

HD

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 36 Issue 4 Summer 2016



PRAYING OUR EXPERIENCE

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Human Development Magazine is a quarterly publication for people involved in the work of fostering the growth of others. This includes persons involved in religious leadership and formation, spiritual direction, pastoral care, education and those interested in the development of the whole person.

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Summer 2016

My brothers and sisters,

I am delighted to share with you our summer 2016 issue dedicated to the theme “praying our experience.”

St. Paul offers us the timeless challenge to “pray constantly” (I Thess. 5:17). Most of his epistles begin with an extended prayer for the community or individual being addressed; likewise the letters end with prayers of benediction. Throughout his correspondence, St. Paul reminds his fellow believers to make their requests known to God with thanksgiving; all speech or action is to be done in the name of the Lord. Yet, how can we pray without ceasing? Even St. Paul acknowledges that we do not know how to pray as we ought (Romans 8: 26).

Most of us struggle to pray - to find the time, to stay focused and let it flow from the core of our being. We know that prayer and life cannot be discrete things and yet we too easily catch ourselves “saying our prayers” (and rushing back to tasks) instead of praying through our life experiences of joy or sorrow, hope or fear, anger, jealousy, lust or gratitude.

As Henri Nouwen wrote decades ago, “To pray unceasingly is to lead all our thoughts out of their fearful isolation into a fearless conversation with God.” (America, August 5, 1978). Prayer needs to begin with the concrete reality of our lives - but it cannot end there! Prayer looks inward only to look outward with greater gratitude, openness and compassion.

Herein rests the challenge all our authors address: how can we pray our experiences - personal, communal and even global- in such a way that we enter more fully into the mind and heart of Christ? How can formal prayers, the psalms of the Liturgy of the Hours, the prayers of the liturgy, truly resonate with our daily experiences? How can we transform problematic thoughts and desires into a purified expression of love that incorporates body and spirit?

Fr. Jerome Kodell, a retired Benedictine Abbott – no stranger to the psalms as a scholar and one praying them daily in community – reflects on the psalms as an example of how we can “pray our experiences.” Sr. Melanie Svoboda, SND, has written a very energizing piece entitled “Everyday Epiphanies;” she invites us to slow down and let prayer flow through us naturally and spontaneously. In a short piece, a Catholic lawyer, Dan Malone, offers his insights on the importance of how we articulate the very words of our most common prayer, the Lord’s Prayer.

A special treat in this quarter’s issue comes to us from England: Fr. Daniel O’Leary, a regular contributor to the Tablet, offers a pastoral perspective from his own experience of “Praying with a Troubled World.” It has often been said that we should pray with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. Fr. O’Leary does just that as he models prayerful contemplation and intercession on behalf of the many people suffering around the world. He shows us how – by contemplation – we can get

“inside” the painful experience of others; we are no longer outsiders glancing with pity but we truly come into communion with them. He suggests that we can even have an appreciation of Earth and all elements of creation as they also “groan in agony” and come to a new spiritual birth. A very poetic, powerful and challenging essay!

Dr. Gillian Ahlgren of Xavier University shares with us valuable insights into the timeless message of St. Teresa of Avila regarding the way contemplative prayer becomes a way of graced living, a space for the Incarnation to continue to unfold within us and among us. If you enjoy her thoughts, you may want to pick up her newly published work, *Enkindling Love: the Legacy of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross*.

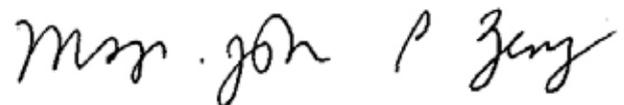
The ever delightful Fr. James Martin, SJ of America magazine gave me an interview during which we discussed various applications of our theme, “Praying our experience.” You will appreciate his usual humble, open style of reflecting on life experience; he is a great model for us all. Finally as an addendum, I composed some models of how we might pray through various experiences and come to contemplative adoration, gratitude and peace.

As a concrete example of how facing one’s challenges can become true prayer, we have a powerful first person narrative from Jeff Jay, a therapist who himself worked through addiction via prayer. It is truly a moving story, the capstone of this season’s issue!

As a special treat - also in keeping with our theme – on our back page you will find a marvelous example of “praying our experience” from the great spiritual author of yesteryear, Fr. Michel Quoist. Many of us developed our spirituality by building on his poetic reflections. The front cover is not explicitly or necessarily a scene of prayer but it seems to present a prayer of jubilation and thanksgiving, praise and wonder as mother and daughter simply enjoy life – and that is certainly prayer!

