and the pacing,
for harsh words,
for the bleak,
for the lonely.

Today I am thankful for the light.
Today I am thankful for the shadow.
It has not been an easy day, this choosing of gratitude.

I Will Make Myself at Home, a Benediction by Kelly Hall

reach out, beloved,
unfold one arm, yes;
then the other, thank you...
let Me come between them.

Whatever space you make for me, I will reside.
Stretch yourself, breathe.
Grace yourself, breathe.

I will make Myself at home,
You will be My living room!
I'll invite more of Me to Myself
and continue to alter this space
so that you can bear this world
and even more, embrace it with Me.

Its through your arms
that I will cradle nurslings and the dying,
Pound drums with the thriving,
support the barely surviving...
Yes, with open arms
we will receive joy and mourning;
we'll clean up, stall out, and fight on
we'll lift and let down,
be vulnerable and strong—
with these arms!
Through these lanky, expressive tools of the trade
we'll love again and again...
So, I bless their hands to act as My own,
to connect as Me, to love through Me.

You feel inadequate at times,
you have a direct view of your insufficiency,
your wounds, your hidden mess...
Don't take your eyes off of Me!
I AM still breathing, thinking, creating...
pondering new ways to
impart love and grace to you...
through you,
through us!

It's you and Me.

So, share us,
touch them, pass Me on.
Love who I love
and give what I give
because I tell you truly,
the more of the lost you come to know,
the more found you become yourself.
The part of you that is Me
will have found the part of Me that is them.

And, O how I love them,
and, O how I love you!

Trust, My love,
that your arms, though small,
can hold this world
because I have made my home within them—
with all that I AM...
I give all I can give.

Share us,
there is eternally more to come.

Hope

Watch: Hope with Gregg Taylor

Gregg is a community architect and pastor for Houston reVision, an organization that leverages the power of community to connect gang-affected youth and kids on the edge with adult mentors, positive peer experiences and life-changing resources in order to help them revise the stories of their lives toward a hope-filled future. He is also the Chairman of the Board of the National Association for Christian Recovery.



Watch: Hope with Teresa McBean

Teresa is the executive director of the National Association for Christian Recovery. She is the co-author (with her son, Scott) of *Forgiving in a World That Loves to Hate*.



Going Deeper

What do you believe about hope? What is hope about? What is hope for?

What do you hope for?

What is your greatest hope?

Where does God enter in?

Reflection: Hope is Dangerous by Kathy Escobar

Hope. It can mean all kinds of things for different people, but I think it mainly implies “expectation.” A possibility that maybe things could be different, that there’s more to this life than just what we see, that there’s something better ahead. Many of us, for all kinds of reasons, are afraid to hope. We have seen many of our dreams dashed. Jobs lost. Relationships crumbled. Addictions destroy. God-not-delivering-the-goods-the-way-we-had-hoped. So we hunker down our hearts and do whatever we can to protect it against believing that good is really possible again, or maybe for the first time. We settle for loneliness. We settle for disconnectedness. We settle for going-through-the-motions. The thought of something more hurts too much. What if we make ourselves vulnerable and hurt again? What if we try and they all get dashed anyway? What if we risk and lose again? The “what ifs” mount, hope gets held at bay, and we miss out on the thing that Jesus kept pointing to over and over and over again—life now. Love now. Hope now.

And, it remains utterly consistent that pretty much everything Jesus calls us to is quite dangerous. So why would hope be different? Hope will require a risk. It will require sacrifice. It will require working against our reflexes to run, hide, self-protect, self-medicate. It will require believing in what is unseen. It will mean we will hurt. It will mean we will be afraid. It will mean taking steps on a path we are unfamiliar with.

It will require us letting God’s Spirit move in a way in our hearts that is mysterious and scary and maybe unfamiliar. So how do we get over our fear of hope’s dangerous-ness?

