



# “Learning Abandonment to God”

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Coracle Fellowship Class of 2017

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“Yet not what I will, but what you will.”  
Mark 14:36



We don't always choose the hard roads we must sometimes walk, but we can always choose how to respond to them, and to walk them with God.

In July of 2015, my wife, Carolyn, was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. She was hospitalized for six weeks before dying on August 26th at the age of 63. This was the most difficult period in my life. Surprisingly, it was also the deepest and most transformative spiritual experience in my life. Once Carolyn's pain was under control, a peace settled over her and she reached out to each nurse and caregiver with kindness, patience, and love. She was a model for me as I prayed each morning for patience, kindness, and humility in my dealings with her nurses and doctors.



After weeks in the hospital and before going into a major procedure, Carolyn took a paper towel and pen while lying on a stretcher and wrote three notes: the first, a note of love to the Lord, her family, her church sisters, and her friends; the second, a love note to me; and, the third, a statement of her faith closing with *“I’ve been blessed abundantly, radically even. I can be called home to the Lord with a smile of appreciation in my heart.”* She slipped the notes into my hands as they took her in for one more

painful procedure. Witnessing the way she faced her death has forever changed me and the living out of my faith.

With my wife's death, I unexpectedly found myself as a 69-year-old retired widower with a soon-to-be empty nest. All of the plans we had been working on for retirement no longer mattered. I had no idea what I was going to do with my life. But, from Carolyn, I had learned how to say, "Yes, Father." I had learned how to accept and consent to God's will as revealed to me in my current situation – a situation that I could not control or change. While there was sadness and loneliness, there was no rebellion, no anger at God, and no doubt about my faith. In fact, the hope that has sustained me is the "Good News" of the coming Kingdom of God – looking forward to the ultimate rising in Glory with the Lord.

Accepting God's will as revealed in my current situation also meant showing up at my church on Sundays without my wife. At times this was difficult, a deep reminder of my loss. At other times there was true comfort. And, then, one Sunday early in 2016, a member of the church staff reached out and offered some opportunities for involvement in things that would have meant a lot to Carolyn. I said "Yes, Brother," and not surprisingly, I guess, one task has led to another. And, now I'm busy around the church working with my brothers and sisters in Christ to love and serve our neighbors. I now find myself more available to God, more available to serve him and serve his people. I am not bound by retirement plans and burdened by the related doubts and fears. I pray each day that I may continue to live into this situation and continue to say, "Yes, Father." As I go into the world each morning, I pray for the Holy Spirit to guide me, helping me to see Christ in others and to discern God's calling for me that day – to show me the work he has for me to do and how to do it his way.

When I can go out into the world open to how God might be calling me and leading me to serve him, it completely changes my everyday interactions with

those I meet. Or when I stay home and work on the latest task that must be done, whether it's something major like moving and down-sizing or more manageable like preparing for the next Coracle retreat, I try to see it as an opportunity to serve God and grow in Christ.

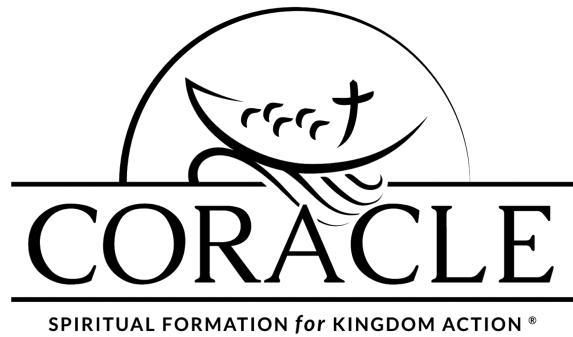
And at times, there's even a hint that God may be working through me as he wills when I look back on a project in wonder and think, *"How did that get done!"*

I pray that,\* going forward, my God-given time, talents, and treasures may be used in the service of God's Kingdom, following his will not mine.

I am learning to say with Jesus, *"Yet not what I will, but what you will."*  
(Mark, 14:36)



**\* A Note From Bill Haley:** *"Robert wrote this 3 1/2 years ago, when his prayer was that God would use all that he had to offer. Having continued to journey closely with Robert since that time, I bear witness that God HAS used Robert mightily in service to many others, and especially the most vulnerable, who Carolyn cared so much about. And Robert does too. He continues to live out of his own convictions, and also carry on Carolyn's legacy."*



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Some of this happens at Corhaven, a retreat home in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia; some of it happens in the Washington, D.C. metro area and throughout the mid-Atlantic; some of it happens online across the country and around the world.

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