Happy reading, reflecting and praying!

Your brother in the Lord,



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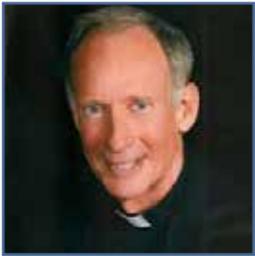




“The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving make your requests known to God.”

(Philippians 4:6)

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September 15, 2016

58th Annual Detroit Bishop's
Mass and Dinner
St. John Fisher Chapel &
Meadow Brook Hall
Rochester, MI

October 3-6, 2016

Alumni Fall Seminar
Immaculata Retreat House
Willimantic, CT

October 5-7, 2016

Walking With the Wounded
Guest House Scripps Mansion
Lake Orion, MI

November 2, 2016

All Souls Mass and Luncheon
Guest House Scripps Mansion
Lake Orion, MI

December 8, 2016

Advent Vespers
Guest House Scripps Mansion
Lake Orion, MI

January 9-12, 2017

Alumni Winter Seminar
DiamondHead Beach Resort
Fort Myers Beach, FL

January 19-22, 2017

Alumnae Winter Retreat
DiamondHead Beach Resort
Fort Myers Beach, FL

April 24-27, 2017

Alumni Men's Retreat
Guest House Scripps Mansion
Lake Orion, MI

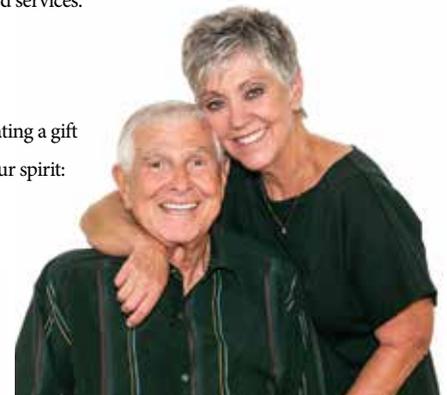
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Melannie Svoboda, SND



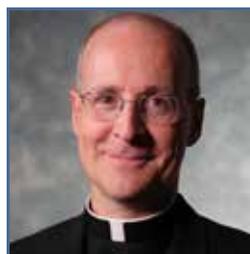
Daniel P. Malone



Daniel O'Leary



Gillian T.W. Ahlgren



James Martin, SJ



Jeff Jay

INFORMATION FOR AUTHORS

The editors of *Human Development* are quite eager to publish articles that translate the latest research in psychology, health, medicine, and spirituality to ministry, formation and practice. Our hope is that *Human Development* will be known as the most user-friendly ministry publication. This will require making complicated theoretical knowledge, research, and concepts understandable and applicable to the personal and professional lives of our readers.

