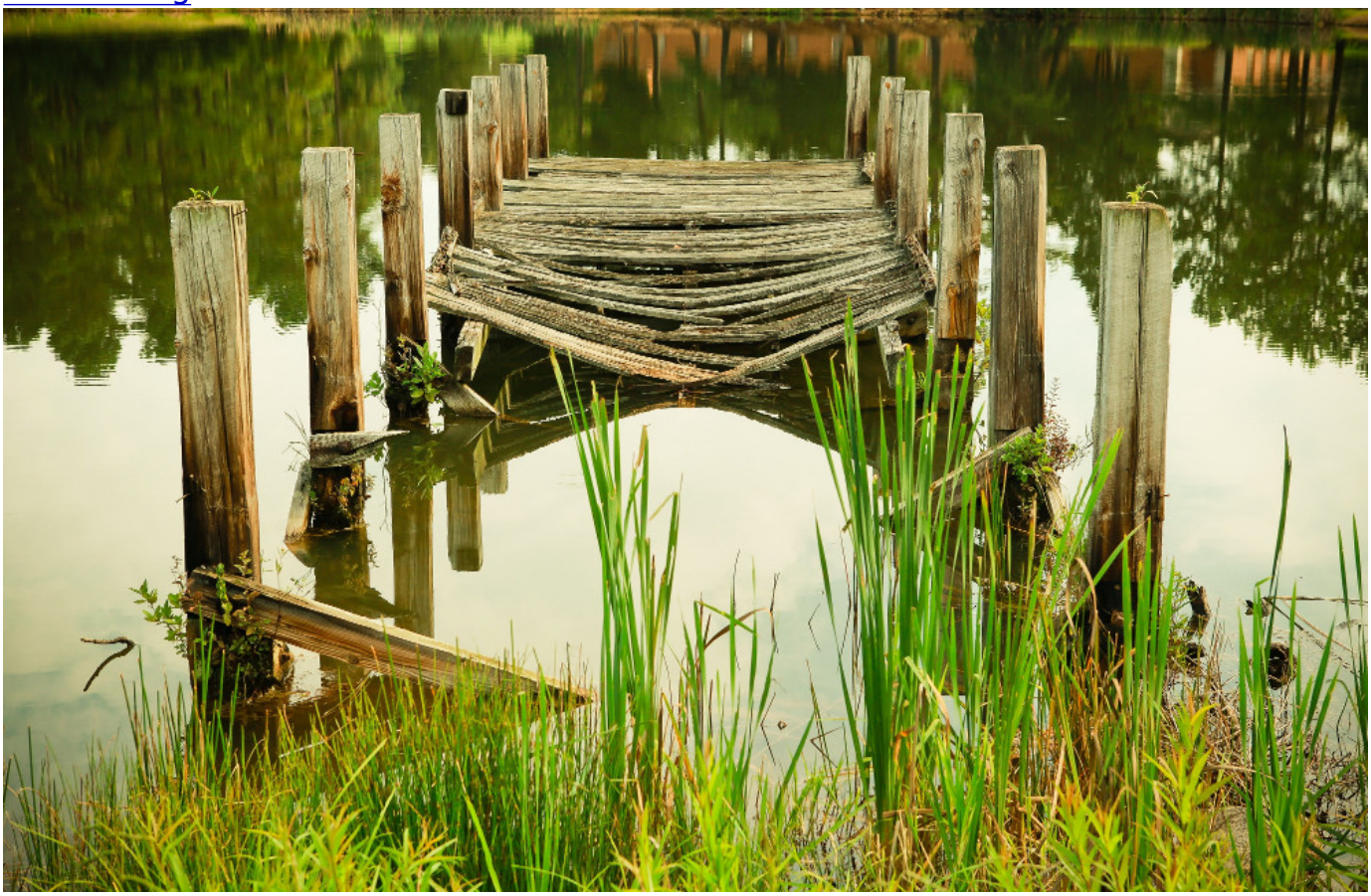
Spirituality
Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/Tom Butler)

by Joni Woelfel

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Years ago, when I got home from being in the hospital, I was so weak I could barely walk. My husband set up a cot for me in our main floor office so I wouldn't have to navigate stairs. I was a young mother at the time and had never felt so helpless.

However, I was filled with the need for creativity, along with the desire to be able to control at least something! Needing to be surrounded by some of my sacred things, I decided to gather a small collection on our fireplace mantle by my bed, where I could be comforted by it. I crept around the house, practically on my hands and knees, but managed to set up photos of my kids, a scented votive candle, a small dried floral arrangement, a stack of my favorite books, a display of get-well cards and other meaningful objects.

When I was done, I felt a surge of joy despite the changes long-term illness was bringing. This was my initiation into understanding author Joseph Campbell's words: "We must be willing to let go of the life we planned so as to have the life that is waiting for us."

That reminds me of the time when our yard was besieged by black mold following months of torrential rains and humidity. Our plants, deck and even our plastic white lawn chairs were covered with the awful black stuff. We treated it repeatedly with bleach, cleansers and even repainting, but the mold always relentlessly came back. We ended up chopping down our many perennials and stopped fighting that which couldn't be fought.

Author Julia Cameron wrote, "The creative process is a process of surrender, not control," and that was certainly the case that year. Gardening is a deeply soul-filling practice for me, as I am a lifelong farm kid whose well-being depends on digging in the dirt. Not being able to work outside as I looked out the window at the big mess caused me to spend wasted time on feeling anxious, uptight and frustrated. As poet Maya Angelou said, "You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them."

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We want to control suffering, the weather, the safety of our loved ones, our emotions, anger, what people think, stress, tragedy — the list goes on and on. We do not relish being vulnerable, feeling frightened, judged or needing help when this

could be translated as weakness. We want to be empowered, which is the essence of life management, maturity, achieving goals and making a difference in the world. What happens then, when the bottom falls out of life in big and small ways and we face diminishment? Are we no longer in control or empowered?

The answer is that we learn a deeper kind of empowerment that doesn't depend on external conditions so much as on inner strength, faith, optimism and hope. Henri Nouwen wrote: "Hope is willing to leave unanswered questions unanswered and unknown futures unknown. Hope makes you see God's guiding hand."

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When we see through the eyes of the soul, we learn that God's guidance and consolation through prayer, patience, a lot of adjusting and love empower us. When I look back at the timeline of my life, I can see that this is true on many levels. Indeed, I find I keep coming back to the words by Campbell: "The rapture that is associated with being alive is what it's all about."

For many of us, this is evidence of the divine presence always there, filling the spaces between control, surrender and letting go all our lives through.

[Joni Woelfel, a frequent contributor to Soul Seeing, writes from Spicer, Minnesota. All Soul Seeing columns are available online at NCRonline.org/blogs/soul-seeing.]

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