



Grace-Based

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Recovery

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A Safe Place to Heal and Grow

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JONATHAN DAUGHERTY

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# **GRACE-BASED RECOVERY**



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## **A Safe Place to Heal and Grow**

Jonathan Daugherty



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This book is dedicated to every person who has the courage to step into a recovery environment. May you discover God's grace in these pages—how much he loves you and the new life of freedom and peace he offers you.



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# A Word to Group Leaders

As you endeavor to lead a recovery group, I commend you for taking on such a courageous and generous role. To help you get the most out of *Grace-Based Recovery* as a resource, I want to share a few things about the goals and emphases of a grace-based group, the best way to structure the group time, and the lesson format.

## GROUP GOALS AND EMPHASES

*Grace-Based Recovery* is ultimately a guide to understanding and applying the truth of God's grace to overcome addictions and strongholds of any kind, and to live out the abundant life available in Christ. Every lesson is an opportunity to point group members to Christ, so they might experience his grace and power firsthand. Apart from Christ, we can do nothing (John 15:5b).

With that in view, before you begin, be sure that you and the group members have read *For Group Members: Before You Get Started*:

- How to receive God's gift of grace;
- What grace-based recovery is *not*; and
- Why grace is the best environment for recovery.

These will lay the foundation for understanding and applying the principles in each lesson.

## YOUR ROLE AS LEADER

You don't need to have a history of addiction to be a group leader, but it is helpful if you can identify with the struggles of the group members. Always avoid creating any kind of "us vs. them" mentality between addicts and

non-addicts. God's Word reminds us that *all* have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). Even if you have not committed the same sins as another group member, you are in as much need of grace as they are. Lead from such a position of humility.

## GROUP GROUND RULES

As you begin, it's important to establish some basic ground rules for the group and your times together. Don't be afraid of having rules in a grace-based group. Grace isn't opposed to structure! Here are some basic rules to guide the group time:

- We protect confidentiality. We do not share someone else's story outside the group. We build trust by being trustworthy.
- We listen carefully. We don't interrupt or grab attention by inserting jokes.
- We don't talk too long. We make room for those who speak up less often.
- We understand that advice is not always welcome. We offer feedback only when invited to do so.
- We abide by the Golden Rule, treating others as we want to be treated.
- We remind each other of these rules whenever necessary.

Group meetings should take between sixty and seventy-five minutes. Group members are encouraged to do some homework between lessons that shouldn't take more than thirty to forty minutes to complete. Remind group members that what they will receive from the lessons is related to the investment of time and energy they will put in.

## LESSON FORMAT

Each lesson follows this basic format:

Main idea (short paragraph)

Bible passage

Article (800-1000 words)  
Discussion questions (3-5)  
Group exercise

## LEADER GUIDE

A Leader Guide is included in the back of the book for each lesson and contains notes with instructions on how you might deliver the content of the lesson and facilitate group discussion. Headings that are in all capital letters (SETUP, ASK) in most cases contain content that you can use to lead the discussion with your group. The notes after Leader guide are comments intended for you, as a way to orient you to the lesson themes and ideas and to provide hints and suggested answers to questions. These notes are not intended to be rigidly prescriptive. Feel free to let your personality and strengths shine as you consider the suggestions offered.

May God bless you as you lead fellow strugglers to Jesus Christ, the only One capable of bringing the dead back to life!

# For Group Members: Before You Get Started

## HOW TO RECEIVE GOD'S GIFT OF GRACE<sup>1</sup>

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17)

The foundation of grace-based recovery is *God's* grace. But what is God's grace and how can you receive it?

Simply put, God's grace is his undeserved kindness shown to all humanity. But there is a difference between what we might call God's "common" grace, extended to everyone, and his "saving" grace. The breath you are breathing is because of God's common grace. God is the Creator of all things, and all things benefit from God's common grace. But even though all creatures experience the beauty and benefit of God's creation, not all human beings experience his saving grace. That is, not all people have a personal relationship with God.