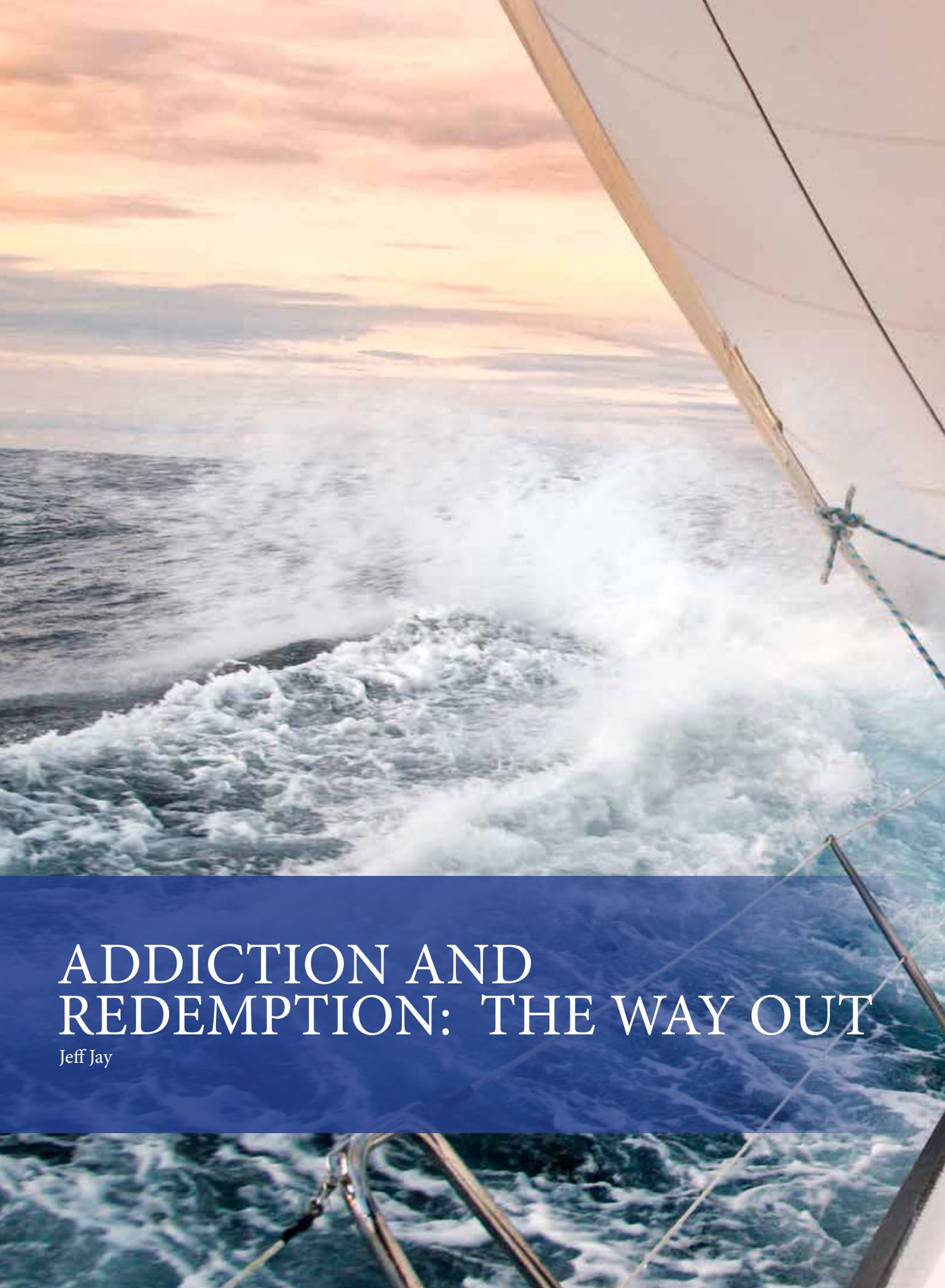
Since ministry is in a time of significant transition and change, we anticipate that the articles we publish will enlighten and positively influence the daily decisions and practices of those in Church leadership, ministry formation, spiritual direction, and counseling of any kind. There are also a number of previously under-appreciated forces that uniquely influence ministry and ministers: cultural, organizational, and situational factors. We intend to highlight and honor these factors in the pages of *Human Development*. Accordingly, we ask prospective authors to be mindful of these considerations in their manuscripts. Manuscripts are received with the understanding

that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than six recommended citations and or readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting sacred scripture, the New Revised Standard Version is preferred. All manuscripts are to be prepared according to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th edition).

Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and Bibliography/suggested readings. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

Manuscripts should be submitted to Msgr. John Zenz at editor@hdmag.org as an email attachment.

A photograph of a sailboat's wake on the ocean at sunset. The sky is filled with soft, orange and pink clouds, and the water is a deep blue with white foam from the boat's wake. The sailboat's mast and rigging are visible in the foreground on the right side.

ADDICTION AND REDEMPTION: THE WAY OUT

Jeff Jay



My addiction had taken me down to the point that I was sleeping under bushes in a city park. At twenty-six years of age, I had a bleeding ulcer, a bleeding colon and transient neuropathy of the legs. But I still didn't think I had an alcohol or drug problem—I just thought I had a little cash-flow problem, and if I could scrounge up twenty bucks, I would be just fine.

The consequences of my behavior had been mounting up for years. I went from being a national merit scholar to a serial college dropout. I was chosen for a great job as a writer in Chicago, but lost the position in six months because of my alcoholism. I crashed cars, ruined good relationships, and alienated friends and family. Even my cocaine dealer told me I had a drinking problem. I was astonished. At the same time, I could not make sense of my actions as I bounced from city to city, year after year.

Looking back on my addiction, after decades of stable recovery, I know I was sustained in some mysterious way by the prayers of others, especially my parents. At that time, prayer was impossible for me, as it is for many addicted individuals. Without the active intercession of my parents, and ultimately their intervention, I would not have survived.

