

NEWLY UPDATED EDITION

JOHN BAKER

FOREWORD BY RICK WARREN

Celebrate Recovery[®]

A recovery program based
on eight principles from the Beatitudes

LEADER'S GUIDE

ALCOHOLISM • DIVORCE • SEXUAL ABUSE • CODEPENDENCY • DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
DRUG ADDICTION • SEXUAL ADDICTION • FOOD ADDICTION • GAMBLING ADDICTION

CELEBRATE
RECOVERY

25

ANNIVERSARY
1991-2019

Celebrate Recovery[®]

LEADER'S GUIDE

John Baker is the founder of Celebrate Recovery[®], a ministry started at Saddleback Church. It is estimated that over the last 25 years more than 1.5 million people have gone through this Christ-centered recovery program. There are currently over 27,000 churches that have weekly Celebrate Recovery meetings.

John has been on staff since Celebrate Recovery started. He has served as the Pastor of Membership, the Pastor of Ministries, and is currently the Pastor of Saddleback Church's Signature Ministries. He is also serving as one of the nine Elder Pastors at Saddleback. John is a nationally known speaker and trainer in helping churches start Celebrate Recovery ministries.

John's writing accomplishments include Celebrate Recovery's *The Journey Begins* Curriculum, *Life's Healing Choices*, the *Celebrate Recovery Study Bible* (general editor), and *The Landing* and *Celebration Place* (coauthor). John's newest books are *Your First Step to Celebrate Recovery* and *The Celebrate Recovery Devotional* (coauthor).

John and his wife Cheryl, the cofounder of Celebrate Recovery, have been married for more than four decades and have served together in Celebrate Recovery since the beginning. They have two adult children, Laura and Johnny, and five grandchildren.

Johnny Baker has been on staff at Celebrate Recovery since 2004 and has been the Pastor of Celebrate Recovery at Saddleback Church since 2012. As an adult child of an alcoholic who chose to become an alcoholic himself, Johnny is passionate about breaking the cycle of dysfunction in his family and helping other families find the tools that will lead to healing and openness. He knows that because of Jesus Christ, and by continuing to stay active in Celebrate Recovery, Maggie, Chloe, and Jimmy—his three children—will never see him drink. Johnny is a nationally recognized speaker, trainer, and teacher of Celebrate Recovery. He is a coauthor of the *Celebrate Recovery Daily Devotional*, *Celebration Place*, and *The Landing*, and is an associate editor of the *Celebrate Recovery Study Bible*. He has been married since 2000 to his wife Jeni, who serves alongside him in Celebrate Recovery.

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This book is dedicated to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

*To my wife, Cheryl, and my children, Laura and Johnny,
for loving me no matter what.*

*To Pastors Rick Warren and Glen Kreun,
for trusting and believing in me.*

To the Saddleback Church staff, for their support.

*To the thousands of courageous men and women who have celebrated
their recoveries with me over the last twenty years!*

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THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Eight Principles Based on the Beatitudes

By Pastor Rick Warren

1. **R**ealize I'm not God. I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable.

"Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor." (Matthew 5:3)

2. **E**arnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to Him, and that He has the power to help me recover.

*"Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."
(Matthew 5:4)*

3. **C**onsciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ's care and control.

"Happy are the meek." (Matthew 5:5)

4. **O**penly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust.

"Happy are the pure in heart." (Matthew 5:8)

5. **V**oluntarily submit to every change God wants to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove my character defects.

*"Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires."
(Matthew 5:6)*

6. **E**valuate all my relationships. Offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me and make amends for harm I've done to others, except when to do so would harm them or others.

"Happy are the merciful." (Matthew 5:7)

"Happy are the peacemakers." (Matthew 5:9)

7. **R**eserve a daily time with God for self-examination, Bible reading, and prayer in order to know God and His will for my life and to gain the power to follow His will.

8. **Y**ield myself to God to be used to bring this Good News to others, both by my example and by my words.

*"Happy are those who are persecuted because they do
what God requires." (Matthew 5:10)*

TWELVE STEPS AND THEIR BIBLICAL COMPARISONS¹

1. We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors, that our lives had become unmanageable.

*“For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”
(Romans 7:18)*

2. We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

“For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” (Philippians 2:13)

3. We made a decision to turn our lives and our wills over to the care of God.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” (Romans 12:1)

4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

*“Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD.”
(Lamentations 3:40)*

5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)

6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

*“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”
(James 4:10)*

7. We humbly asked Him to remove all our shortcomings.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:31)

9. We made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23–24)

10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

*“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”
(1 Corinthians 10:12)*

11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and power to carry that out.

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly.” (Colossians 3:16)

12. Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps, we try to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

*“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.”
(Galatians 6:1)*

1. Throughout this material, you will notice several references to the Christ-centered 12 Steps. Our prayer is that Celebrate Recovery will create a bridge to the millions of people who are familiar with the secular 12 Steps (I acknowledge the use of some material from the 12 Suggested Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous) and in so doing, introduce them to the one and only true Higher Power, Jesus Christ. Once they begin that relationship, asking Christ into their hearts as Lord and Savior, true healing and recovery can begin!

FOREWORD BY RICK WARREN

The Bible clearly states “all have sinned.” It is my nature to sin, and it is yours too. None of us is untainted. Because of sin, we’ve all hurt ourselves, we’ve all hurt other people, and others have hurt us. This means each of us needs repentance and recovery in order to live our lives the way God intended.

You’ve undoubtedly heard the expression “time heals all wounds.” Unfortunately, it isn’t true. As a pastor I frequently talk with people who are still carrying hurts from thirty or forty years ago. The truth is, time often makes things worse. Wounds that are left untended fester and spread infection throughout your entire body. Time only extends the pain if the problem isn’t dealt with.

What we need is a biblical and balanced program to help people overcome their hurts, hang-ups, and habits. Celebrate Recovery® is that program. Based on the actual words of Jesus rather than psychological theory, this recovery program is unique, and it is more effective in helping people change than anything else I’ve seen or heard of. Over the years I’ve witnessed how the Holy Spirit has used this program to transform literally thousands of lives at Saddleback Church and to help people grow toward full Christlike maturity.

Most people are familiar with the classic 12-Step program of AA and other groups. While undoubtedly many lives have been helped through the 12 Steps, I’ve always been uncomfortable with that program’s vagueness about the nature of God, the saving power of Jesus Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. So I began an intense study of the Scriptures to discover what God had to say about “recovery.” To my amazement, I found the principles of recovery—in their logical order—given by Christ in His most famous message, the Sermon on the Mount.

My study resulted in a ten-week series of messages called “The Road to Recovery.” During that series my associate pastor John Baker developed the participant’s guides, which became the heart of our Celebrate Recovery program. I believe that this program is unlike any recovery program you may have seen. There are seven features that make it unique.

1. *Celebrate Recovery is based on God’s Word, the Bible.* When Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount, He began by stating eight ways to be happy. Today we call them the Beatitudes. From a conventional viewpoint, most of these statements don’t make sense. They sound like contradictions. But when you fully understand what Jesus is saying, you’ll realize that these eight principles are God’s road to recovery, wholeness, growth, and spiritual maturity.