When God created the world, there was no sin or imperfection in it. He placed the first two humans, Adam and Eve, in the creation to care for and manage it (Genesis 2). God intended human beings to bear his image throughout the world as living reflections of their Creator (Genesis 1:26-28). In order for this relationship between God and humans to be one of love and not duty, God gave Adam and Eve free will, the ability to choose. And then he gave them a boundary, or a law.

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1. For a more thorough exposition of the gospel, get the book *Free and Clear: Understanding and Communicating God's Offer of Eternal Life* by R. Larry Moyer (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2009).

God told Adam that there was one tree that he and Eve were not to eat from. If they did, they would die (Genesis 2:16-17). One day God's enemy, Satan, appeared to Adam and Eve and tempted them to cross the boundary that God had established (Genesis 3:1-5). They crossed that line and ate the fruit that God had forbidden. This one act of disobedience ushered sin into the world and brought with it the penalty of death and decay, both physically and spiritually. Immediately, Adam and Eve were spiritually separated from God because of their sin (Genesis 3:6-24). Their relationships were broken, with God and with each other.

This condition of brokenness and separation from God continues with every generation. Humans are born with sin in their essential nature, a hard-wired desire to disobey God. This is why it comes so naturally to break God's laws (by lying, stealing, cursing, committing adultery, coveting, etc.). And nothing we do can earn our way back to the pure, undefiled relationship with God that Adam and Eve had at the beginning, before they sinned (Romans 3:10-20). We are truly trapped and lost in our sin (Ephesians 2:1-3).

But God did not abandon Adam and Eve. He also didn't abandon you or me. He made a promise from the very beginning that he would provide a Savior for us, one who would defeat Satan's plan to destroy us and pay the debt that we, as sinners, owe God for breaking his law (Genesis 3:15, 21).

In the Old Testament, we see God institute his law (Exodus 20:1-17) and raise up priests and prophets who would call people to turn from their sin in repentance and turn to God in faith. At that time, God required the blood sacrifice of animals to be offered as payment for the sins of his people. But these rituals had to be done over and over again because no animal could fully satisfy the debt owed to God for sin. Only a sinless human being could satisfy the demands of God's justice (Hebrews 9:11-28).

Enter Jesus Christ. He was the promised Savior. He was born of a virgin; his Father was God—and he himself was God. Both fully God and fully

man, he was able to live a sinless life—the life we are unable to live—even as he faced every temptation that we face as human beings. He was “God in the flesh” and the only one able to satisfy the Father’s righteous judgment against sin.

Jesus performed miracles to prove that he was God, sent from heaven by his heavenly Father and anointed by him to be the promised Savior. He stopped storms with his words. He raised men from the dead. He healed the lame, sick, and blind. And he shared the Good News of God’s salvation through faith—faith in him.

But Jesus’s work of salvation was not performing miracles. Jesus came to earth to pay the debt that you and I owe to God for our sin. Every human being stands under God’s judgment as a sinner. We owe God for the sins that we have committed against him. But we can’t pay what we owe. God demands a payment of sinlessness or perfect righteousness—something that you and I don’t possess. This is why Jesus is the critical link for us.

Jesus lived the perfect, sinless life. But death is the penalty for our sin. So Jesus needed to pay that penalty to erase our debt. On our behalf, as our perfect substitute, Jesus died on a cross, bearing the sins of the world. He physically died, carrying the weight of every human being’s sin in all of history, past and future (including yours and mine). Because he took our punishment and paid our penalty, our sins can be forgiven, no longer held against us by God when we put our faith in Christ’s work on our behalf.

Yet there is more! But God desired more than just our debt being paid. God wants us to have life—eternal life.

Therefore, on the third day after Jesus died, he rose from the grave, and he offers new, eternal life to all who trust in him. He showed himself to hundreds of his followers over a period of forty days before ascending back to heaven. He conquered sin and death, and now offers the free gift of forgiveness and eternal life to anyone who trusts in him alone for salvation. This is God’s saving grace.

Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). The only way you can know the fullness of God’s grace and have a relationship with him is to have faith in Jesus Christ—to trust that Jesus is God’s promised Savior and that through him you are forgiven and restored.

Do you want to receive the fullest expression of God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ? Then let me invite you to pray to God. The following prayer may be used as a guide. It isn’t the words printed below that save you. It is placing your trust in Jesus Christ alone as your only hope of being eternally joined with God.

Dear God,

Thank you for not giving up on me. I know that I am a sinner and that I have broken your law. I know that such disobedience deserves death, to be separated from you forever. But you made a way for me to be forgiven and restored to you through faith in your perfect Son, Jesus Christ. I place my trust right now in Jesus Christ alone as my only hope of salvation from the just penalty of my sin. Please fill me now with your life and help me to experience the abundance of your grace.

Thank you for your love and kindness. Help me to grow in my relationship with you. I want to live according to your Word from this day forward.

Amen.

If you just trusted in Jesus Christ for your salvation, I encourage you to tell someone. If you are part of a grace-based recovery group, share this experience with your group leaders. They will want to celebrate this pivotal moment in your life with you and help you begin to grow in your faith.

If you have further questions about the Bible and Christianity, seek out a local Christian church or visit [Ligonier.org](http://Ligonier.org).

## WHAT GRACE-BASED RECOVERY IS *NOT*

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age . . . (Titus 2:11-12)

Grace is not weak. Quite the contrary—it is powerful! Just look at these verses in Titus. It doesn't say that it is the law of God that trains us, or our strong will, or the right curriculum. No, it says that it is *grace* that transforms people from lives of ungodliness and worldly passions to lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly. Grace!

Sometimes people have misconstrued grace-based recovery, believing that we think acting out is okay and that there shouldn't really be any accountability; believing that it is all about feeling good and making people happy. Gag! Grace doesn't teach that.

If you are in a group that claims to be “grace-based” but never corrects or challenges anyone who is repeatedly acting out or getting worse in their addiction, then you need to flee that group as quickly as possible. Grace is not an abandonment of the truth. One of the foundations of a healthy recovery is brutal honesty, with ourselves and with each other. Don't join any type of recovery program that pits grace and truth against each other. They are not opposites; they exist in harmony.

Jesus was described as being full of grace and truth (John 1:14). This didn't mean that he was full of grace one day and truth the next. He was full of grace *and* truth, not grace *or* truth. This means that he told the truth within the context of love and compassion for others. Whether he was chewing out a religious leader for self-righteous duplicity or showing mercy to a woman caught in adultery, he never compromised on the truth or on his free gift of kindness to the undeserving.

The following will help you understand what grace-based recovery is *not*, so that you can better recognize what it *is* throughout the main lessons in the book.

## Grace-based recovery does not say it is okay to keep acting out

When you begin to understand God’s grace (his undeserved gift of kindness offered in Jesus Christ), there is a profound alteration in your perspective on acting out. You realize that God has withheld his just punishment for your sins and instead poured out the riches of his kindness. Why would you want to continue acting out when such grace has been given?

Grace does not teach us to say no to temptation in order to receive more grace, as if our doing the right thing earns us more grace. Grace is free! What grace teaches is that because we are *already* accepted and loved, we are really free to say no to sin. We don’t have to perform to validate our worth. We can live free because we *are* loved, not in order to *be* loved.

I realize that even those who understand this truth about grace have still had plenty of experiences where acting out continued. But this doesn’t diminish grace. It simply means that grace was not fully embraced at that point so that it impacted experience. It was only acknowledged intellectually.

There are many in recovery who have all the “right answers” but continue to live in ways contrary to those answers. Remember, though, that it is grace that trains us to say no; it’s not the ability to spout off a bunch of great solutions. As God’s grace moves deeper into your soul, you become more willing to give up your “answers” in favor of asking more questions—questions that reveal the true state of your heart and move you toward real healing and growth.