Like most alcoholics and drug addicts, I had a distorted view of my drug use. Have you ever tried to confront an alcoholic on his drinking problem? The tables will turn very quickly and you will find that you are the problem, and if you would only stop nagging, he might not drink so much. For an addict, the drug is the “solution;” it cannot possibly be the problem. That is why communication with an active addict is all but impossible. It is also one of the main reasons addicts are resistant to change.

When the end came for me, it was gruesome. I had traveled to San Francisco one last time, hoping for a fresh start, but I was quickly on the skids. I had just enough money for a flop house room in North Beach, a little food, and a lot of alcohol. An old girlfriend came to see me at ten in the morning as I sat in the grass of Washington Square Park, drinking my breakfast. She looked beautiful and hip, and talked earnestly about my addiction problem. Needless to say, she made no progress as she tried to encourage me to do something, anything, but drink myself to death. I remember her sadness and frustration in trying to reach me through the bulwark of my denial.

Somehow I heard through the grapevine that Rickie, an old high school friend of mine, had committed suicide. He’d done it in a quiet and fastidious way: taking a handful of Valium and then pulling a large plastic trash bag over his head and cinching it around his neck with heavy-duty rubber bands. He laid down on his bed, passed out, and eventually suffocated. No muss, no fuss.

So deep was my emotional paralysis, so craven my thinking, that when I heard about Rickie’s suicide, my immediate reaction was “far out,” and I silently resolved to do the same. It would be easy enough to accomplish, and even seemed like the right thing to do, as my life was obviously over. I could not even hold a busboy job anymore; I could not even stay on my feet for a full shift. I could not survive without constant doses of alcohol. I was in the final stage of the illness, so I would drink for a few hours, sleep for a few hours, and then wake up and drink again.

I felt like I was drowning in a sea of despair, without the least flicker of faith. In the absence of hope, death

seemed like a good idea, even a merciful option. I regretted the waste of my life, but saw no way to save it. I was as incapable of prayer as I was any other relationship. My world revolved around the addiction.

I had tried to detox myself once a couple years before, the last time I had been in San Francisco. I’d gotten myself into a god-awful little hole of a room above a strip joint on Broadway, and I planned to wait out the demons. I lay in the bed with torn sheets and blankets, sweating and shaking and hearing voices.

My room had a window that looked out on an air shaft, and I watched it go dark at night and brighten in the morning—and so I counted the hours of my agony. After two days and two nights of muscle spasms, diarrhea, and fitful bouts of non-sleep, I was getting dehydrated, so I walked down the dirty stairwell to the street like a zombie. It must have been 3 a.m., but there was a little all-night store a few doors down where I could buy some orange juice. The shocker came when I saw a stack of the next day’s newspapers sitting by the cash register. I could not believe it.

What the newspaper was telling me, by its awful, incomprehensible date, was that two days had not passed, only a part of a day. I had hallucinated the passing of time, and I was at the beginning of the detox, not the end. It was too much for me, and I returned the juice to the cooler and bought two quarts of beer instead. There was no escape and I never tried again.

I did not know anything about addiction or recovery in those days. I figured I could probably stop drinking if I checked into a church mission of some sort and followed the dictums of some priest for the next couple years, but I was a card-carrying atheist in those days and had been a philosophy major in college, so I could argue my points with vigor and depth. When I was growing up, I had been an altar boy and had tried to believe as my father had, but all that was gone, and I embraced the intellectual fashions of the day. They nearly killed me.



A TURNING POINT

My plan for suicide was interrupted by a series of unlikely events that can fairly be called miraculous. To abbreviate the long story: I was discovered wandering the streets in a blackout by a vacationing family friend from Michigan. The friend realized I was in grave danger, determined the location of the flop house I had landed in, and alerted my parents. They in turn went into action, and the next day they reached me by phone (in an era before cell phones) and in spite of the fact that I had no phone in my room. Once they got me on the line, I made some excuse, hung up the phone and headed for the liquor store.

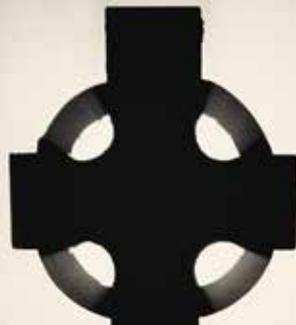
Ten minutes later, I was sitting in the grass of Washington Square Park with a small bottle of wine to ward off my despair. It appeared I could not even commit suicide properly. I was a failure at everything. Then it occurred to me that my parents just might call the police, so I called them back, to buy a little more time. I was still planning on ending it all.