Here are just a few thoughts:

- Admit what we’re really afraid of. Is it being afraid to fail? Are you afraid of your heart hurting? Are you afraid that you’ll just end up mad at God again? What is it that freaks you out about hope? Real relationship requires honesty.
- Seek courage in the small steps. Sometimes we have such a high expectation of ourselves, that we’re supposed to somehow “take the hill” tomorrow, having conquered all that holds us back. That usually just leads to failure and shame and anger toward ourselves for our lack of faith and courage. Small steps keep hope alive, especially when we celebrate them together in community.
- Expect it to hurt. Hope’s gonna hurt. It’s supposed to. It means we are still really alive. Jesus made very clear that following him would mean pain. Hardened hearts do not hurt. But soft, open, hopeful ones are sure to. I think we need to get better at bracing ourselves for hope to hurt.
- Recognize that hope in circumstances is not the same as hope in God. Over and over in the scriptures the psalmists cry out “we hope in You, God...our hope is not in the world, but in You.” It is so easy to rest our hope in outcomes, tangibles, things-the-way-we-want-them-to-turn-out. This is why real hope is so dangerous, because it means accepting somehow that things may not be how we had hoped but that our hope in God mysteriously supersedes circumstances.
- Strain to see God, feel God, hear God wherever you can. I really think we get so blinded by our pain, our fear, our busyness, our self-centeredness that it becomes difficult to experience God’s Spirit moving, revealing, challenging, strengthening, encouraging, pushing. Especially when hope is waning and our anger or ambivalence is getting the best of us, we will need to strain to see him in small wacky ways that might normally be missed. In the eyes of a friend. In a word of encouragement. In a song. In the mountains. In a crisis. In a scripture. In where-ever-we-feel-a-flicker-in-our-heart-that-reminds-us-God-is-with-us.

Yeah, hope is dangerous. I am afraid of it, too, but I sense God nudging me in all kinds of ways to let him fan more and more of it into flame. To risk my pride, my heart, my safety on hope’s behalf.

Practice

Prepare for a sacred time of deep listening. Take three deep breaths. Release to God both the questions asked above and your answers. One way to visualize this is to imagine folding them up like a paper, put them in an envelope and drop them in a mailbox to God. You don't need to recount them all, just send. Take three deep breaths. Ask God to reveal God's hope. Listen.

Romans 15:13, The Message

Oh! May the God of green hope
fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace,
so that your believing lives,
filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit,
will brim over with hope!

Space by Seth Woods

there's a cold distance in the attic tonight
the crawl space that connects my house to yours
we had been scheming through the walls
on hands and knees
peeking behind forgotten doors that lead to new worlds
but the lights have gone out and i can't find you in the dark
childhood tells me that faith is the hope in things unseen
but experience says be careful where you place your feet
and how you distribute your weight
and i go riding through these air ducts and water-pipes
on that lop-sided hamster wheel
turning it all over again and again
and something in my mind tells me it's foolish to trust you
and something in my gut believes in you fiercely
and i'm waiting in the space between the two
to see if you'll ever come back.

At His Mother's Funeral by Seth Woods

my father couldn't hug me.
dressed in his gray-brown-charcoal suit,
his eulogy hearsed and rehearsed up until
the final moments,
when handshaking and soft welcoming took precedence,
throwing himself into the work of the host,
the master of ceremony,
the eldest son
(when he was the second eldest).
dad was never a great wellspring of emotion,
more of an underground aqueduct,
man made,
and when functioning properly,
bringing the flow straight to the faucets,
the shower heads, the dish
washer, turned off and on
by simple machines and the human will.
it was a long year or two for him,
of watching her not die,
watching her age and ache and not die,
watching the joy leave her and she did not die,