## Grace-based recovery is not a celebration of sickness or depravity

Some might assume that because a person is encouraged to share their full story of brokenness, this opens the door for admiring, or even promoting, such behaviors. That simply isn't true. Occasionally, someone might start to "relive" their past while telling their story, in which case it is important for whoever is listening to step in and remind the person that sharing their story is for the purpose of confession and healing, not glorification of evil.

Those listening to someone share their story also need to be careful, protecting themselves from the temptation to lust or to encourage more detail than necessary. The goal of an addict telling their story is to remove all secrets from the darkness. If addicts do not get their story out into the light, they will never experience the fullness of true freedom. Grace allows for deep secrets to be exposed without shame.

## Grace-based recovery is not a sin management system

Most recovery programs are oriented toward modifying behavior with a little emotional and spiritual work tossed in on the side. But mostly, they are about cleaning up behavior. This typically leads to a rigid performance-based system that, at best, can only teach a person to manage the addiction, not break free from it.

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)

Behavior modification works for what it is designed to do: modify behavior! But there are lots of problems with this approach when it comes to helping addicts break free from deeply embedded compulsions. First, since it is only focused on behavior, it completely misses dealing with a person's heart. This is unfortunate because the only way an addict can truly break free from addiction is through the transformation of the heart. Behavior modification is primarily concerned with the addict not acting out.

Another problem with behavior modification is that it sets up an addict to form a belief system that is false: that freedom from addiction occurs from the outside in. In other words, if you get the external behaviors right, your heart will change too. Of course, this isn't true, but addicts who adopt behavior modification as the means to recovery will inevitably learn to believe this.

Finally, behavior modification can actually lead an addict *back into their addiction!* Yes, you read that right. When the addict's success or failure in recovery is measured solely by whether they have or have not acted out, they will eventually be forced to make a very tough decision: tell the truth or lie. Most choose to lie, which carries them right back to their old patterns of addiction.

“But why would they lie?”

Because they are being measured by their behavior, not by their intrinsic, unchangeable worth as a human being. And because behaviors are not static, the way they view their worth will be on a yo-yo. One day they might feel great about themselves because they are “behaving,” but then the next day they feel horrible because they are not. That is not grace-based recovery.

## Grace-based recovery is not easy

Contrary to what some might believe about grace-based recovery, it is not an easy path. Receiving grace is not comfortable; it challenges your pride and invites you to humble yourself, which most people are not good at doing. (Myself included!)

Over the years, we have had plenty of people abandon our groups and our programs, not because what we offered was too easy, but because they found grace-based recovery too hard! It is hard to let go of pride, legalism, control, and shame, and then embrace the gift of grace, walking into (not away from) inner brokenness, and committing to total transparency.

Do not be deceived into thinking that grace-based recovery is easy. It is not. It is much easier to embrace a recovery program of rigid rules, rituals, and behavior modification methods. You can feel justified and “accomplished” in such programs. They appeal to your pride and desire for control, all the while allowing you to ignore your deep brokenness. Yes, that is much easier, but it isn’t that dissimilar to addiction. Only the context has changed.

Unfortunately, taking the easy road in recovery never leads to freedom. And I hope it is freedom that you actually want, whatever the cost. I can testify from personal experience that although grace-based recovery is not easy, it is worth it because of where it will take you. Grace-based recovery leads to places you cannot find through rules alone or behavior modification. Places like peace, joy, freedom, and an unwavering assurance that you are a beloved child of God.

## WHY GRACE IS THE BEST ENVIRONMENT FOR RECOVERY

The heart, not behavior, is at the heart of recovery. This is very hard for many people to accept, whether those in recovery or those leading recovery programs. And even if this truth is acknowledged on an intellectual level, it is extremely difficult to embrace on an emotional one. It just seems way more obvious that behavior should be the primary focus of recovery.

The problem, however, with focusing on behavior in recovery is that it keeps the addict in a performance orientation rather than a relational one. If recovery is about changing the heart, then focusing on behaviors keeps the addict from ever reaching his or her heart. Everything can just stay up in the head. But a “heady” recovery is no real recovery at all.