2. *Celebrate Recovery is forward-looking.* Rather than wallowing in the past or dredging up and rehearsing painful memories over and over, Celebrate Recovery focuses on the future. Regardless of what has already happened, the solution is to start making wise choices now and depend on Christ’s power to help make those changes.

3. *Celebrate Recovery emphasizes personal responsibility.* Instead of playing the “accuse and excuse” game of victimization, this program helps people face up to their own poor choices and deal with what they can do something about. We can-

not control all that happens to us, but we can control how we respond to everything. That is a secret of happiness. When we stop wasting time fixing the blame, we have more energy to fix the problem. When we stop hiding our own faults and stop hurling accusations at others, then the healing power of Christ can begin working in our mind, will, and emotions.

4. *Celebrate Recovery emphasizes spiritual commitment to Jesus Christ.* The third principle calls for people to make a total surrender of their lives to Christ. Lasting recovery cannot happen without this step. Everybody needs Jesus. Celebrate Recovery is thoroughly evangelistic in nature. In fact, the first time I took our entire church through this program, over 500 people prayed to receive Christ on a single weekend. It was an amazing spiritual harvest. And during the ten-week series that I preached to kick off this program, our attendance grew by over 1,500! Don't be surprised if this program becomes the most effective outreach ministry in your church. Today, nearly 73 percent of the people who've been through Celebrate Recovery have come from outside our church. Changed lives always attract others who want to be changed.

5. *Celebrate Recovery utilizes the biblical truth that we need each other in order to grow spiritually and emotionally.* It is built around small group interaction and the fellowship of a caring community. There are many therapies, growth programs, and counselors today that operate around one-to-one interaction. But Celebrate Recovery is built on the New Testament principle that we don't get well by ourselves. We need each other. Fellowship and accountability are two important components of spiritual growth. If your church is interested in starting small groups, this is a great way to get started.

6. *Celebrate Recovery addresses all types of hurts, hang-ups, and habits.* Some recovery programs deal only with alcohol or drugs or another single problem. But Celebrate Recovery is a "large umbrella" program under which a limitless number of issues can be dealt with. At Saddleback Church, only one out of three who attend Celebrate Recovery are dealing with alcohol or drugs. We have several other specialized groups too.

7. *Finally, Celebrate Recovery is a leadership factory.* Because it is biblical and church-based, Celebrate Recovery produces a continuous stream of people moving into ministry after they've found recovery in Christ. Eighty-five percent of the people who've gone through the program are now active members of Saddleback Church, and an amazing 42 percent are now using their gifts and talents serving the Lord in some capacity in our church.

In closing, let me say that the size of your church is no barrier to beginning a Celebrate Recovery ministry. You can start it with just a small group of people and watch it grow by word of mouth. You won't be able to keep it a secret for long!

I'm excited that you have decided to begin a Celebrate Recovery ministry in your church. You are going to see lives changed in dramatic ways. You are going to see hopeless marriages restored and people set free from all kinds of sinful hurts, hang-ups, and habits as they allow Jesus to be Lord in every area of their lives. To God be the glory! We'll be praying for you.

Dr. Rick Warren
Senior Pastor,
Saddleback Church

FROM MY HEART TO YOURS

My name is John Baker, and I'm a believer who struggles with alcoholism. In 1992, I joined the Saddleback Church staff as the Director of Small Groups and Recovery. Over the years, I have also have had the honor of serving as the Pastor of Membership and Ministry. In 2001, I became the Pastor of Celebrate Recovery. That's what I do, but God is really more interested in who I am, when there is no one else around. He's interested in my character, my values.

So as a way of introducing who I am, I would like to share my testimony by relating my experiences, as I have traveled my personal "road to recovery."

I was raised in a Christian home in the Midwestern town of Collinsville, Illinois, population 10,000. I had a so-called "normal" childhood, whatever that is. My parents were members of a small Baptist church pastored by a very young Gordon MacDonald. I asked Christ into my heart at age thirteen. In high school I was class president and lettered in basketball, baseball, and track. I felt called into ministry at age sixteen and applied to several Christian universities. Up to this point, everything sounds normal — almost boring.

But I had a problem: I had to be the best in everything. Deep down inside I never felt good enough for my parents, my teammates, my girlfriends, or anyone. If I wasn't good enough for them, I wondered how I could ever be good enough for God. I must have missed the Sunday sermons on God's mercy and Jesus' unconditional love and undeserved and unearnable grace. I was a walking, talking paradox — a combination of the lowest possible self-esteem and the world's largest ego. Believe me, that's not a very comfortable feeling inside. The best way that I can describe the feeling is a burning emptiness — a hole — right in the gut.

I wrestled with God's call and judged myself unworthy to enter the ministry. Instead, after high school I went to the University of Missouri. When I packed for my freshman year, I took my nonexistent self-esteem with me. I joined a fraternity and soon discovered the solution — or what I believed to be the solution — for my life's pain: alcohol. It worked! I fit in! For the first time in my life, I felt like I belonged.

While attending the university as a business administration major (with a minor in partying), I met my wife, Cheryl. We were married during my senior year. Because the Vietnam War was in full swing, we knew that after college I would be called into the service. Little did Cheryl know what else the next nineteen years would have in store.

In 1970 I graduated from college, joined the Air Force, and was chosen to be a pilot. I attended Officers' Training School, and in ninety days learned how to act like an officer and drink like a gentleman. I continued to abuse alcohol, viewing it as a cure for my pain, certainly not a sin!

In the service, I quickly found the proper use for 100 percent oxygen — a cure for hangovers! The service is a great place to discover one's talents. Soon I was selected as my squadron's social officer. Perfect! A job that required a lot of hours planning functions at the officers' club bar. Then the war ended, and I was assigned to a reserve unit.

After the service, I joined Scott Paper Company. I earned my MBA degree at night school and God gave us our first child, a daughter, Laura. Two years later we were blessed with our son, John Jr.

I was promoted eight times in the first eleven years of my business career. I was the vice president of sales and marketing for two large consumer food manufacturers. I had reached all my life's career and financial objectives and goals by the time I was thirty! Along with all this business success, however, came several relocations. Moving every two years made it difficult for us to establish a home church, but as my drinking continued, church became less and less important to me. I knew that if I died I was saved, but my Christianity was not reflected in my lifestyle, business practices, and priorities.

Still, I thought my life appeared normal to casual observers. I was a leader in my church's Awana ministry for youth. I thought nothing of leaving work early to stop by a bar before the Wednesday night meeting so I could relax and relate better to the kids. Didn't everybody do that? I was also my son's Little League coach for five years, but I always stopped by the pizza joint with my assistant coach for a few pitchers of beer after every game. Again, didn't everybody? Talk about insanity!

Slowly I became more and more uncomfortable with the lifestyle I was leading. I faced a major decision. I had a choice: do it my way—continue drinking and living by the world's standards—or surrender, repent, and do it God's way. I wish I could tell you that I saw the light and did it God's way, but the truth is, I chose my way. My drinking increased and I turned my back on God. Proverbs 14:12 (TLB) says, "Before every man there lies a wide and pleasant road that seems right but ends in death."