A kiosk of pay phones stood in the corner of the park, and I placed a collect call back to Michigan. It was an unusually sunny day in North Beach, and I admired the solidity of Saints Peter and Paul Church as I spoke to my parents. Did something begin to resonate—an echo of my previous faith? My parents were unusually kind, and I began to soften.

“Jeff, how are you doing?” asked my father.

I was physically ill all the time, and my mind was confused. But somehow the blue skies, the songbirds, and the church spires caused me to say something I’d never even considered: “I think I need to go into a hospital.”

Where this outlandish idea came from, I don’t know. The idea of rehab was all but unknown in 1981; but the next thing I knew there was a taxicab, a ride to the airport, a plane ride to Detroit, a shaky night at home, and a car ride to Hurley Hospital in Flint, Michigan, early the next morning. The first twenty-four hours in the detox ward were rough, though the medication helped. In the middle of the night, if I am not mistaken, the ancient alcoholic in the bed next to



mine went through his last agonies and passed away, despite the frantic ministrations of the staff. Once they wheeled his lifeless body away, I was alone and I was afraid.

The next day, I had a visit from the head doctor on the ward, Dr. William Keating, who had decades of experience in alcohol and drug treatment. I was a twenty-six year old kid sitting on the side of the bed, shaking and sweating and feeling terrible. I was wearing a blue hospital gown that tied up in the back ineffectively. Dr. Keating strode into the room with authority—a big, powerful black man with a white coat, a stethoscope, and a clipboard. It was like God himself coming in to take charge. He pulled up a chair and got right up in my face and called out like he was trying to wake the dead. And maybe he did.

“Boy!” he said.

I almost jumped out of my skin.

“Boy,” he said, “you’ve got a disease. You are not responsible for what you have done.”

Great, I said to myself.

“But you are responsible for what you do now.”

Shit, I said to myself.

“Your disease is incurable,” he said. “The most we are going to be able to do is put it in remission. We are going to give you a program to follow: Twelve Steps. You follow that program and the disease will stay in remission. You stop following that program and the disease is going to kick you in the ass again.”

Then he stood up and walked out.

I did not know what he was talking about. I did not know anything about alcoholism, Twelve Steps or anything else, but I was suddenly alert in the daze of detox, and I tried to ponder his statements. As the hours and days went by, Dr. Keating’s brief prognosis and prescription echoed in my mind, like operating instructions for a new life.

I spent ten days in the hospital before I was stable enough to transfer to a residential treatment center. My physical health was returning, but my thinking was cloudy, and my emotions were running on an erratic rollercoaster. A lot happened in the next three weeks, but as I was getting ready for discharge, I had a terrible realization: I was going to drink again. At

the time, I was walking the grounds of the facility, and trying to figure out my next move. I did not want to drink, I knew it was a terrible idea, but I knew I would drink again, despite my best efforts. I just could not stop.

In the next moment, I also realized that I would not survive another bout of cross-country alcoholism. I'd landed in too many crazy places, I'd gotten too sick, and I just wasn't going to survive. I became possessed by a terrible certainty: "I'm going to drink again, and I'm going to die."

I tried to run from the facts, but my attempts to rationalize were as flimsy and transparent as the lies I told to cover my addiction. I knew what was going to happen, and this time there would be no miracle intervention. I had had my chance, and I was all but certain to blow it.

REACHING A STEP TWO: FALLING TO MY KNEES

My intellectual pride still would not allow any kind of prayer or faith. I could accept Step One—that I was powerless over alcohol and that my life had become unmanageable. Any fool could see that. But I resisted Step Two, and rejected the idea of God altogether. I just could not believe that a power greater than myself was going to restore me to sanity. Consequently, the remaining steps were impossible. I was a sober alcoholic without a program of recovery. I was doomed.

This anguish lasted for hours, with the unavoidable truth always in my head: "I am going to drink again and I am going to die." I was frantic to break its grasp and hopeless at the same time. The afternoon turned into evening, and the evening turned into night, and the night turned into the dead of night. I paced my small room at the treatment center, sat in the desk chair, and stared at the darkened window that reflected my image back at me. I didn't believe in hell, but I was in it, burning in my own helplessness and fear. The hours and minutes glowed on the face of my clock radio like an inscrutable countdown.