Grace fosters an environment of love, which doesn’t always translate to addicts immediately cleaning up their behavior. But it does lay the foundation for long-term transformation. Love is the best long-term motivator

in recovery. Fear and rigid rules may whip an addict into clean behavior, but they cannot change the heart. That requires love.

When I began my recovery, I assumed (like every other addict) that all I needed was better behavior. I knew deep down that there was a mess in my soul, but I thought that if I could just learn to control my out-of-control behaviors, my heart would clean up too.

I was shocked to discover that better behavior did not have the magical effect on my heart that I assumed it would. In fact, the more I cleaned up my behavior, the more disconnected I felt from my heart! How could this be?

On one hand, I felt good that I wasn't acting out (as much). On the other hand, I felt hollow, still broken, and very detached from a part of me that had yet to wake up. My heart was still very much outside my recovery equation. Many in recovery today are in the same boat; clean on the outside, but broken and empty on the inside. Grace is the best environment for recovery because it allows you to be broken on the journey.

The goal of recovery is still healing and growth, but by taking the emphasis off behavior and placing it on your heart, you are free to experience full recovery, not simply behavioral recovery. And isn't that what you want, anyway? A full recovery? It's what I wanted.

If someone asked me now whether I would want cleaned-up behaviors within three months or a completely transformed life within ten years, I would take the ten years in a heartbeat. But too many in recovery are looking for a quick fix, an immediate change to make them feel better. And it's okay to want to feel better! But true recovery takes time. There is no such thing as a "quick fix" for addiction.

Recovery is a journey marked by numerous failures; each one a new opportunity to learn and grow. Grace gives you that opportunity. If you fall, get back up and learn from it. No penalties, no punishment, no shame. Get

back up and take another step. If you fall on that step, get up. And the next one? Get up again.

... for the righteous falls seven times and rises again ... (Proverbs 24:16a)

Even the righteous fall. Nobody is failure-free, whether a recovering addict or a faithful saint. So the focus in recovery had better not be on whether or not you fall. We all fall! The focus needs to be on encouraging one another to “rise again.” Grace creates the best environment for such encouragement.

## Introduction

# Grace-Based Recovery: A Safe Place to Heal and Grow

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Main idea: Creating a safe, healing environment

Bible passage: Matthew 11:28-30

GBR article: A safe place to heal

Discussion questions

Group exercise

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## MAIN IDEA

Grace-based recovery is about creating a safe, healing environment for overcoming addictions and strongholds<sup>1</sup> of any kind. The atmosphere of a grace-based environment is welcoming and open, inviting broken sinners to find their hope and healing in Jesus Christ, not in the strength of their own will.

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1. When the term “addiction” is used in this study, it primarily refers to compulsive, destructive behaviors. When the term “stronghold” is used, it primarily refers to spiritual and emotional bondage to false beliefs about yourself, God, and life.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

### Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

# Introduction

## ARTICLE

# A Safe Place to Heal

“Hi. Welcome to the group. My name is Jonathan.”

“Hi. I’m Joe.”

“I’m glad you’re here, Joe. We’ll get started in a few minutes. Help yourself to some coffee and grab a seat in the circle. Hey guys, this is Joe.”

In unison, “Hi, Joe!”

If you are Joe, this can be a terrifying experience, right? On the one hand, it is wonderful to be greeted, reassured that you are in the right place, and actually welcomed. On the other hand, it is frightening because everybody knows why you are there. You are addicted. Ouch!

As scary as this scene may be, you must enter it if there is going to be any hope for freedom from your addiction. You must enter a place where you are accepted in all your brokenness, a place where healing is available and transformation is waiting. You must *enter*.

## Grace-based recovery is a safe place

Grace-based environments often come in the form of a support group or small-group counseling or coaching. They are places where your full story can be heard without judgment or shame. In such an atmosphere, you are loved and embraced because of your *presence*, not because of your *performance*. It is safe to be real in a grace-based group.