I was on that road. I was what is known as a functioning alcoholic. I never lost a job, never got arrested for drunk driving. No, the only things my sin-addiction cost me were my close relationships with the Lord and my family. Cheryl and I separated, after nineteen years of marriage. I lost all purpose for living. You see, what I had considered the solution for my life's problem, alcohol, *became* the problem of my life!

My life was out of control. I had created my own hell on earth! On an October morning, I was in Salt Lake City on a business trip when I woke up and knew I couldn't take another drink. But I also knew that I couldn't live without one! I had finally hit my bottom. I was dying physically, emotionally, mentally, and most important, spiritually. I was at **Principle 1**.

Principle 1: Realize I'm not God. I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable.

"Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor." (Matthew 5:3)

Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors, that our lives had become unmanageable.

"For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." (Romans 7:18)

When I got back home from that business trip, I went to my first AA meeting. But that was only the beginning. All in all, I went to over ninety meetings in ninety days. As time passed, I was ready for **Principle 2**.

Principle 2: Earnestly believe that God exists, that I matter to Him, and that He has the power to help me recover.

“Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4)

Step 2: We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

*“For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”
(Philippians 2:13)*

This is where I found my first glimmer of hope! God loves me unconditionally. I was finally able to understand Romans 11:36 (TLB): “Everything comes from God alone. Everything lives by His power.”

Today my life with Christ is an endless hope: my life without Him was a hopeless end! My own willpower left me empty and broken, so I changed my definition of willpower. Now I know that true willpower is the willingness to accept God’s power for my life.

This led me to **Principle 3**.

Principle 3: Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ’s care and control.

“Happy are the meek.” (Matthew 5:5)

Step 3: We made a decision to turn our lives and our wills over to the care of God.

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—
this is your true and proper worship.” (Romans 12:1).*

In working the first three principles I said, “I can’t, God can,” and I decided to let Him. One day at a time. If we don’t surrender to Christ, we will surrender to chaos! I thought the first three principles were hard, but now came **Principle 4**.

Principle 4: Openly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust.

“Happy are the pure in heart.” (Matthew 5:8)

Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

*“Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD.”
(Lamentations 3:40)*

Step 5: We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

*“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other
so that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)*

At this point I had to go back to visit the young John Baker, to face the hurts, hang-ups, and habits I had attempted to drown with alcohol. I had to face the loss

of my infant brother. I had to accept my part in all the destruction that my alcoholism had caused to all those who were once close to me. After I 'fessed up, I was able to face the truth and accept Jesus' forgiveness and healing, which led me out of the darkness of my secrets and into His wonderful light!

I thank God for providing me with a sponsor who helped me stay balanced and didn't judge me during the sharing of my inventory. I cannot begin to tell you the burden God lifted off me when I completed the instructions found in James 5:16! I now knew I was forgiven by the work of Jesus Christ—the one and only true Higher Power—on the cross and that all the sins and wrongs of my past were no longer a secret. Now I was finally willing to have God change me. I was ready to submit to any and all changes God wanted me to make in my life. You see, not much changed in my life—just everything changed!

Principle 5 made me realize that it was time to “let go and let God.” By this time, I was happy to do so! I had seen enough of myself to know that I was incapable of changing my life on my own.

Principle 5: Voluntarily submit to every change God wants to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove my character defects.

“Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires.” (Matthew 5:6)

Step 6: We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” (James 4:10)

Step 7: We humbly asked Him to remove all our shortcomings.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

For me, completing Principle 5 meant three things: (1) I allowed God to transform my mind—its nature, its condition, its identity; (2) I learned to rejoice in steady progress—patient improvement that allowed others to see the changes in me that I could not see; (3) God rebuilt my self-worth based on His love for me rather than my always trying to measure up to the world's standards.

During this time God gave me His definition of humility: “My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak” (2 Corinthians 12:9, GNT). Then I could say with the apostle Paul, “I am most happy, then, to be proud of my weaknesses. . . . For when I am weak, then I am strong” (vv. 9–10, GNT).

I was now ready to work on **Principle 6**, my favorite:

Principle 6: Evaluate all my relationships. Offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me and make amends for harm I've done to others, except when to do so would harm them or others.

“Happy are the merciful.” (Matthew 5:7)
“Happy are the peacemakers.” (Matthew 5:9)

Step 8: We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:31)

Step 9: We made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift in front of the altar.

First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

(Matthew 5:23–24)

I said this is my *favorite* principle, but certainly not the easiest! I had quite a list of names on my amends list. They ranged from former employers and employees to friends and neighbors. But my most special amends were to my family, especially to my wife, Cheryl. We were still separated. I told her that my drinking was not her fault. I was truly sorry for the pain I had caused in her life, that I still loved her, and that if I could ever do anything for her—anything—she only had to ask.

Over the months of separation, Cheryl had seen the changes God was making in my life, changes that occurred as I worked my program. (This is where it really gets interesting!) She and the kids had started attending a church that met in a gym. It was called Saddleback. One Saturday night I was visiting the kids and they asked me to join them on Sunday morning. Much to their surprise, I said yes! It had been five years since I had last attended a church service, but when I heard the music and Pastor Rick Warren’s message, I knew I was home. Cheryl and I began to work in earnest on our problems and five months later, God opened our hearts and we renewed our marriage vows. Isn’t that just like God!

As a family we were baptized and later took all the church’s classes: 101 Membership, 201 Maturity, and 301 Ministry. In Class 301, I found one of my life’s verses:

“You have been chosen by God himself—you are priests of the King, . . . you are God’s very own—all this so you may show to others how God called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were less than nothing; now you are God’s own.” (1 Peter 2:9–10, TLB)

As Pastor Rick Warren says, “God never wastes a hurt.” All the pain and heartache of my addiction finally made sense!

However, at my AA meetings I was mocked when talking about my Higher Power—the only true Higher Power, Jesus Christ. And at church I couldn’t find a small group where individuals could openly relate to my struggle with my sin-addiction to alcohol. I knew they had to be there because in a church the size of Saddleback, I couldn’t be the only one struggling with a hurt, hang-up, or addictive habit.

So I wrote Pastor Rick Warren a short, concise, thirteen-page, single-spaced letter outlining the vision that God gave me—

The vision of Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered recovery program.

The next thing I knew, Pastor Rick called me into his office and said, “Great, John—you do it!” From that meeting Celebrate Recovery was born.

I finally was able to accept God’s call. I entered Golden Gate Baptist Seminary and committed my life to God, to serve Him wherever and whenever He chose.

I have dedicated my life to serving Jesus Christ. I intend to work the last two principles on a daily basis for the remainder of my time on this earth.

Principle 7: Reserve a daily time with God for self-examination, Bible reading, and prayer in order to know God and His will for my life and to gain the power to follow His will.

Principle 8: Yield myself to God to be used to bring this Good News to others, both by my example and my words.

