

The Widow Walk ...a Light-guided, self-disciplined navigation

(by Howie Soucek, rev 1-20-23)



More than “manage” and “cope,” I like the word “navigate” to describe my journey in life following the passing of my wife and many other dear ones in recent years, as it more aptly conveys the notion that I learn and further develop disciplines to navigate through and around the storms that beset me in my grief—thus minimizing the damage and discomfort wreaked upon me along the way. And I have come to realize that as long as I continue to sail upon the sea, storms are as much a part of the journey as are calm seas.

Thus, my journey is *a developmental one*, in which I gradually get better and better at realizing Peace and even Joy, repeatedly having to recommit myself—in earnest—to disciplines toward that end each day.

Of the following disciplines, one person may actually apply only two or three of them, while others apply more or different ones, or to a different extent, such that this assembly of disciplines makes a useful smorgasbord of help being offered to anyone who suffers. How unique is our suffering ...and how the same!

As to timing, very little of this may be helpful immediately following a difficult trauma, such as the loss of a loved one, but as time proceeds, more and more of these disciplines become helpful, as if one’s journey following a trauma must evolve to different stages in order to be more receptive or ready for additional avenues of progress.

This writing was originally developed to help with the suffering we face with the loss of someone dear (and also with the anticipated loss of someone dear, for whom we are a primary caregiver), but it should be considered that *these same actions are helpful with most other forms of suffering in life as well*.

So, then, here are my “disciplines” to deliberately practice and gradually get better at, ...for without the Light to guide us, we are lost, indeed ...but we will also sail into oblivion if we fail to open our eyes and **take responsibility for using the Light** with our navigation skills that we have been given....

1. **Keep a thankful heart** by way of frequent, *spontaneous*, spoken “prayer.” Noticing as many as possible, I praise God for my uncountable blessings, large and small, offered me each day. Neither take anything good for granted nor without appreciation. I recognize that *everything* good in my life comes of God, while in every case of pain and suffering, God is with me (*when I allow it*), comforting me, encouraging me, and bringing me Peace, even in the face of great misery. Indeed, each day is a “day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118: 24). If you want to get better and better at finding yourself in the Presence of God, step one for me in each instance is to become conscious of my blessings and to express my earnest gratitude for them.

2. **Help someone else**, whether a friend or a stranger, in some way large or small, planned or (mostly) *incidental*. Deliberately notice opportunities to do this; such help can be physical, emotional, intellectual, and/or spiritual (as in prayer together, or on behalf of someone). This is another component of innocent *Relationship in God's Love*, and my own suffering is correspondingly and inexplicably reduced. ...Which is the theme of an excellent book by Micah Dillon, titled My Mended Heart, in which her thought that "in the sending comes the mending" has a dual meaning: 1) the person you are helping is being mended, but also—importantly, mysteriously, and even though it may not be your conscious purpose, 2) YOU are being mended, ...for it is not time that heals, it is Love that heals, with Love being non-directional, indiscriminate, and unconditional (as it is OF God). Indeed, Micah's book is therefore a perfect segue to why it is important to:
3. **Share myself** with others by way of earnest, meaningful communications, thus to *further* develop Relationship in God's Love. *We are meant to do this*. To not talk about our suffering with at least a few loving, trusted friends is to concentrate a poison inside oneself—increasing our distance from God, and increasing the suffering for *all* concerned. I recognize that, regarding others but also myself, I must endeavor to break down the barriers of awkwardness, fear, assumptions, hopelessness, and the withdrawal/isolation that prevent such communications; this will require a gentle persistence and also the acceptance of failure in many cases. *Most often, these communications are incidental, oral conversations*. However, written communications can often offer even more healing for the writer and for a reader alike—researched, proven, therapeutic healing. Here, you are welcome to read an example of *an actual journal* [Journaling a Griever's Walk] written and shared by someone who was primary caregiver for three terminally ill loved ones, was at their side at the moment of death, and who is navigating the journey afterward.
4. **En-Joy my simple, day-to-day tasks**, considering them as part of the Lord's "work" for me (almost as if a monastic practice) —making my bed, washing dishes, bathing, gardening, putting out the trash, taking care of my pets, repairing something broken, caring for a loved one,... *We are meant to en-Joy our good work and the humble satisfaction of accomplishment*.
5. **"Accept" my grief and suffering**, which is *NOT to deny* the painful fact of my *loss* or the *source* of my suffering in the world. Put another way: I seldom can control what happens to me, but I *can* control how I react to it. To accept my grief is to face my self-ish enemy, to see it for what it is: *self-pity*; and rather than to feel guilty about this, I should simply recognize it as naturally human but a distraction from my relationship with God. This is as if rather than seeing my suffering inside of me, I instead see it *outside* of me—I can point my finger at it, and say, "I see you for what you are!" Accordingly, ***I repeatedly subordinate it and thus prevent it from controlling me***; weeping becomes wonderfully natural and *unburdensome*. ***Acceptance is freeing... and empowering***. Now my grief actually serves to draw me closer to my compassionate God, who knows me completely and is cradling me in warm Love all the while. This is a **Victory** over our suffering that we can choose to receive from God.
6. **Lift up my eyes to the hills** (Psalm 121) *each time I visit my pit of despair* (which will continue until my body leaves the world), I lift my spiritual eyes to see my ***uncountable***

blessings, even in this moment, but also in my personal past—and extended into the future—including the company of all who Love me, to include my Lord—those who are with me now, and also those who have gone from this earth but not from the company of my spirit. ***This bigger picture is the Truth I must not lose sight of!*** I endeavor for my journey to take me, if only gradually, further away from despair in the world and ever-closer to pure Joy in God’s Love—*which is all around me in the here-and-now*, each time I lift my eyes to it. And because I will revisit my pit of despair *repeatedly* until I, too, am gone from the world, I must discipline myself to become better and better at lifting my eyes to the hills.

7. **Support my holistic well-being** (mind, body, spirit—all of which are intimately interconnected) by way of proven, routine, disciplined activities *to gradually improve* with:
- being *deliberately conscious* of or “tuned to” the presence of God (with and through Loving relationships, through prayer, through an earnest appreciation for my many blessings each day, and also through the en-Joyment of my Creation-gift);
 - performing regular, physical exercise;
 - using creative interests in art, music, writing,...;
 - using mindfulness daily (“getting out of your head” via meditation, prayer, yoga, contemplation/reflection, et cetera);
 - eating properly;
 - sleeping properly;
 - and by en-Joying fun, learning, humor, singing, playing, interesting discussion, ...

Of course none of us, monks and nuns included ☺, is perfect in leading a disciplined life! The point is that I should *earnestly strive* to live as I know I should (deliberately getting better and better at it, even if only gradually), both for myself and for those who care about me. I also believe that the less well I am spiritually, the more subject I am to every manner of illness and dis-ease.

I accept responsibility for this in every case in which I have any control, remembering that in more cases than I’d like to admit, ***It’s a choice!*** --- (*Our Free Will conveys an awesome responsibility...*)



Our consistent prayer: Dear Lord, even in our suffering—perhaps especially in our suffering—may we draw closer to you through our Relationship with each other—in your Love, ...and as guided by your Light, to find your healing Peace. Amen