Grace is an often misunderstood and misapplied concept. **Grace is simply defined as undeserved favor or kindness.** When you are offered grace, it is a free gift of acceptance and kindness that is not dependent on your goodness or behavior. It is a gift that validates your worth as a human being *because you are a human being.*

When you step into a grace-based recovery environment for the first time, it might feel a bit awkward, like you are in a foreign country. Is it really a place where you aren't condemned? A place where your worth isn't based on your performance? A place where joy, truth, and acceptance are offered with no strings? I know it seems too good to be true. *It is good, but it's also true—grace is out there!*

“Joe, why don't you share some of your story with us? Tell us why you're here.”

“Well, are you sure you want to hear it? I mean, it's pretty bad. I've done some really stupid, hurtful things that I'm ashamed of. Is it really okay to share that here?”

“Joe, we like to call this a ‘No Shame Zone’ (or NSZ for short). That means that no matter what you share, we won't stand in condemnation over you. Heck, we're just like you! We want you to share your story because until you do, you won't be able to start the journey of recovery to a whole new you.”

“Okay. Here goes . . .”

The foundation of a grace-based recovery environment is the invitation from Jesus in Matthew 11:28, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” This invitation is a call to both the self-righteous do-gooder and the desperate outcast to make their way to Jesus. In Jesus, there is rest for the weary; his grace invites you into his rest. And no one needs grace and rest more than the one who is addicted.

Do you want rest for your weary soul? Do you want a place where you can heal and grow? Then you need grace-based recovery, a place where your

value is constant and your life matters to God. Take on the easy yoke and light burden of Jesus and you will discover the rest he promises.

## Grace-based recovery is a healing place

Grace-based recovery means learning how to live in freedom every day. No one will do recovery perfectly, but perfection isn't the point. Healing and growth are what this journey is all about. Grace is the vehicle that moves you from a self-centered addict to a loving child of God.

Attitude in recovery is huge. Grace offers a vision of hope. No matter how far you have fallen in your addiction, grace always meets you there to pick you up. When you know that you have value, that *you are worth recovery*, you just might be able to take that first step and tell your story. You just might be able to start seeing yourself a little differently than before. You might start recovering and establishing a foundation for a whole new life.

If I gave you an acorn and told you to plant it today, would you expect to see a full-grown oak tree tomorrow? Of course not! There is a (long) process of growth that must occur before a tiny acorn becomes a massive oak. But the ultimate purpose of that acorn was always to become an oak tree. In the same way, your ultimate purpose has always been to be an "oak of righteousness" that bears God's holy image in his world (Isaiah 61:1-3). The seed of grace planted in you today will mature over time into a flourishing life of freedom and joy.

Grace-based environments give you the time and space to "grow up" in recovery. It takes time to unpack your whole story and start moving in a new direction. You need an environment where such time and patience are offered. That is grace-based recovery.

"Joe, I sure hope we see you again soon."

"Oh, I'm sure I'll be back. This is the best I've felt in years."

"Well, just so you know, even if we don't see you for another six months, you're still welcome here. You are always welcome here."

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can you identify with Joe's experience of stepping into a group for the first time? Why is a grace-based environment so important in that first encounter?
2. In a grace-based environment "you are loved and embraced because of your *presence*, not because of your *performance*." How does this idea make you feel? How does such an environment motivate you toward recovery?
3. What might make it difficult to enter a grace-based recovery environment?
4. How does a grace-based recovery environment change your perspective on the time frame it might take for real change and transformation to take place in your life? Does this encourage or discourage you? Why?
5. Is anything preventing you from coming to Jesus to find rest? If so, what is it? What would it take for you to let it go?

# Introduction

## GROUP EXERCISE

# Celebrate God!

Since this is a NSZ (No-Shame-Zone), share any fear you have about opening up to others about your weaknesses and failures. After each person shares, other members of the group are invited to make one affirming comment to the person who shared. (Be respectful, brief, and non-preachy.)