*“Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires.”
(Matthew 5:10)*

Step 10: We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

*“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”
(1 Corinthians 10:12)*

Step 11: We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and power to carry that out.

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly.” (Colossians 3:16)

Step 12: Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps, we try to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.” (Galatians 6:1)

God has blessed me richly, and I gratefully pass on these blessings to you. It is my prayer that this book will help your church start a Celebrate Recovery program where your people can safely work together on their hurts, hang-ups, and habits—a program where Christ’s love, truth, grace, and forgiveness are demonstrated in all things.

In His steps,
John Baker

GETTING STARTED

The purpose of Celebrate Recovery is to encourage fellowship and to celebrate God's healing power in our lives as we work our way along the road to recovery. We are changed as we share our experiences, strengths, and hopes with one another. In addition, we become willing to accept God's grace and forgiveness in solving our life's problems.

By working through the principles, we grow spiritually, and we are freed from our hurts, hang-ups, and habits. This freedom creates peace, serenity, joy, and most importantly, a stronger personal relationship with others and our personal, loving, and forgiving Higher Power, Jesus Christ.

On November 21, 1991, Celebrate Recovery held its first meeting at Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, California. The program not only has survived, but has been truly blessed and continues to grow beyond our greatest expectations. More than 11,500 courageous individuals have worked through their hurts, hang-ups, and habits at Saddleback Church since the ministry began.

We have tried a variety of new ideas and concepts to help the ministry grow. Of course, not everything we tried has worked, but from the very beginning, I told the leadership team that the one thing we could not change in Celebrate Recovery is the truth that Jesus Christ is the one and only Higher Power.

This leader's guide is a compilation of what has worked at the Celebrate Recovery model at Saddleback. As you read through the book, you will see that in later chapters every aspect of Celebrate Recovery is explained in detail. This introduction, however, is provided to get you started. The ninety-day start-up strategy will help you organize your church's Celebrate Recovery ministry. The seven keys will show you how Saddleback's Celebrate Recovery model grew from forty-five people in 1991 to more than 700 weekly attendees today. And finally, the meeting format and instructions on how to use the materials list will give you a blueprint or structure from which to start and grow your new Celebrate Recovery ministry.

Implementing the 90-Day Start-Up Strategy

This simple yet effective start-up strategy will help you organize and plan your Celebrate Recovery ministry. The churches that have followed this strategy have been able to smoothly and effectively begin helping those in their church and community who are struggling with a hurt, hang-up, or habit. This strategy is

broken up into three phases and each phase is designed to help you build a strong foundation to support your ministry both at the beginning and as it grows.

Phase 1: Investigate, Communicate, and Invite (30 Days)

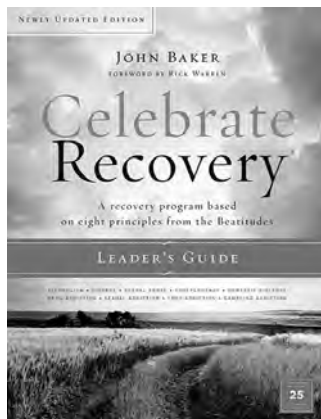
Investigate

Investigate www.celebraterecovery.com

- Under the “Group Finder” tab, look for Celebrate Recovery ministries in your local area. Visit as many of these as you can. Although each ministry will have its own unique personality, you will be able to see how the DNA of Celebrate Recovery is kept intact.
- Investigate to find the Celebrate Recovery state representative closest to your location. Your state rep is a valuable resource who will come alongside you and advise you along the way.
- Investigate one-day seminars/Seven Keys to a Successful Ministry

Investigate www.saddlebackresources.com

- Investigate all the Celebrate Recovery resources available to you for a successful ministry. It is highly recommended that you initially order the *Celebrate Recovery Program Starter Kit* which encompasses the “how-tos” and “basics” of starting your ministry.



- The kit includes:
 - 1 leader’s guide
 - 1 of each of *The Journey Begins* participant’s guides (4 total)
 - 1 of each of *The Journey Continues* participant’s guides (4 total)
 - 1 Leader’s Resource DVD with a video message from Rick Warren and John Baker and complete text of the leader’s guide
 - 1 Pastor’s Resource DVD with a message from Rick Warren and John Baker and sermon transcript MP3 messages from Pastor Rick’s “Road to Recovery” series

- 1 copy of the *Celebrate Recovery Study Bible*
- 1 copy of *Your First Step to Celebrate Recovery*
- 1 copy of the *Celebrate Recovery Daily Devotional* booklet
- Investigate the *Life's Healing Choices* book. It would be helpful to read it at this time to gain a broad understanding of the Celebrate Recovery principles of recovery.



Most importantly, start PRAYING CONTINUOUSLY!

Communicate

Communicate with your state representative.

- Introduce yourself and set a time to meet.

Communicate with your church.

- Set up an appointment to share your vision with your senior pastor and any of those who will be supervising this ministry. On the twenty-minute DVD in the *Celebrate Recovery Program Starter Kit*, Pastor Rick Warren explains the benefits of this program from a pastor's key point of view.
- Use church bulletin announcements, flyers, video, Facebook, Twitter, and your church website to communicate the plans to bring Celebrate Recovery to your church.

Invite

Invite anyone in your church who is interested to join you for an informational meeting.

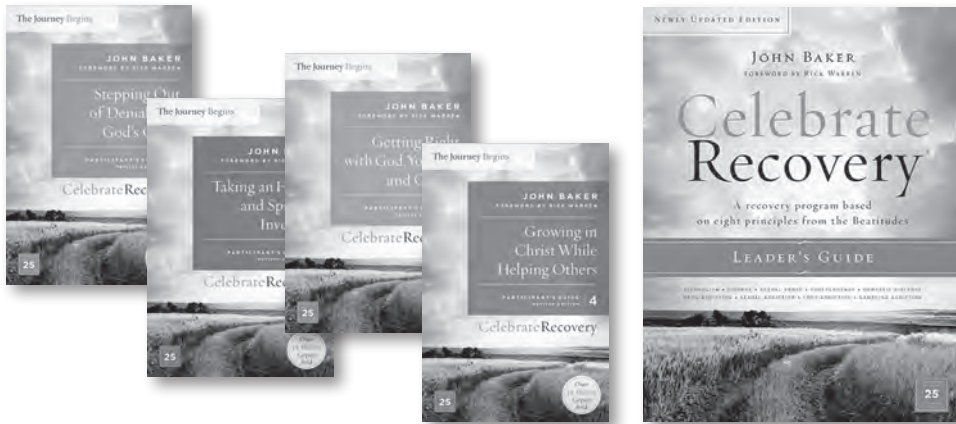
- Share your plans and begin to recruit support. Christ-centered and/or secular recovery experience is helpful.
- Some people will be potential leaders; others may want to come alongside the ministry in other areas, such as worship or child care.

Phase 2: Train, Plan, Prepare (60 Days)

Train

Familiarize yourself with the *Celebrate Recovery Program Starter Kit* and its components.

Purchase a set of *The Journey Begins* participant's guides and a leader's guide for each volunteer/leader.