until the bump with the wheelchair,
the war-wound of a bruise,
the month in the hospital,
the tubes in the throat,
the sores from the bed,
and then, at last, death.
when i would go to embrace him
at the church that day
he would side-step,
would pivot like a point guard,
like an unenthused second date,
put one arm over my shoulder
and look the other way.
this occurred no less than
three times that morning,
my dad, so awkwardly full of emotion
and so little control of it –
the kitchen tap trickling a murky stream into the sink,
the water mains rusted from years
of overuse and disrepair,
the water leaking out in the yard,
at the curb, down the road through
the manhole covers,
calls being made by the neighbors to the city office,
the switchboard jammed up for hours,
workers wading through the streets,
their wrenches separating and rejoining pipe joints...
too busy with their task
to notice the children
jumping in the puddles,
making trash can lids into row boats,
fighting over who gets the next turn on the ply-wood surf board,
crying because their soggy underwear is riding up uncomfortably
and because the sunscreen
that their mothers hastily applied to their faces
has now run down into their eyes,
blurry with the sweat and tears and pain
of another unbelievable day
on earth.

A Wet Hope by Joel McKerrow

Early morning train ride,
sun streaming through trees,
girl with bright dyed red hair in front of me,
old man to my side.

He looks over. I catch him. Wonder at his staring.
I keep typing, looking in the periphery,
he is still staring, he cannot look away
and I am self conscious.

He jumps up suddenly,

walks over expectantly,

I pretend I am only now realizing his intrusion into my day.
I look up from typing, turn off music,
take out EarPods. I do this slowly,
the reluctant pace of not wanting to bother with this.

“May I shake your hand?” he asks me.

He holds out right, a slight tremor.

I am slow sometimes. Cannot see a moment for what it is.
And the moments, they seem to hide well too,
behind my pre-occupations.

“Certainly” I agree and hold out my own.

Rough and calloused lines of skin embrace the meekness of my writers hand.
His eyes are red, they shine from the tears,
I am not sure why I am making him cry, but I am.
His only words,

“You look exactly like my Son-in-law and we have not seen him for a long time.”

It was nothing profound,
but it was enough,
I was what he needed that day. Just me. Not the eloquence of my poetic words,
not counseling and holding,
just the recognition of a lost loved one seen in the mirror of my skin.
Through the tears of his eyes he smiled
and I watched as they coated his skin in wet hope.

Fill This Land, a Benediction by Kelly Hall

Face up my beloved,
even at your most vulnerable,
even when corruption demands your head—
rest assured: I Am for you!

I will throw open the gates,
even wider the doors of the sanctuary,
to expose where religion plots against a brother,
withholds and starves a sister,
hangs its members on words
spoken against empire;
against building much of nothing.

And still,
I will not turn my back against the mistaken,
even though you have not understood much of me,
I remain who I Am:

Teacher
Shepherd
Liberator!

To the willing ear, I speak truth coupled with love.

The wounded-in-action, I bandage with justice armed with divine perspective.
The slipped, sunken, and fallen, I restore and even more so,

I love shamelessly!

Righting wrongs,
washing hands,
purifying hearts—
I plant fields of goodness,
there is more than enough!

My Glory will fill the land.
It
will
fill
the
land.

I'll light the path and guide you myself—
don't give up—follow me
and your heart will know eternal peace,
Yes, your heart will flow with my eternal peace.

See this benediction come to life at
<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/fill-this-land>

Perseverance

Watch: Perseverance with Jane Wolfe

Jane is the the founding director of Life-Path at Salem Alliance Church in Salem, OR. She is the author of *Stepping Out with Hope and Healing for a Hurting World*.



Watch: Perseverance with Juanita Ryan

Juanita is a therapist in private practice (www.juanitaryan.com). She is an author of seven books and over 30 Bible study guides.



Going Deeper

Write about a current issue you want out of. Pick one you feel especially weary of. Ask God to show you where he is in it. Wait. When revelation comes (and only God knows when that will be) write it down.

How do you hang in with life when you want to quit?

How do you hang in with God when God feels absent in the mess?

What have you come to believe about God?

Consider God's perseverance. What does God's perseverance teach you about your focus, and about going the distance?