People in recovery talk about desperation as a gift, because it strips away the intellect and lays the choices bare. Desperation brings clarity to the mind by tearing away the comforts of arrogance and pride. It rips away the shield of self-pity and depression, and calls for a decision. Sink or swim! The gift of desperation is the last chance for life. It is the gift of grace.

This agony made me do something I'd never done before, something I never would've done under any other circumstances. And out of this simple action came all my recovery. At about two o'clock in the morning, I got down on my knees in the middle of the room. I was beyond hope, beyond words, beyond anything I'd ever known.

I knelt down on the carpet, held my hands in prayer, and cried out to the One I did not believe in.

"God, help me," I said.

Then I buried my face in my hands and sank into the darkness and pleaded, "God, help me."

I knelt in the ruins of my life, alone. I closed my eyes against the void, drained of all expectation. Yet within me was the slightest glimmer of hope, like an echo from the past, and in that moment of supreme desolation, I was lifted up and something happened that I can only explain in the way a child might explain it: all of heaven opened up for me.

MEETING CHRIST: IMMERSSED IN LOVE

A kind of waterfall seemed to be breaking over me, a waterfall of love. I was kneeling under a great, cleansing waterfall that came in wondrous torrents. It was water made of light, pure and silky. It was alive, too, and personal. It was not a substance, but a living presence, wiser and more intuitive than I could grasp. This presence was greater than the world, yet flowing into the world, and washing over me and filling me with joy. I knew I was in the presence of Christ.

We knew each other as friends know one another, but deeper than that, deeper than I knew my own

thoughts. And this cascade poured over my mind and washed away all my fears and doubts. The joy of meeting was ecstatic and spacious. My fear of death, my inability to control myself, my nameless anxieties and torments were all obliterated. And I knew I could stay sober. I was in a rapture, completely immersed in the heart of God and swept into eternity.

I could also see that God had no more in common with our religions than the ocean has with a small bay. The ocean may fill the bay, and the bay may hold some fraction of the ocean, but they are utterly different. Every wondrous thing attributed to God is true, but in this life we are only at the edge of the bay and we cannot see the waters beyond. For a few moments though, I was alive in the ocean, and the Divine exploded over me like an enormous surf, and I rode the wave.

Under this endless cascade of love, still on my knees, but with my arms outstretched and looking up with wonder, I was transformed. My mind was unshackled and released into a greater realm. Not only did I know I could stay sober, I knew that all my malignant thoughts were illusions, and these illusions only lived on the power I gave them. All my demons were flushed downstream like motes of dust, entirely insignificant, and I was immersed in the water of life.

As the rapture wound down, I became overwhelmed and got up from my knees to lie down on the bed. Again and again I said, “Thank you,” and knew I was heard. I knew I was always heard.

I was stupefied by the transformative power of what I experienced. It rewired my brain instantaneously and positively, in the same way a traumatic event can rewire the brain negatively. There was no anxiety left in my heart, no doubt in my mind. I was completely free of the obsession to drink and free of the heckling thoughts.

LOVED BECAUSE OF MY ADDICTION!

The Twelve Steps now made sense to me, and once I was discharged I started going to meetings. The most memorable quality of the first people I met in early recovery was their kindness. They listened to what I had to say with tremendous sympathy, and although our stories were all very different, it wasn't too hard to see the similarities. My family loved me in spite of my alcoholism, but these people loved me because of my alcoholism. They were my tribe. Rather than preach, they invited me to accompany them on the journey of recovery, using the simple slogans of the program. “Easy does it,” they said. “Keep coming back.”

It occurred to me that I was already a pro at the famous “one day at a time” approach. After all, when I was drinking, I did not worry about next week's booze, so I just stopped worrying about next week's sobriety. I focused only on the present. I became a big fan of the Serenity Prayer, too. I could not control people or circumstances, but I could control how I responded to them. “Keep it simple,” the older members told me. I certainly was not capable of anything more.