Meet on a weekly basis with your initial volunteer/leadership team to provide training and Celebrate Recovery experience. Even though some may have 12 Step experience, you want to ensure that all have experienced aspects of Celebrate Recovery so they may lead others with integrity.

Here is a suggested format for your weekly meetings (2 hours) prior to launching your Celebrate Recovery general meeting night:

Part 1: Planning & Training (1 hour)

- Open with prayer
- Plan: (Refer to next section for topics)
- Train: Training topics from leader's guide might include:
 - Facilitating your general meeting night (see page 50)
 - Open share small group format (see page 54)
 - Small group guidelines (see page 54)
 - Step study small group (see page 57)
 - Celebrate Recovery Newcomers 101 group (see page 59)

Part 2: Step Study Group (1 hour)

- Break up into men's and women's small groups.
- Refer to page 57 for step study small group format.

At the end of the sixty days when you are ready to launch, this initial group will likely have completed Participant's Guide 1 and have started Par-

participant's Guide 2. If possible, leaders should plan on giving two nights per week to the ministry after launching the Celebrate Recovery general meeting night. This will allow the core group to continue to meet together on the second night to complete their step study.

Plan

The heart of the Celebrate Recovery program is found in three different types of groups: the *large group meeting* and the *open share small groups*, which both take place on the general meeting night, and the *step study small groups*, which meet on a separate night. In order to plan for these groups, first determine the day and location of your general meeting night.

Things to consider for your general meeting night:

- **Child Care:** Determine the ages that will be included. Refer to your family ministries director/pastor for proper procedures for your church.
- **Food:** Decide if you will be offering fellowship events such as dinner/snacks before the large group meeting or coffee/desserts following the open share small groups.
- Remember that food is an optional element that will help to build community and improve the experience for the whole family, but it is not a requirement. Although child care is not mandatory, it is **HIGHLY** recommended. Just keep it simple and do what is appropriate for your ministry.

Things to consider for your large group meeting:

- **Worship:** Determine if the worship component will be through a simple CD player, an iPod with speakers, or a complete band.
- **Teaching/Testimony:** Decide who will be teaching the twenty-five lessons from the leader's guide along with who will be sharing their written testimony. Consider planning these components on a quarterly basis. See www.saddlebackresources.com for available resources ("Testimonies to Go" DVDs, etc.).

Things to consider for your open share small groups:

- **Initial Open Share Small Groups:** Determine which groups you will offer. A suggestion would be to start with: men's chemically dependent, women's chemically dependent, men's codependent, and women's codependent. You can also start with simply a women's group and a men's group.
- **Leaders:** Open share group leaders and coleaders should be chosen according to their recovery experience.

Prepare

- Set the date for your first general meeting.
- Contact your state rep to schedule a time for him/her to visit.
- Confirm commitments from those assisting in facilities, worship, child care, and food.
- Finalize assignments for positions in the large group meeting and leader/coleader positions for open share small groups.
- Invite the church. Put information about Celebrate Recovery in the church bulletin and/or set up an information table during church services. Consider creating an informational brochure. You could also use church announcements to show the pastor's support and approval of the program. This will let everyone know that your church is a "safe place" to deal with their "hurts, hang-ups, and habits."
- Invite the outside community. Consider having a "soft launch" or "dress rehearsal" first. This will give you a few meetings to have things running smoothly before the public arrives.
- Open the doors on your launch date—well equipped and ready.
- Have fun!
- PRAY CONTINUOUSLY!

Phase 3: Continuing Growth (Day 91+)

An excellent way to help your Celebrate Recovery ministry grow is to consider having your church use the *Life's Healing Choices* book and *Life's Healing Choices Small Group Study Guide*. This small group study will greatly enhance your congregation's understanding of the scope of Celebrate Recovery's "hurts, hang-ups, and habits."



Consider waiting six months or so before offering step study small groups to your Celebrate Recovery participants. This will accomplish two things:

1. Leaders will have time to get through Principle 5, preparing them to be effective step study leaders themselves.
2. Your general meeting night will have a chance to grow and develop.

Consider purchasing the *Celebrate Recovery Advanced Leadership Training Kit*. This resource will be valuable to your ministry to further equip and empower your leaders. The corresponding *Celebrate Recovery Advanced Leadership Training Visual Kit* contains PowerPoint backgrounds and camera-ready artwork for printing of banners, etc.

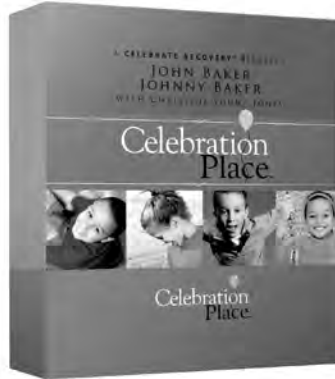
The kit includes:

- 10 training modules
- 2 DVDs: “3 Doors of Celebrate Recovery,” which explains the different group formats, and “Intervention,” which explains the “how-tos”
- 2 resource CDs: one with trainers’ teaching notes and the other containing the participant handouts, information table sheets, and bulletin inserts for all twenty-five of the Celebrate Recovery lessons
- 2 audio CDs: one containing the “Serenity Prayer” and the second containing the “Recovery Check-Up” lesson

The training modules are excellent tools for you to use during your monthly leaders’ meetings. Simply choose a module to cover each month. You may also want to teach certain modules, such as “Module 4—Training New Leaders,” on a monthly basis at a different time, as you recruit and introduce more participants into leadership.

As your ministry and leadership grow, consider starting *Celebration Place* and *The Landing*.

- **Celebration Place:** Celebration Place is created for children ages five to eleven. The beauty of Celebration Place is that it addresses the very same topics adults are learning about in Celebrate Recovery—but in kid-friendly ways. This approach initiates positive, fun, faith-filled conversations between kids and parents that let them practice open communication and sharing in ways they may never have before.



- The Landing: The Landing is a dynamic resource that targets and assists students. Young people can break patterns of unhealthy behavior through the community, teaching, and experiences they'll discover at The Landing. They'll examine the past decisions that led them to where they are today; talk about the patterns and behaviors that keep them trapped; pursue the life-changing truths of freedom found throughout the Bible; and commit to living differently and building healthy relationships with family members, adult leaders, and trusted peers.



- Continue to stay in touch with your state rep. He or she will be able to assist you in the process of getting your program listed on the Celebrate Recovery website.
- Check the Celebrate Recovery website to find one-day seminars and Summit dates.

This start-up strategy is meant to help you prepare, launch, and maintain a healthy Celebrate Recovery ministry. You may need to spend more time in one area than another, and you may not be ready to launch in exactly ninety days. The important thing is that you take advantage of the years of experience of Saddleback Church and thousands of others that have paved the way. Stay connected and don't be afraid to ask questions. You have lots of support!