Reflection by Joey Davis

Historically, I have been a complete failure when it comes to life-long sobriety. I did enjoy a fair amount of success at “life”, especially before I started my illustrious drinking career, in earnest, at 42. I was a good student, an above-average athlete, and a moderately successful small business owner. I even had good relationships with my friends, family, and employees. I was able to achieve my goals because I honestly worked for them. I also had a lot of fun, at least before I started drinking. But when it came to my recovery efforts, I was an abysmal failure. I would have some small victories, stay sober for extended periods of time, re-establish some trust with the people that still cared about me, and then always give up. I never saw it through to the finish line. Alcohol was killing me. Destroying me as a person and wrecking my future. The really sad thing is that I was letting it take me down into my own personal hell. I just couldn’t see the light at the end of the tunnel. My vision of the future was black as night.

At one point along my path, a friend of a friend (someone I didn’t know from Adam) heard about my struggles and told my buddy that she wanted to speak with me. I reluctantly agreed; I had heard it all before. I was sick of people getting into my business. Words couldn’t help me. I thought that I was doomed. I just couldn’t “get it”. My failures at this recovery business were beginning to define me...who I was as a person, as a contributor to society, as a friend and family member.

I was lost.

What she told me was pretty dang simple. It took a few years for it to really sink in, but I thought about her, her own personal story and what she told me many times in the coming years. She told me that she too had struggled mightily with alcohol, that she understood the cycle of destruction I was participating in, but that she had found a way out. She just NEVER GAVE UP. It seemed a bit trite, as I had become increasingly pessimistic about everything; especially what people were telling me. But there was something completely earnest and non-judgmental about her. She didn’t preach at me. She didn’t scold me. She was just really chilled out about life, obviously very happy, and somehow more “real” to me than folks in AA, church groups, and medical personnel had been. She told me that it just wasn’t as hopeless as it seemed right then. I remember that she told me, “Honestly Joey, this doesn’t have to be the last time you drink—in fact, this probably isn’t. This stuff takes a while to sink in. Just don’t give up!”

Unfortunately, she was right. I had to fall really low before I finally woke up. However, when I was “ready” (like she told me I would eventually be), I found peace in her words from years prior. I did not give up. Somehow I found the courage to power through when I had no power.

Harriet Beecher Stowe once said something that just about sums up what happened to me:

“When you get into a tight place and everything goes against you, ‘till it seems as though you could not hold on a minute longer, never give up then, for that is just the place and time that the tide will fall.”

Yep...the tide will fall. You just have to be on a boat of self-honesty, humility, and hope to survive the waters of addiction, shame, and remorse. It can happen for you, just as it happened for me. Unfortunately, I had to be beaten into submission to the fact that I was at a grave loss when it came to alcohol. I had to end up in jail and eventually prison as a two-time felon, basically alone, and seemingly hopeless, before I came to believe that there was hope. I guess I’m just more than a little stubborn that way.

Perseverance is the way to reach the shore, despite the troubled waters beating you down. It’s the bucket given to you by God (when you sincerely ASK him for it) to keep your leaky, rickety boat from sinking. Let God help you. Grab your bucket.

Never consider yourself a “lost cause”. If (or when) you fail, shrug it off. Maintain your balance. Keep your head up. Try, try again. Remember, “We don’t shoot our wounded in recovery”. Today might not be your last day to drink, use drugs, lie, cheat, steal, gossip, or over-indulge in ANYthing that changes your mood, but it CAN be. Give a miracle a chance.

Practice

Make time for silent reading. Take three deep centering breaths. Ask God to open you up for the presence of the Spirit, then read the following passage and put yourself into the following story:

Or imagine a woman who has ten coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and scour the house, looking in every nook and cranny until she finds it? And when she finds it you can be sure she'll call her friends and neighbors: 'Celebrate with me! I found my lost coin!' Count on it—that's the kind of party God's angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God.

Who or what are you? What is your perspective? Use what you learn here as an application to the current event you wrote about at the beginning of this section.

Moving Forward by Joel McKerrow

This is for the day when you are torn in two.
When the discontent comes.
When a world once endless is now four walls and closing,
the constriction of breath
and the whisper out ahead,
there must be more than this.
This is for when the old ways can no longer hold you
and when you realize,
that they have not been able to do so for quite some time now.

