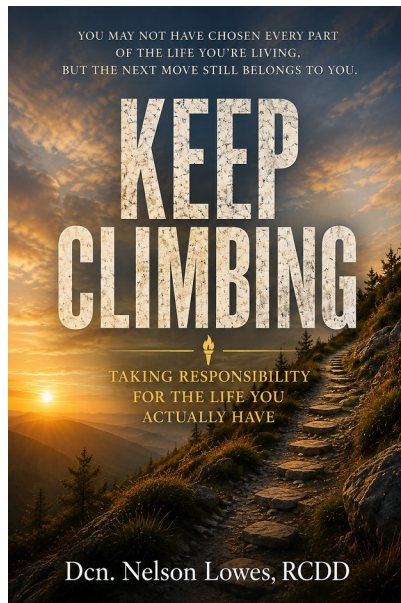




KEEP CLIMBING

Reader Companion

A practical reflection workbook for the life you actually have

What belongs to me? • Wrong Hill Test • Steering Wheel • Responsibility Without Shame • 72-Hour Next Move • Outstretched Hand

THE QUESTION

You may not have chosen every part of the life you are living, but the next move still belongs to you.

Dcn. Nelson Lowes, RCDD

Companion resource to Keep Climbing: Taking Responsibility for the Life You Actually Have

© 2026 Dcn. Nelson Lowes. Published by Torch & Trail Press. For personal and group use.

Start Where You Actually Are

This companion is not a test and it is not a promise that a few worksheets can fix a complicated life. It is a way to slow down long enough to separate what happened from what belongs to you now, distinguish a hard hill from a wrong one, stop grabbing steering wheels that are not yours, and identify a next move small enough to make but important enough to matter.

Use it with the book, after a keynote or workshop, in a parish or leadership group, or by yourself with a pen and some quiet. You do not need to complete it in order. Start with the page that names the problem you are actually carrying.

The Five Keep Climbing Moves

#	MOVE	WHAT IT MEANS
1	Recognize the hill	Is this a hard hill worth climbing, the wrong hill, or a hill that belongs to somebody else?
2	Own your part	Tell the truth about what belongs to you without pretending everything was yours to control.
3	Keep your hands on your steering wheel	You can advise, influence, teach, love, and lead. You cannot choose for another adult.
4	Choose direction over perfection	Yesterday is closed. The next responsible choice is the piece you can actually move today.
5	Extend - and accept - a hand	Responsibility is not isolation. Ask for help when you need it and use experience to become useful, not superior.
ONE RULE Do not try to solve your whole life on one page. The point is not perfection. The point is direction.		

1. What Belongs to Me?

Responsibility becomes clearer when we stop treating every part of a situation as though it belongs in the same bucket. Some things happened to us. Some things were chosen by us. Some things can still be repaired. Some things can only be accepted. The work begins by telling the truth about the difference.

THE SITUATION I AM CARRYING

Name one situation - personal, professional, relational, financial, spiritual, or otherwise.

WHAT I WAS HANDED

Circumstances, history, limitations, decisions by other people, timing, losses, or facts I did not choose.

WHAT I CHOSE

Decisions, words, habits, promises, omissions, or responses that were actually mine.

What Belongs to Me? - Continued

WHAT I CANNOT REBUILD

What is finished, irreversible, outside my authority, or no longer available to change.

WHAT MAY STILL BE REPAIRABLE

An apology, payment, correction, boundary, conversation, process change, commitment, or new behavior.

WHAT BELONGS TO ME NOW

Not everything. Just the part I can responsibly carry today.

CHECK YOURSELF

Understanding the past is not the same as excusing the present. Owning your part is not the same as taking blame for everything.

REFLECTION

- ☐ I am carrying blame for something that was never fully mine.
- ☐ I am avoiding something that clearly does belong to me.
- ☐ I am trying to change something that can only be accepted.
- ☐ I can see at least one repair or next action that remains possible.

2. The Wrong Hill Test

Not every difficult hill is wrong. Some of the most worthwhile parts of life are hard. But persistence can become its own excuse when sunk cost, pride, fear, status, habit, or identity keep us climbing after the direction no longer makes sense.

HARD BUT RIGHT

The work is difficult, but it serves real responsibilities, values, relationships, or a genuine calling. Growth and sacrifice are producing something worth building.

WRONG HILL

I am staying mainly because of sunk cost, pride, fear, status, habit, or because I am good at it - not because the direction still makes sense.

NOT MY HILL

The problem matters, but responsibility for solving it fundamentally belongs to someone else. I may influence or support; I cannot take over.

UNCLEAR

I do not yet have enough information. The next responsible move may be counsel, prayer, data, a boundary, time, or a small experiment rather than a dramatic decision.

THE HILL I AM EXAMINING

Name it plainly.

EVIDENCE THAT IT MAY BE HARD BUT RIGHT

EVIDENCE THAT IT MAY BE THE WRONG HILL

The Wrong Hill Test - Decision Page

WHAT AM I AFRAID I WILL LOSE IF I CHANGE DIRECTION?

Time? Money? Status? Identity? Approval? Seniority? A relationship? The story I told myself?

WHAT MIGHT I LOSE IF I DO NOT CHANGE DIRECTION?

WHAT EVIDENCE DO I STILL NEED?

A conversation, counsel, financial information, prayer, a trial period, a boundary, a job search, a medical opinion, a hard fact?

MY CURRENT BEST JUDGMENT

- ☐ Hard but right - keep climbing, but change how I climb.
- ☐ Wrong hill - begin planning a responsible descent and new direction.
- ☐ Not my hill - support appropriately, then release control.
- ☐ Unclear - gather the missing evidence before making a dramatic move.

REMEMBER

Leaving the wrong hill is not the same thing as being afraid of a hard one.