Seven Keys to Start Your Recovery Ministry and Keep It Growing

There are seven keys to starting a recovery ministry and keeping it growing: **(1) worship, (2) leadership training, (3) senior pastor support, (4) fellowship events, (5) curriculum, (6) new groups, and (7) outreach.**

Think of the seven keys this way. Jesus Christ is the one and only true Higher Power. He is the rock, the foundation, of the Celebrate Recovery program. Proverbs 9:1 (NLT) tells us, “Wisdom has built her spacious house with seven pillars.” Each of the seven keys act like a pillar built on the foundation and supported by the foundation—Jesus Christ. The seven keys, in turn, are the pillars that help support your Celebrate Recovery ministry.



Let's begin with what I believe to be the most important key to continued growth in any recovery program: worship.

Worship

Worship has been a central part of Celebrate Recovery since the very first meeting. Every Friday night we begin our large group time with twenty minutes of praise and worship. I believe our worship time is important for the following reasons:

- Worship is a major strength and difference between a Christ-centered and a secular recovery program.

“And you will sing as on the night you celebrate a holy festival; your hearts will rejoice as when people playing pipes go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel.” (Isaiah 30:29)

- Worship provides a time for everyone to put aside the busyness and hassles of the world and get in touch with the true Higher Power, Jesus Christ. It allows time for the power of the Holy Spirit to fill all those who attend with a peace and a safety that only He can provide. There will be people present who are hurting so badly that they may be able to express their pain only through silent prayer and worship.
- Worship gives us a vehicle in which to celebrate our recoveries! I suggest keeping the praise songs upbeat to build up, strengthen, and encourage those who attend, and to focus on the joy of God’s presence, peace, and power in their recoveries.

I wish everyone could attend the Celebrate Recovery model at Saddleback Church! You would see firsthand the power of worship in recovery; we have upwards of fifteen singers and musicians who weekly minister faithfully to others. It doesn’t matter, though, what size your Celebrate Recovery is; a twenty-piece band is not necessary to incorporate worship into your recovery program. When we started Celebrate Recovery in 1991, we had two singers and a three-piece band. Even if you use a CD or simply find someone who can lead while playing a guitar, just be sure to include worship as a key part of your recovery program.

Leadership Training

The second key to growing your recovery ministry is leadership training. Proverbs 23:12 says, “Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge.” Pastor Rick Warren has told the Saddleback Church staff over and over, “Once you stop learning, you stop leading.”

If I had to choose one word that would describe the leadership training at Celebrate Recovery, it would be *consistent*. We schedule monthly meetings to discuss recovery issues and group dynamics. These leadership meetings include four elements: planning, teaching, sharing, and fellowship time.

Planning time includes assigning the lessons that will be taught by the teaching team for the next month. At this time we also line up the testimonies that will be used to support the particular principle we are working on that month.

In addition, assignments for the Celebrate Recovery information table, Solid Rock Cafe, Bar-B-Que, and other special events are given out at this time. In this planning element of the meeting, group participation is essential.

Teaching time is also very important. The majority of the teaching will be done by the training team and ministry leader. More about these roles will be explained on pages 33 and 36. In addition, Christian counselors have volunteered their time and support to help instruct and support our leaders. They have taught on a variety of topics from “how to handle someone in your group who is suicidal” to “helping the parents in your groups get needed help for their children.”

During *sharing time* I encourage the leaders to break into small groups. This gives them an opportunity to share different ideas for handling a conflict in their group, enforcing the five guidelines, or any general tip or strategy that has worked in their group. They also share their experiences, strengths, hopes, and especially their struggles with one another.²

We use the *fellowship time* in our leadership meetings to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. This is a great time to share what Christ has done in each of our lives and to bond us as a ministry team in purpose and spirit. The meeting concludes with a light dinner or an old-fashioned potluck. Sometimes we include spouses and families.

The leaders sign an annual leadership covenant and they also must meet the following qualifications:

1. They must be a growing Christian, not a new believer.
2. They must have completed all levels of the church’s leadership classes.
3. They need to have worked hard on their own recovery and be able to talk comfortably about their own victories and struggles.
4. They have completed a step study using the four Celebrate Recovery participant’s guides.
5. They need to have a strong personal support network: family, recovering friends, accountability partners, church leaders, Christian counselor, and so forth.
6. They must agree to attend ongoing monthly Celebrate Recovery leadership training sessions.

2. Because we encourage leaders to always share their hopes and victories with their Friday night groups, they understand that if they have had a tough week and feel that they are unable to lead their Friday night group with encouragement and hope, they can come to me before the meeting and I will find a replacement for them for that evening.

We tell them that we see their admission of a struggle as a strength, not as a weakness. We will meet with them during the upcoming week to encourage them. Usually by the next Friday night they are back leading their group, sharing Christ’s hope and power with a new enthusiasm and compassion.

7. They must agree to be alert to the temptation of developing a codependent relationship with members of their group.³

Let me offer you a word of caution. If you are trying to run your recovery ministry or your church's pastoral care all by yourself, you are going to burn out. And not only will you burn out as a leader, but eventually your own recovery will begin to suffer.

The way to be an effective Celebrate Recovery leader is to start giving the responsibilities of your leadership away.

Exodus 18:13–21 (TLB) tells us:

The next day Moses sat as usual to hear the people's complaints against each other, from morning to evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw how much time this was taking, he said, "Why are you trying to do all this alone, with people standing here all day long to get your help? . . . It's not right! You're going to wear yourself out—and if you do, what will happen to the people? Moses, this job is too heavy a burden for you to try to handle all by yourself. Now listen, and let me give you a word of advice . . . find some capable, godly, honest men [to help you]."

If you want to be a great recovery leader, and if you want to last and have your ministry grow and be more effective in reaching and helping hurting, broken people, I strongly suggest that you consider one important word: T-E-A-M!

At Celebrate Recovery we manage the ministry by the T-E-A-M structure. We have one person responsible for each of the following:

T—training

E—encouraging

A—assimilation

M—ministry leader

This is how we make Celebrate Recovery a truly lay-driven ministry. On pages 33–36 are explanations of each team member's role and responsibilities:

3. When you're just starting your Celebrate Recovery program, your leaders will not be able to fulfill these seven qualifications. The important thing is that they agree to complete them as soon as possible.

T = Training Coach

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
(2 Timothy 3:16–17)

The Training Coach’s role is to equip Celebrate Recovery leaders for ministry in an environment that allows each leader to grow in God and confidence. A key responsibility of the trainer is to ensure the DNA of an authentic Celebrate Recovery, which is vital in bringing accountability and credibility to the ministry.

An effective Training Coach:

Conducts *NEW LEADER TRAINING* and Orientation

When you are ready to begin training your new leaders, a helpful tool to consider is the *Advanced Leadership Training Guide* (ALT). The ALT is divided into ten modules and will provide you with all the training materials you need (www.saddlebackresources.com). Using the ALT, you are free to be as creative as you want. Take the ALT, pull various sections together, and create your own training topics.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------|
| • Training New Leaders | ALT Module 4 |
| • Writing Your Testimony | ALT Module 5 |
| • Training Open Share Group Leaders | ALT Module 6 |
| • Training Step Study Group Leaders | ALT Module 7 |
| • Implementing the Small Group Guidelines | ALT Module 8 |
| • Training Sponsors | ALT Module 9 |
| • Additional Training for Great Leaders | ALT Module 10 |

Helpful tips for Training Coaches can be found for free on our Celebrate Recovery blog and podcast at www.celebraterecoveryblog.com, or you can join us on the Celebrate Recovery Facebook page.