If you prefer not to participate verbally, simply say “Pass” when it is your turn. But consider allowing other members to speak affirming words over you, whether or not they know your specific fears. The truth spoken over you is powerful in breaking spiritual and emotional strongholds and affirming God’s message of grace and love.

Lesson

# 1

## Grace to Overcome

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Main idea: Grace-based paradigm vs. performance-based paradigm

Bible passage: Titus 2:11-14

GBR article: Grace changes everything!

Discussion questions

Group exercise: Celebrate God!

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### MAIN IDEA

Grace is essential for overcoming addictive strongholds—the compulsive behaviors and false beliefs that have ensnared you. The fact that God offers you grace shows you that you have value to God; it’s a value that isn’t based on your performance. Grace is God’s unearned favor or kindness toward you. You and I don’t deserve God’s love, but he offers it to us by grace. Therefore, recovery is more of a gift from God than it is a reward for your good performance.

Real recovery isn’t just about *not* doing something wrong or unhealthy; it’s about living daily in connection with God and others, and learning to live according to his Word. It isn’t based on your skill or willpower; it’s

based on the grace of God. You must receive this gift of grace<sup>1</sup> and let it work in your life if you are ever to break free from addictive strongholds.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

### Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, **training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age**, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (author's emphasis)

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1. See "For Group Members: Before You Get Started" to learn how you can receive God's free gift of grace and eternal life.

*Lesson*

# 1

ARTICLE

## Grace Changes Everything!

Recovery from any addiction is hard. (What an understatement, right?) But sometimes it is made even harder by programs intended to help you break free from your compulsions. Some programs can make you feel as if an additional burden is being laid onto your already heavy heart. And even if a program is well-meaning, the message that can be communicated is, “If you don’t measure up to the standards of our program, you will be seen as an even greater failure.” This doesn’t make for a good start to an already daunting journey.

Grace offers a different approach to recovery, one that doesn’t place your value on the ever-changing roller coaster of performance. Grace gives hope to the person just realizing the need for recovery, and also breathes new life into the one who has been on the journey a while but feels stuck in a rigid rut of rules and performance-based rituals.

Grace-based recovery offers a pathway to true healing and lifelong freedom. Such recovery isn’t merely about managing behaviors or simply “not acting out.” It provides a way to experience fullness in every aspect of life and a pursuit of purpose that is meaningful and joyous.

I have experienced many different kinds of recovery programs since 1999, when all my secrets<sup>2</sup> and lies came to the surface. I have tried many methods,

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2. Read my full story in my book, *Secrets* ([NewGrowthPress.com/Secrets](http://NewGrowthPress.com/Secrets)).

from “pain therapy” to intense Bible study and militaristic accountability.<sup>3</sup> I have read many books, worked with numerous counselors, attended seminars, and studied multiple curriculums on addiction recovery.

Over all these years, I have found very few, if any, resources that are grace-based. Most are what I refer to as “sin management systems,” a way to feel better about yourself and your failures without ever truly breaking free. It is sad. But it is not unfixable!

Do you want to be free from your addiction? Of course you do! Addiction sucks. Literally. It sucks the life from you. It tears apart relationships, destroys character, weakens the body, depresses the soul, and ultimately leads to death—in all areas of life. *No one sets out to become addicted.* But once you find yourself drowning in addiction, you must make a difficult choice: enter recovery or get worse.

Entering recovery is not easy. It means having to admit things about yourself that are embarrassing and ugly. It means that someone else will have to hear your story of brokenness, selfishness, foolish decisions, and lack of self-control. You will have to decide if the pain of recovery is worth more than the continued, worsening pain of addiction.

You might lose your reputation if you choose recovery, because now the truth is out. You might lose your spouse. You might lose your children, your job, your possessions, even your life. Although you might lose such things if you choose recovery, it is more likely that you would lose those things *anyway* if you continue down the path of addiction. Any losses in recovery cannot compare with what is ultimately gained: freedom, peace, and joy.

