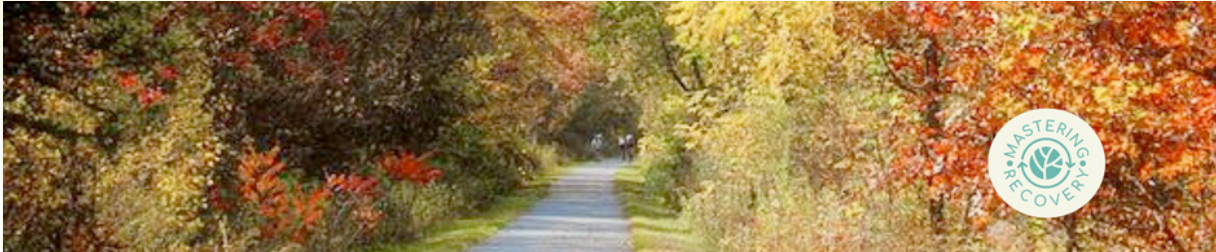


Mastering Recovery

Rooted in the Steps. Growing Through Connection

With Barry Lehman



#5.21 – Legacy, Forgiveness, and Love
November 19, 2025

What I'm Thinking

🍁 A Legacy Remembered



Today, November 19, marks what would have been my dad's 120th birthday.

When he registered for the draft in 1940, he was 35. He wanted to serve so badly that he lied about his age, claiming to be a year younger so he could be called up sooner. He even left home — ran away, really — to make it happen.

That's Buddy's War, the story I began researching and writing as a blog twenty years ago. I was almost the same age — 59 — that he was when he died.

He passed away in 1964, when I was sixteen. Like many children of World War II veterans, I grew up with an image of my dad that was more silhouette than story: an at-times angry, impulsive man whose inner battles I could sense but never understand.

For decades, that was all I knew — until grace nudged me to look closer.

The Long Road of Step Nine

“...made direct amends wherever possible...” — Step Nine

Step Nine is often misunderstood as a transaction — a single act meant to balance the moral books.

But at its heart, it's *grace in motion*.

Making amends isn't about convincing anyone of our change or excusing what happened. It's not, “*I'm sorry I hurt you, **but** you have to understand...*” The moment a “but” enters the sentence, grace disappears. (Yes, I did that. A couple times. And my sponsor didn't let me get away with it.)

Real amends are confession and humility woven together: I was wrong. I caused harm. *I'm here to take responsibility, not rewrite history.*

It's the posture that opens the door for grace to do what only grace can — begin healing what we can't fix alone.

That's why Step Nine is a two-way street.

It's not just about what we say; it's about who we become as we say it. Grace flows in both directions — toward the one we've hurt and back toward our own heart, loosening what shame has hardened.

A Son's Amends

At first, I simply wanted to understand who my father was — the medic who served in the 10th Armored Division through the Battle of the Bulge, who carried other men's wounds while never tending his own.
I thought my father's war ended in 1945.

It took me most of a lifetime to realize that it never really did.

He brought home the silence, the distance, and the unseen wounds that so many veterans carried—and I carried those same echoes without even knowing it. When I found my grandmother's wartime diaries, I thought I was researching history. As I dug through records, letters, and history, something unexpected began to happen.

Beneath the battles was another story—the spiritual journey of **forgiveness, humility, and grace** that bridges generations.

The man I had judged began to look different.

The story I thought I knew expanded into a whole life — one marked by courage, confusion, duty, and deep, hidden pain.

Grace was working quietly, as it always does. It turned curiosity into compassion and softened my heart in ways I didn't expect.

And yet, I never did find anything to confirm or contradict my feelings about him — my teenage discomfort at his anger, the distance of adolescence, the grief that comes from never getting the chance to talk things through. Forever, now, beyond reach.

When finished there were more mysteries than when I started, but they weren't about him anymore.

They were about my own acceptance of myself.

I didn't plan it as a Ninth Step. I simply wanted to know him better. I wanted to put all the stories I knew and now found to be true, into their proper place. It was only after it was published, that the true nature of the book came to light.

As with any Ninth Step, I came to understand that my only task at the end was one of grace — accepting him as he was and allowing that to be okay.
Accepted. Just as he was.

And me — accepting the grace that I can now give, which makes me less a prisoner of the past and more at peace with who I am today.

✧ **Grace at the Heart of Step Nine**

Grace is what keeps Step Nine from collapsing under the weight of regret.

It's what allows us to face what we once ran from — to look backward not to dwell, but to heal.

Grace says: You can't change the past, but you can transform its meaning.

1. It invites us to stop defending and start listening.
2. It calls us to speak without the safety net of a "Yes, but..." Stop blaming, and find grace at work where we need it.
3. Because in that honesty — that simple, uncluttered "I was wrong" — love has room to enter.

Making amends is less about erasing what happened than about reclaiming who we are in light of it.

It's where humility and love meet in the middle of the road, and grace becomes the bridge.

The past isn't finished with us—until we finish it with love.

 Learn more about Buddy's War and my other books: [Click here.](#)

✦ Reflection Prompt: The Two-Way Street of Grace

1. Who or what in your past still tugs quietly at your heart?
2. What might it look like to walk back down that road with grace instead of guilt?
3. Where is grace asking you to let go of the “but” and simply say, “I was wrong”?

Write it. Pray it. Speak it aloud if you need to.

Grace travels both directions — toward others and toward you.



✓ Taking a Step Beyond

**To forgive is to set a prisoner free
and discover that the prisoner
was you.**

— Lewis Smedes



Thanks, Dad. Happy Birthday.

A closing thought.

Legacy isn't about the stories we tell; it's about the love we're still learning to live.

This week, may grace help you make peace with what came before — and open your eyes to the new universe it's still creating within you.

— Barry

P.S. I honestly, truly, and deeply would love to hear your thoughts and reactions. Email me. I look forward to hearing from you.



Do you like the newsletter? Forward it to a friend or colleague!



Wherever you are in the journey-
come back to what grounds you.
You're not alone.

Barry Lehman
2370 Lexington Ave. S
Mendota Heights, MN 55120

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