Provides training sessions for *MONTHLY LEADERSHIP MEETINGS*

It is not necessarily the Training Coach’s responsibility to conduct all of these sessions but to work in conjunction with the Ministry Leader to determine the needs of the ministry.

Develops and oversees leadership for *SMALL GROUPS*

The Training Coach supports group leaders, being sensitive to any issues specific to a particular group dynamic, or leader and coleader conflicts.

Develops a Training Coach *APPRENTICE*

Look for someone within your existing leadership to train and develop as an apprentice. A good trainer possesses the ability to see the vision and articulate it in a way that everyone can easily understand, training from personal experience. Motivation is caught, not taught.

E = Encourager Coach

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” (Ephesians 4:29)

The Encourager Coach’s role is to funnel positive energy into Celebrate Recovery leaders so they can handle the struggles and stress that may come from working with people who are hurting. They also serve as a bridge for the participants, who begin to serve through volunteerism on their pathway to becoming leaders themselves.

An effective Encourager Coach:

Provides and oversees the *SHEPHERDING CARE* needs of the groups and ministry leaders

The Encourager Coach speaks life into the leadership of the ministry and helps support the TEAM coaches by building them up, continually encouraging them with the Word of God and through prayer. The Encourager Coach recognizes milestones that have been reached by leaders, volunteers, and participants (as applicable) in their recovery.

Creates *FELLOWSHIP EVENTS* for the leaders and groups

In order to keep the leadership and ministry fun and friendly, the Encourager Coach plans fellowship events, both small and large. These events are not to interfere with your general meeting night, but to be held other days/times during the week. Particularly consider adding a fun teambuilding game at your monthly leaders’ meeting.

Encourager Coaches also support the Assimilation Coaches with Outreach fellowship events.

Helpful tips for Encourager Coaches can be found for free on our Celebrate Recovery blog and podcast at www.celebraterecoveryblog.com, or you can join us on the Celebrate Recovery Facebook page.

Helps identify *NEW APPRENTICE GROUP LEADERS*

Encourager Coaches should be on the “watch” for individuals who are working the Steps through the participant’s guides, and who are really making changes in their lives. This is a good indication.

Identifying new leaders must be intentional. Look for recovery experience. Look for those with a heart for hurting people. Do not compromise on the standards for leadership. To achieve this, consider visiting step study groups that are in the last participant’s guide. This is an opportunity to recruit and identify new leaders.

Develops an Encourager Coach *APPRENTICE*

The Encourager Coach develops someone from within Celebrate Recovery to be an apprentice. This role will have both men and women serving the needs of the leadership team.

The Encourager Coach’s personality traits and spiritual gifts:

- Natural encourager
- Helping
- Pastoring
- Relational
- Caring
- Good listener
- Understands group life and dynamics
- Spiritually mature
- Passionate
- Loves to pour into other leaders

A = Assimilation Coach

“I will praise the LORD at all times. I will constantly speak his praises. I will boast only in the LORD; let all who are discouraged take heart. Come, let us tell of the LORD’s greatness; let us exalt his name together.” (Psalm 34:1–3, NLT)

The Assimilation Coach’s role is to communicate favorably with the church family and community about Celebrate Recovery. An Assimilation Coach will gain information and knowledge about churches and secular recovery groups in his/her area as well as local Christian counselors and probation departments.

An effective Assimilation Coach:

Is responsible for the *PROMOTION* of Celebrate Recovery to the members, the church, the community, and the world

Members and the Church:

- Create Celebrate Recovery brochures, business cards, and newsletters (*Visual Kit 2* has Celebrate Recovery logo: www.eyeeffectsworship.com).
- Utilize your church’s bulletin and website.
- Produce a video about your Celebrate Recovery display pictures.
- Encourage your pastor to include Celebrate Recovery testimonies in sermons.
- Use Celebrate Recovery shirts, hats, etc. from www.shop.celebraterecoverygear.com.

The Community:

- Use brochures, newsletters, and video.
- Utilize advertising in local newspapers and magazines.
- Network with other ministries in your area.

The World:

- Help another church start Celebrate Recovery. Contact your regional director to help you reach out to other churches.

Helpful tips for Assimilation Coaches can be found for free on our Celebrate Recovery blog and podcast at www.celebraterecoveryblog.com, or you can join us on the Celebrate Recovery Facebook page.

Recruits and interviews new *LEADERSHIP CANDIDATES*

The “A” Coach may visit step studies on Step 12 to share the joy of serving as a leader and hand out Celebrate Recovery leader information sheets. (Sample Celebrate Recovery Leader Information Sheet and Interview Questions, Appendix 2)

Use the Leader Information Sheet and Interview Questions to help during the interview process and conclude by signing the Leadership Covenant. (Sample Celebrate Recovery Leadership Covenant, Appendix 1)

Provide other opportunities where anyone can serve. (Examples: Bar-B-Que team, worship team, coffee shop team)

Develops and maintains *GROUP INFORMATION MATERIALS* for groups and information tables

The “A” Coach sets up and replenishes Celebrate Recovery information/resource table, including copies of: the four participant’s guides, the *Celebrate Recovery Bible*, the *Celebrate Recovery Journal*, *Life’s Healing Choices* books, and group information sheets.

Develops an Assimilation Coach *APPRENTICE*

Pray for God to provide the right person with a heart to get the word out about Celebrate Recovery: a “people” person, outgoing and good at developing relationships; someone with a passion for spreading the word that there is a place to find help from life’s hurts, hang-ups, and habits.

M = Ministry Leader

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1)

The Ministry Leader has many important roles. However, the most important thing any effective Ministry Leader can do is to set the **TONE** in his or her Celebrate Recovery ministry. Let’s look at some of the things a Ministry Leader can do to make Celebrate Recovery a great experience for everyone who attends.

An important way a Ministry Leader can set the TONE is Teaching by example. The Ministry Leader needs to be someone *in* recovery. While a pastor or staff person may oversee the ministry while not engaging in it, the Ministry Leader should be someone who recognizes the need for personal recovery, working the Celebrate Recovery Principles in his or her own life. That’s one way to teach by example. When the Ministry Leader is involved in personal recovery, he or she is more effective in dealing with people who are in the same boat.

Teaching by example includes doing the things he or she is asking others to do. By showing up early to set up chairs, helping prep the ingredients for the Bar-B-Que, and greeting newcomers, the Ministry Leader can show the rest of the TEAM, as well as other leaders, how they should interact on the general meeting night. In short, teach with more than just words.

As Paul told the church in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

Next, the Ministry Leader sets the TONE by **Openly** sharing his or her hurts, hang-ups, and habits. Ministry Leaders should be transparent, not unapproachable or “fixed.” So, in teaching the lessons, they should use personal illustrations to show how Celebrate Recovery has and is helping them in their own lives. Yes, Ministry Leaders should be sure to share about how Jesus Christ has changed them, but shouldn’t shy away from sharing about the work they still have to do. This means Ministry Leaders should participate in open share and step study groups, and be part of the overall Celebrate Recovery ministry.