But you might be wondering, *How can grace cause all this change?* I realize that the idea of grace doesn't seem to fit with our normal understanding (or experience) with recovery. We think of recovery in terms of delivering brutal confessions, agonizing amend-making, setting up stringent

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3. This book is not intended to attack any particular method of recovery, but rather to expose possible fallacies of underlying performance-based principles that are counter to grace-based recovery.

boundaries, keeping high levels of accountability, and working our butts off. And while all those things are very much a part of the recovery process, apart from grace they simply become an idolatrous task list that exhausts the body and soul almost as much as addiction.

Grace changes everything because grace gives you a new lens through which to see the whole process of recovery. Grace reminds you over and over again that your value before God is unchanging regardless of your bad (or good) performance. Grace invites you to an ongoing process of growth in the context of love, joy, and authentic community.

Here are some possible differences between a grace-based perspective and a performance-based perspective and how they might affect recovery.

**Grace-Based Recovery**

Personal value is a constant.

Confession explores mistakes to learn and grow from them.

Accountability is an opportunity to build others up in truth and love.

Allows for safe exploration of wounds, shame, false beliefs, etc.

Grace leads to humility.

Grace shifts focus to God and others.

Grace sets people free.

**Performance-Based Recovery**

Personal value fluctuates, based on behavior.

Confession punishes bad behavior by a “start over” mentality.

Accountability is a tool to control or force behavioral outcomes.

Focuses on behavior over and above the emotional.

Performance leads to pride.

Performance focuses on me.

Performance manages sin.

I know that this chart can be troubling for some, especially those who have had experiences in highly behaviorally focused programs. My intent is not to upset. I know that many have found help and significant breakthroughs in such settings. But there is no denying the differences between a recovery setting that is primarily focused on behavior modification (performance-based) and one that is focused on the freedom that God desires to give (grace-based)—even if those differences don’t play out exactly the way the chart describes.

I have worked with hundreds of addicted individuals over the years and all who have come from performance-based environments have expressed the same sentiment: even after eliminating their addictive behaviors, something was still missing. They still felt “unfree” from something. In other words, simply “not acting out” was not real freedom, not true recovery. This is where grace must enter the journey. Without the favor and kindness of God, there is no freedom, even if you never act out again.

Spend some time asking God to show you his grace. Open yourself up to this wonderful gift. Read and reread Titus 2:11-14 and ask God to show you how he wants to manifest his grace in your life and recovery. Don't rush this conversation. Sit in grace and let it soak to your bones. Be enveloped by the truth that in Jesus Christ, your value to God is unchangeable—he really does love you! When that truth sinks deep into your soul, you will know the grace of God—and it will change everything.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Define “grace.” Why is God's grace so important to your personal recovery?
2. Thinking about all that you could lose as a result of your addiction, share your top reasons for why you are committed to recovery. Now ask yourself if those reasons are grounded in your relationship with God or in your own ability and strength. How can you move more toward a grace motivation (following God's instruction and lead) rather than a performance motivation (following your own wisdom and ideas)?
3. Why is a grace-based recovery approach actually hard to practice? What is required in order to truly receive (embrace) grace? (Hint: Think of the differences between humility and pride.)
4. Review the chart of differences between Grace-Based and Performance-Based recovery. Where in your own recovery have you seen more of a performance-based approach rather than grace-based? How can you take more of a grace-based approach moving forward?

Lesson

# 1

GROUP  
EXERCISE

## Celebrate God!

In grace-based recovery, all celebrations of victory give the credit to God rather than yourself. Why? Because recovery is a *gift* of God's grace. Therefore, he deserves the glory, not you. This kind of celebrating can be difficult to do, when it feels very much like you were the one who resisted the temptation to act out! But remember, it is *grace* that trains us "to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions." Even victories are a gift of God's grace.

Go around the group and share a victory from the past week. Keeping in mind that victories are gifts from God, share how this changes your perspective and attitude toward the specific victory you shared. Spend time together celebrating God for giving you all you needed to resist temptation and "live self-controlled, upright, and godly" in that moment.