



Mastering Recovery

Rooted in the Steps. Growing Through Connection

With Barry Lehman

#5.26– Grace and Hope in the Darkest Night

December 23, 2025

A Quiet Night



The days just before Christmas have always felt different to me.

Not louder — quieter.

Even when the world is busy, something underneath seems to slow down.

Lights seem to glow more than they shine.
Conversations soften.

There's a sense that something tender is close to the surface. For many of us in long-term recovery, this week can carry a mix of things -

- gratitude and grief,
- warmth and fatigue,
- connections and old aches — sometimes all at once.

This isn't a week for fixing anything.
It's a week for being honest about what we're carrying.

The Space Between Expectation and Gift

There's a memory I come back to most Decembers. Memory, of course, is all that we have of the past. It is what holds us to good times that still live in us. My December memory, even 70 years later, is that long pause before Christmas morning. The waiting. The hoping. The uncertainty. Even, yes, Santa Claus. We were a non-religious family, I was even a non-Christian, whatever a 7-year-old knows of that, like my mother. But Christmas was still celebrated.

So, as a kid, it was the waiting that was almost unbearable. I knew what was going to happen for sure. I was getting presents! I looked forward to it for weeks.

On Christmas Eve we would go to bed earlier than usual. Sleep? No, not that I remember. I wanted to see, or at least hear, Santa getting there. Dad would get home mid-evening after closing the pharmacy. My brother and I would hear hustle and bustle in the living room, down the short hall between us and our parents bedroom, right next to ours.

The anticipation grew. I would go over to the door and listen. Not that we heard anyone talking, but we knew they were getting out food and snacks for when the family was joined by Dad's employees along with our aunts and uncles and grandfather.

I never saw Santa. My brother would fall asleep. I would try so hard to stay awake. Just to hear the prancing and pawing of each tiny hoof. But, then it was midnight, the door opened, light came in and mom woke us up.

The presents were under the tree, everyone was sitting and having a good time. Life was as expected. Even if I fell asleep and missed Santa. He had still been there. Disappointment? Sure. Gratitude and joy for hope fulfilled? You bet!

Recovery has taught me that waiting isn't empty time.

It's formative time.

Waiting reveals what we cling to. Waiting exposes our assumptions. Waiting softens us — if we let it.

The longer I've been sober, the more I've learned that hope doesn't arrive with certainty. It arrives quietly, often disguised as patience, humility, or simply staying present when we'd rather escape into answers.

Grace doesn't rush us through the night.

It sits with us there.

The Heart of the Week: Grace is Being Met

Grace, as I've come to understand it in recovery, isn't about being let off the hook. I opened an email from one of the blogs I get once in a while about the Solstice. It was from [Mark Porteus Soul Connector](#).

It's okay, it told me, to slow down. There are seasons to move forward and when it's time, to pause, reflect, and realign. Don't confuse stillness with stagnation. I don't have to be going and building all the time. And light will return. That's grace, even in a quiet season.

Grace is how we are being met by life.

Met in our humanity.

Met in our limits.

Met in the places where we don't have tidy faith or clear direction.

Hope, too, changes as we mature in recovery.

It stops being about outcomes

and becomes about *trusting the next step* — even when we can't see very far ahead.

Grace says, *You belong here, even now.*

Hope says, *Keep walking.*

★ The Recovery Lens

Long-term recovery reshapes how we understand both grace and hope.

- They aren't rewards for doing things right.
- They aren't consolation prizes for surviving something hard.
- They aren't rewards for surviving the quiet and the wait.

They are companions.

They show up when we:

- stop demanding certainty
- release old expectations
- allow ourselves to be human
- stay present instead of rushing ahead
- trust the process more than the plan

This week isn't asking us to resolve anything.

It's asking us to stay.



✓ Taking a Step Beyond

**Be patient toward all that is
unsolved in your heart
and try to love the questions
themselves.**

— Rainer Maria Rilke

✨ Reflection Prompt

Where am I being invited to wait rather than rush?

**What expectation might I be asked to loosen
so grace and hope can meet me as I am?**

You don't need answers tonight.
Just honesty.

🕯 Closing Reflection

I'm reminded every year how easy it is to lose ourselves in the rush of December.
But peace has a way of finding us when we least expect it.

Thanks for sharing these moments with me — they help keep me steady, too.

— Barry

Email me. I always look forward to hearing from you.



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

All photographs are my own.
All is Copyright © 2025

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