3. The Steering Wheel

One of the hardest parts of responsibility is accepting how little control comes with it. We can care deeply and still be unable to choose another adult's attitude, effort, behavior, or outcome. Clarity begins by putting each concern where it actually belongs.

I CONTROL	I INFLUENCE	I MUST RELEASE
My words My choices My preparation My effort My boundaries My apology My next action _____ _____ _____	Advice Encouragement Expectations Coaching Invitations Requests My example _____ _____ _____	Another adult's choices The past Other people's opinions Guaranteed outcomes What I cannot command What God has not given me to control _____ _____ _____

THE PART OF THIS SITUATION THAT ACTUALLY BELONGS TO ME IS...

ONE STEERING WHEEL I NEED TO STOP GRABBING IS...

THREE QUESTIONS

What belongs to me here? What belongs to the other person? What is the next action I can take without pretending I control the whole outcome?

4. Responsibility Without Shame

Responsibility is useful only when we can distinguish it from the things that often masquerade as responsibility. Blame looks backward for a guilty party. Control tries to own outcomes that may not be ours. Shame turns a mistake into an identity. Accountability tells the truth about commitments, consequences, and repair. Responsibility asks what belongs to me now.

WORD	WORKING DISTINCTION
Blame	Who caused this? Sometimes relevant, but not sufficient for deciding what happens next.
Control	What can I force or guarantee? Usually less than I wish.
Shame	What does this mistake prove about who I am? Often destructive when it becomes identity.
Accountability	What commitment, consequence, truth, or repair must be faced?
Responsibility	What part belongs to me now, and what can I responsibly do with it?

THE TRUTH I NEED TO TELL WITHOUT EXAGGERATING IT

THE CONSEQUENCE OR REPAIR I NEED TO ACCEPT

THE SHAME-STORY I NEED TO STOP TREATING AS A FACT

For example: "I failed at this" is not the same sentence as "I am a failure."

KEEP BOTH

Accountability and dignity can occupy the same room.

5. The 72-Hour Next Move

Big problems are good at creating small paralysis. This exercise forces the next move down to a size that can actually be completed. The action should be specific, observable, and possible within the next 24 to 72 hours.

THE PROBLEM OR GOAL IN FRONT OF ME

THE REAL EXPLANATION I NEED TO RESPECT

A limitation, responsibility, health issue, timing problem, cost, competing obligation, or other fact that is genuinely real.

THE EXCUSE I MAY BE BUILDING ON TOP OF THAT EXPLANATION

THE SMALLEST RESPONSIBLE ACTION I CAN COMPLETE IN 24-72 HOURS

WHAT MIGHT PREVENT ME FROM DOING IT

WHAT I WILL DO WHEN THAT OBSTACLE APPEARS

HOW I WILL KNOW THE ACTION IS COMPLETE

MAKE IT OBSERVABLE

Not “fix my life,” “get healthy,” “repair the relationship,” or “be a better leader.” Send the email. Take the walk. Schedule the appointment. Admit the error. Pay the bill. Ask the question. Have the conversation.

6. The Outstretched Hand

Personal responsibility can quietly turn into the belief that a responsible person should be able to handle everything alone. That is a trap. Sometimes another person knows something we do not know, sees something we cannot see clearly, or can simply remain present while we carry what still belongs to us.

A HAND I MAY NEED TO REACH FOR

Who can help me without taking over?

WHAT I AM ACTUALLY ASKING FOR

Advice? Information? Accountability? A connection? Prayer? Practical help? Someone to listen?

A HAND I MAY BE ABLE TO OFFER

Who could benefit from experience I have already paid tuition to acquire?

HOW I CAN HELP WITHOUT TAKING THE STEERING WHEEL

What can I offer while leaving the other person responsible for his or her own choices?

THE STANDARD

Listen. Ask questions. Tell the truth without using the truth as a weapon. Admit what you do not know. Help in a way that leaves the other person more capable of carrying what belongs to them - not more dependent on you to carry it.

7. Tuition Already Paid

Experience becomes more useful when it stops being evidence that we are smarter than the person behind us and becomes something we can place in that person's hands. Some lessons cost years, money, relationships, embarrassment, missed chances, or pain. We cannot recover the tuition, but we may be able to make it useful.

A MISTAKE OR HARD SEASON THAT TAUGHT ME SOMETHING EXPENSIVE

Choose one you can now look at with enough distance to learn from it.

THE LESSON I ACTUALLY LEARNED

Not the cliché. What do you know now that you did not know then?

WHAT I WISH SOMEBODY HAD TOLD ME EARLIER

HOW I COULD PASS THIS ON WITHOUT LECTURING, RESCUING, OR PROVING MYSELF

QUESTION TO CARRY

What lesson could I pass on so the person behind me does not have to pay full price for the same lesson?

8. The Life You Actually Have

The final question is not whether you can become a different person with a different past. It is whether you can become more faithful, responsible, useful, honest, loving, and whole inside the life that is actually yours.

FOR FAITH-CENTERED READERS

Grace does not erase responsibility. It changes the way we carry it. Yesterday can be confessed. Tomorrow can be entrusted. Today can be lived.

OWN YESTERDAY

What do I need to admit, grieve, forgive, repair, confess, learn from, or finally stop trying to rebuild?

ACT TODAY

What is the next responsible move that actually belongs to me?

CONSIDER TOMORROW

What am I building now that the person I become later will have to stand on?

MY KEEP CLIMBING RULE

Write one sentence you can carry with you when the hill gets steep.

CLOSING

Look honestly at the life you actually have. Figure out what part belongs to you. Do something responsible with that part. If tomorrow comes, do it again. Keep climbing.

For the book, speaking programs, discussion resources, and future Torch & Trail Press materials:

torchandtrailpress.com