This is for the day of dissatisfaction
When, from the drip of a tap that is no longer flowing,
you take back your cupped hands
and how hard it is to do so.
We would place our mouth around the pipe,
suck rust if we could.
I have seen men lose themselves for less.
But you are more than this,
Throw yourself from nest,
flap wings even when you think that you have none,
I have seen men give themselves to this.

This is for the day of choosing,
itchy feet and shaking knees.
Clothes that stretch too small
Stringent borders and high prison walls.
The streets that knew us and gave us our name.

You know what silent death awaits you should you stay,
you know what it is to be frozen,

So walk out the front door,
leave the house of your conditioning,
follow the path around the back, through the fields,
though regret may follow you there,
though fear and sorrow may be your guide for a time,
keep walking,
they will soon lose interest

when they realize
that you have lost interest in them.

Fear is a pen who has misplaced her ink but still continues to mark up the pages regardless,
like the boy drawing pictures in the margins.

Take off your too tight skin,
The freedom of the new frontier always outweighs the pain of our tearing,
the loss of our covering,
unravelling, raw and vulnerable and fraying at the edges.

This is for the day when change comes to find you.
When you smell a new scent on the wind
This is for the day when they cannot hold you,
when you realize the rules were never made for you.

I urge you, on that day to turn around, quickly now, not for too long
take a picture with your mind,
for this is the last time that you shall come back to this place.
Thank it for what it was,
the words given to you,
for who you became under its soft gaze,
pay it the homage it is due,
tattoo its memory on the underside of your ribs,
so that if the future takes everything from you,
it can never take this.
It is only when you are naked that you shall be able to read it again,
It may help you remember who you are in the face of such loss.

But now turn from this,
give yourself to the new path,
the uncharted and the unfamiliar
keep the wind at your back,
your pack is light and the night is over.

This is for the day when you take that very first step.
This is for the day when you can no longer take the next.

Today by Kelly Hall

There are days that call for the strength of mountains,
to meet force with force
to hammer against the cold hard rock
until it gives, revealing treasured gems
unseen to most.

There are days I am allowed to drift
to float along with or without, to explore
my creator within His seas and think or not,
as I interact with judgments that flow

(regardless of what I choose) about anything or nothing.

There are days that I feel threaded into the ground,
just another blade of grass among many... — 34 —

walked on, cut down—but soft, oh, so tender—
being vulnerable while rooted to God and community
(willingly) is a unique strength.

Then there is today, when I recognize the consequences
of being too firm. Of wanting to hold those who drifted out of reach,
or beyond, or that I only met once as a mountain, or the sea,
or whimpered beneath them as grass
so I can prove that I can be a tree just as well...
with the flexibility of limbs tall-reaching towards the sky
I don't have to beat myself black and blue for diamonds,
drown for answers, or let life run over me.
I can turn and bend and keep on reaching for light,
unfolding one small scroll of wisdom at a time, and
even after the pelting of a hard days rain,
or the chaffing of the whipping wind,
yes, even though my boughs hang low,
I have hope in the sun.

I AM Here, a Benediction by Kelly Hall

Be confident, beloved, rest assured
for I Am among the givers and takers;
afflictors and afflicted;
the self-less, and the selfish.

I know by name
the run-and-hiders and surrenderers,
masked avengers and offenders—
I am with you as you prioritize Me, and when you put your way first—

I AM here. I still Am.

I met Moses on the mountaintop, and sought Aaron at its base
and I will be with you in your highs and lows.
No one is missed! No one can hide!
Christ is My sight, My viewpoint;
the lens for My vision of Fatherhood.

My presence is always now,
and now is what matters.
I am with you now.

(and now.)

So, trust Me when you can.
I cover you, even when you can't.
I continue to pursue you,
to love and free you
and welcome you into My now
where I AM, always.

See this benediction come to life at <http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/i-am-here>