SPIRITUALITY UNLOCKS THE DOOR

I had a life-changing spiritual experience, but it was only a beginning. I learned that most people had a more gradual awakening, usually as a result of working the Twelve Steps. I learned, in fact, that the Steps were a recipe for transformation, based on the experiences of the earliest AA's. Some people likened them to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, and there were obvious parallels to the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount and the Letter of St. James. Other people found similarities to their faith traditions. The point was—and this point was always emphasized—that our recovery was contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Believe what you like about God, they

“Under this endless cascade of love, still on my knees, but with my arms outstretched and looking up with wonder, I was transformed.”

would say, but do the next right thing. There was never a dichotomy between faith and works; they were inseparable. Some people went to church and some did not, but all looked beyond themselves to something greater—to God, as they understood Him.

I began to see the world differently and to live my life with God. I was still subject to every human weakness and foible, and I was far from living a saintly life, but I never picked up a drink or drug again, and I began to make progress. In my addiction I fancied myself as living a life of unbridled freedom, even as my world became smaller and smaller. In recovery, my choices expanded, even as I committed myself to the structure of the Steps and the meetings. Truth, it seemed, always resided in paradox.

My father died an excruciating death when I was fifteen months sober, though he was only fifty-eight years old. It was a terrible blow to the entire family, but I probably weathered it better than anyone because I had so much support from my friends in recovery. They crowded the funeral home, packed the church, and checked on me continually. God's love flowed through them in a way that would have been impossible if I hadn't been part of the group.

In 1986, after I had been clean and sober five years, I began working at Sacred Heart Rehabilitation Center, a treatment program with locations in Detroit and Memphis, Michigan. Sacred Heart catered mainly to indigent men and women from the city, who began with a thirty-day stay in detox, and then continued with a ninety-day residential program out in the country. I worked at the 90 day program, with a caseload of 9 to 12 men. We had over a hundred patients at Memphis at any one time, and it was a tough crowd.

GETTING BEYOND SELF-ISOLATION

The program was run by a priest from Canada named Fr. Vaughn Quinn. He had gotten sober at the Guest House program for Catholic clergy, and had stayed on in Michigan to work with the poor. I had gotten to know Vaughn from Detroit-area 12 Step meetings, where he was a force of nature. He laughed loudly, swore cheerfully and challenged people to get off their butts and out of their ruts. I remember him driving the point home one night during a talk he was giving to a large crowd.

“The biggest pain that you and I have, that stops us from living, from laughing, from loving, is preoccupation with self. The anatomy of faith is this,” he said, “do the action first. Take a risk!”

He challenged addicts to end their isolation, and join the group. Vaughn was always in motion, getting people off the street and into treatment, collaring politicians for funding, and collecting well-heeled donors for support. As he continued his lecture that night, he asked the crowd: “Can other people see the unrepeatable beauty of God's creation in the twinkle of your eye?”

Every day when I drove through the countryside and into the two hundred acre campus at Sacred Heart I would pray, “God, help me be a good instrument of your love in the world today.” Beyond the techniques and technicalities of the job, I would continuously ask for guidance. How would I cope with the unpredictability of group therapy? How could I bring my own experience into a didactic lecture? The answers usually came as intuition rather than lightning bolt, in simple terms.

Vaughn left the program shortly after I came on the staff, so I never had a working clinical relationship with him. But his method of walking with people on their journey, while challenging them to develop a larger vision of their lives, still resonates with me.

WALKING THE TWELVE STEPS TOGETHER

In my years as a counselor, I have seen countless people go through a spiritual evolution on their way to achieving long term recovery. They admit their problem without reservation (Step One), they reach outside themselves for a solution to their dilemma (Step Two), and they commit themselves to God—however they may understand God—for guidance (Step Three). Without these key elements, sobriety quickly breaks down. But still more work is required.

Step Four (made a searching and fearless moral inventory) and Step Five (admitted to God, ourselves and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs) are intimidating prospects. On the surface, these Steps seem like a simple preparation for confession, but in practice they go beyond a recitation of wrongs to an examination of underlying

issues. The literature of recovery states that in undertaking these Steps, we must get to the bottom of our resentments, our fears, and our pride.

There are two major goals in the Fourth and Fifth Step process: first, to admit our moral failings in detail and, second, to ferret out the causes of our resentments and self-pity. The first goal usually has a sticking point. In my experience, people often have at least one item they plan to take to their graves, something they have done that is so shameful they cannot speak it out loud. Usually, it is sexual in nature, but it can be any dishonorable act. If this perceived “unforgivable sin” is not brought to light, they will almost always slide back into addiction. “We’re as sick as we are secret,” says the old wisdom. Like any good confession, this unburdening has a substantial reward, and the person immediately feels they have passed an important milestone.

