

# Commentary: Addiction and surrender: The art of letting go

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*"She told me to follow her to the edge.*

*I said, 'No, I am afraid.'*

*She told me again to come to the edge.*

*I said, 'No, I am afraid I will fall.'*

*I came to the edge, and she pushed me,  
and I flew." (Anonymous)*

Why do we Christians long for control, knowing it is only when we let go—abdicating all certainty and control—that we overcome our innermost fears?

Surrendering control—not drinking—terrifies us alcoholics. Based on my disease's penchant for denial, stopping is the last thing I ever wanted to do.

Why is it so difficult for me to surrender, to let go? The irony is to "win" in life—to know sobriety—necessitates my letting go with unconditional surrender.

Anyone like me who is reading this and is battling alcoholism knows reaching out for help is what we should do. But we don't. Surrender flies in the face of everything we have been taught since childhood and does not come easy to us.

My personal recovery teaches me my alcoholism is a chronic, progressive brain disease characterized by an impaired ability to control alcohol, despite the certainty of incurring adverse social, occupational or health consequences.

# Letting go to survive

A helpful metaphor of “letting go” places me all alone, stranded in the middle of the ocean and on the verge of exhaustion. I am relentless in my continuing efforts to survive, frantically treading water, convinced no other alternative to drowning exists for me.

Surrender takes place at this very point of vulnerability. It is not until I realize that by surrendering and becoming perfectly still, floating on my back looking toward the sky, am I at peace, knowing I can and will survive.

I simply need to let go. The experience of surrendered release frequently surfaces in exhaustion—the moment I “give up” my efforts and permit myself simply to float and survive.

No matter how hard I denied it to myself, family, loved ones and friends, I knew in my heart I no longer was in control of my drinking. This knowing brings me closer to surrendering.

Often, alcoholics will resort to seeking help only when our addiction leads to hitting our “bottom,” allowing us to become ready and willing to let go, surrender and finally give up being sick and tired of being sick and tired.

## Surrender was and is crucial

Surrender was and is crucial to me getting sober. The first step in every 12-step program is the admission of powerlessness and the need for absolute surrender to win the addiction battle. I must continue to seek help for what I cannot face or accomplish alone. In seeking help, I accept my own powerlessness.

Again, it is my denial that most often stops me in my tracks. My spiritual journey begins, though, in acceptance and admission, in acknowledging I

am not in control. Peace and serenity are obtained only by relinquishing my ego-driven demand for control.

Taking ourselves too seriously often prohibits our ability to let go. The 17th century spiritual teacher Jean-Pierre Caussade described such self-destructive reasoning and an inability to let go as “pious pig-headedness.” Simply being able to lighten up about ourselves goes a long way toward our success in letting go.

I always believed I could control my drinking any time it became necessary. The simple truth is, I was living a lie and possessed a secret I dared not share with anyone. Deep down inside, I knew I was not able to control my drinking. My self-discipline and ability to control my alcohol intake essentially had evaporated.

## **Prayer and forgiveness**

Prayer and forgiveness follow surrender.

Prayer is my response to the realization I am not in charge, not in control and not God. Often my prayers are a silent cry, a plea for help and guidance from God, who is greater than me.

To forgive our loved ones who are battling addiction involves letting go of the deep-seated feeling of resentment, the identification of oneself as victim. For me, forgiveness appears when I let go of the feeling of resentment by surrendering the vision of myself as victim.

Forgiveness means giving up claim to controlling the past and refusing to be controlled by it.

If you, a family member or a friend can relate to any of this and would like to talk, please call me. And if you do not reach out to me, reach out to someone.

There are countless resources available, including [Rational Recovery](#), [Celebrate Recovery](#), 12-step programs, clergy and the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association](#).

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