The second goal is more difficult to achieve, and takes more time. Addicts—like all human beings—are susceptible to the double-edged sword of resentment and self-pity. They feel angry and then depressed, anxious and then hopeless. The inventory process is designed to reveal the causes of these malignancies in personal relationships. Though usually mundane in their details, if these problems are not clarified and resolved, they will fester for years. They can also lead to relapse.

Jenny was a prime example. After completing a residential treatment program, she came to see me for follow-up counseling, and wanted to discuss the Fourth Step. I expected her to focus on the shame she felt for subjecting her children and spouse to decades of addiction, but that was not on her list. Instead, she was obsessed with resentments, and in particular a wrongful accusation by an old neighbor who used to be a friend. The accusation had been made more than ten years ago, but Jenny nearly shouted when she spoke about it, and her face flushed red. Jenny’s action had been misconstrued by her neighbor, but she had never sat down with the woman and talked things out.

I suggested to Jenny that the old neighbor could not be expected to read her mind, and that Jenny’s silence probably seemed like an admission of guilt. Jenny’s pride had been wounded and she was self-righteous in her indignation, but she also had a

role in the predicament. This was self-evident to an outside observer, but Jenny was thunderstruck. I suggested she meet with her old neighbor, and clean up her side of the street, so to speak, leaving the results to God. Jenny paused for a moment, realized there was no other reasonable option, and agreed.

Jenny had been locked down by wounded pride and self-pity, but she had enough humility to seek out counseling and accept guidance. Her prayer life went beyond quiet time with God and church attendance. Her prayer life was action oriented. A favorite scripture of the early AA’s is from the Letter of St. James: “Faith without works is dead.” In Jenny’s case, she took outward action, attending meetings, getting a sponsor, and seeking additional counseling. She gave God numerous channels to act in her life. Though she was consumed by dozens of petty resentments, it was clear she would ultimately work through them. I knew that Jenny, in the years ahead, would help others, as well.

CONCLUSION: PRAYER AND THE GROUP

I remember a time when I did irreparable harm to someone, at least in my own mind. I celebrated the Sacrament of Penance, but it did not seem sufficient. This problem is commonplace among recovering addicts, and it is a major reason people relapse: they simply cannot forgive themselves. Step Twelve offers a partial solution. It directs us to go out and help others, to carry a message of hope to those who still suffer from addiction, and to practice the principles of recovery in every aspect of our lives. By helping save others, we can save ourselves, and make reparations for an irretrievable past.

“My brothers, if anyone among you should stray from the truth and someone bring him back, he should know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” (James 5:19-20)

So much of addiction is about being insulated and isolated, refusing to let anyone – even the Lord – into our crusty heart and soul. Freedom comes when we surrender to love, open our hearts, and share our pain.

People in Twelve Step groups have rediscovered a secret that has echoed through the centuries. In

seasons of joy or sorrow, if we stay in the heart of the group, the words of Christ will be fulfilled, and we'll find that "the kingdom of Heaven is among us." (Luke 17:21).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. From reading Jeff's story do you see how conversion happened through prayer and the Twelve Step program and the group support? Even if you are not directly dealing with an addiction, how might those same factors apply for you at this time in your life?
2. Jeff was helping us see and understand how (and why) an addict prays: he met the Lord in the darkness alone but also in the honest sharing of the group. Do you see how we "pray our experience" both individually and in community?
3. How can praying for an addicted person change the situation? How much should we leave to God, and how much should we try an intervention?
4. Do you see similarities between the Ignatian examen and the Fourth and Fifth Steps of AA?
5. Healed and healing: through prayer and conversion and physical care, one can experience healing of addictions of all kinds and degrees of intensity. But an essential and on-going element of the healing also seems to be the willingness to accompany others as they deal with their struggles. How am I experiencing healing as I share the journey of others at this time?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Jay is a certified addiction counselor and intervention professional, with a national private practice, based in Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan. His latest book is "Navigating Grace: a solo voyage of survival and redemption," (Hazelden, 2015) from which parts of this article have been derived. He has served as trustee for several professional and treatment organizations, and is currently advisory board member of Jefferson House, a Capuchin treatment program for indigent men, in Detroit.

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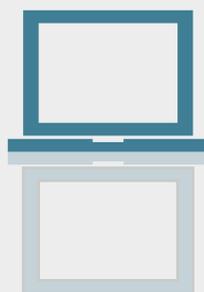
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