Remember, there’s no limitation. James 5:16 says, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” That applies to all of us, from newcomer to Ministry Leader.

Setting the TONE also means to **Never** forget to keep the *Celebrate* in Celebrate Recovery. Recovery can be hard, especially at the beginning, but Jesus changes things. The Ministry Leader should make sure to help people remember the joy that is possible in Christ when He works in our lives. Pick uplifting, high-energy songs for worship, use jokes (even bad ones) in the lessons, have a smile on your face and ask the leaders and TEAM to do the same. Make sure every testimony has a section dedicated to celebrating what Christ has done.

This will help us do what Paul instructs in Philippians 4:4: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” By remembering to celebrate the changes God will make in our lives, not just focusing on the problems of today, we can give the participants and newcomers hope.

Last, when the Ministry Leader sets the TONE we see that **Everyone** wants to be a part of something great. When the TEAM is in place, the leaders have been trained, and the TONE has been set, people will be drawn to your healthy Celebrate Recovery ministry. When pastors see lives changed, they will get behind Celebrate Recovery and send people in their congregation to it. When people share about what God has done for them, they will attract their friends and family to check it out. In short, by putting the work in, and by setting the TONE, people will flock to Celebrate Recovery.

We see this happening in Acts 2:44–47: “All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

An effective Ministry Leader:

Is responsible for the entire RECOVERY MINISTRY

Selects and schedules **TEACHERS** and **TESTIMONIES** for general meeting

Oversees all **CELEBRATE RECOVERY MINISTRY** volunteer teams

Serves as the **MAIN CONTACT** with the church staff

Helpful tips for Ministry Leaders can be found for free on our Celebrate Recovery blog and podcast at www.celebraterecoveryblog.com, or you can join us on the Celebrate Recovery Facebook page.

Senior Pastor Support

The third key for growth in your recovery ministry is senior pastor support. I can't emphasize the importance of this key enough. In 1993, Pastor Rick took the entire church through an eight-week series called "The Road to Recovery." It was based on the eight recovery principles found in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. Celebrate Recovery took off!

Ezra 10:4 (TLB) says, "Take courage and tell us how to proceed in setting things straight, and we will fully cooperate." The people at Saddleback did cooperate, and the ministry not only grew but became a part of the church family. Your senior pastor's support of your recovery program makes it acceptable for someone to be in recovery. It is not just "those" people anymore—it's "us"!⁴

In addition, your recovery ministry needs to participate in providing a service to the church other than its main purpose. If you want your recovery program to be respected and supported by the church as a whole, it needs to be and act as a regular ministry of the church, not as something separate. Celebrate Recovery needs to participate in all churchwide events. For instance, we provide a food booth at Western Day, a game booth at the Harvest Party, and we sponsor the sock hop at the church's New Year's Eve Party.

Share the recovery testimonies with your senior pastor. Encourage him to support the ministry by pulpit announcements and announcements in the church bulletin.

If you feel you need help in obtaining your senior pastor's or elder board's support, a great tool is the DVD found in the Celebrate Recovery kit. Make an appointment with your senior pastor or elders and watch the DVD together. It is a concise overview of the Celebrate Recovery ministry. They will have an opportunity to hear from the heart of my senior pastor, Rick Warren, about the changed lives that God has taken through the ministry.

Fellowship Events

The fourth key area for growth is fellowship events.

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone

4. Dysfunctional families don't talk, don't trust, and don't feel. Safe families do talk, do trust, and do feel! The church is a family as well. It can be a dysfunctional family, in which you are not allowed to feel, to talk openly, or to trust others; or it can be a safe place, a healing place, in which members can express their feelings, talk openly, and trust that others will not judge them. What we don't talk out creatively, we will act out destructively. Your church needs to be a safe place!

who falls and has no one to help them up! . . . Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9–10, 12)

It was not that many years ago that those in recovery were viewed by others as lacking the courage to seek help for their life’s problems. Some of the early AA meetings were held in church basements, where members would enter by the back door so that no one would see them and identify them as alcoholics. Thank God, those back-door days in the basements are gone. Your recovery program needs to be out in the open. It should be a regular place where people in recovery can join together, fellowship with one another, and share God’s answer on how to overcome their struggles by His power.

At Celebrate Recovery we have two main fellowship events, the Bar-B-Que and Solid Rock Cafe (see Appendix 4). The Bar-B-Que starts at 6 p.m. every Friday night throughout the summer. Our menu includes Recovery Dogs, 12-Step Chicken, Serenity Sausages, and Denial Burgers. We have great prices and great fellowship! Solid Rock Cafe follows our open share group time. It is a great place to “unofficially” continue the meeting.

At Celebrate Recovery, the main focus of every fellowship event is to help participants develop healthy relationships that will grow into a support team of sponsors and accountability partners. Both the Bar-B-Que and Solid Rock Cafe are designed to encourage individuals to meet either before or after our Friday night meetings. They provide a forum for the building of accountability teams and sponsorship relationships. (We don’t assign sponsors; it is each person’s responsibility to find and establish that important and personal relationship.)

Also, these fellowship events are great ways to get everyone involved in 12-Step service. Someone may not meet all the requirements of being a Celebrate Recovery small group leader. However, he or she can start serving and giving back by volunteering to help out at one of the fellowship events. Remember, in God’s eyes all service is valued (Matthew 10:42).

Curriculum

The fifth key for a successful recovery program is finding the right curriculum. The number-one question I get asked about starting a recovery ministry is, “What is the best curriculum?”

There is a wide variety of resources from which to choose, but I believe the foundation for an effective recovery ministry curriculum should all be

the same: the Bible. God's Word needs to be at the center of your recovery program. And it can't be if it is not the center of your curriculum.

Romans 15:4 tells us, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope." The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous contains twelve great promises, but God's Big Book—God's love letter to us—has over seven thousand miraculous promises!

Second, make sure your curriculum can be applied to all groups—all areas of recovery. If it is biblically based, it will! At Celebrate Recovery, we want to try to break the family's cycle of dysfunction at the youngest level—the kids. That's why we have The Landing for teens and Celebration Place for five- to eleven-year-olds. Both programs are based on Celebrate Recovery.

A third thing to look for in choosing a curriculum is its usability: Is the curriculum easy to use? Remember, it's impossible to eat an elephant in one bite, but if you cut it up in small pieces it becomes much easier (though not necessarily any tastier!).

Fourth, the material needs to create movement through the steps. Some books do a great job of teaching *about* the 12 Steps and specific areas of recovery; however, they do not encourage movement *through* the steps. I have seen many individuals get to the 4th Step and get bogged down, dwelling in the mud of their past. Even worse, they judge the program as too hard and stop the recovery process altogether!

The Celebrate Recovery curriculum fills all four of these curriculum requirements: it is built on God's Word; it can be used in all areas of recovery; it is packaged in four easy-to use, bite-size participant's guides; and completing each of the books gives a sense of progress and assurance of movement through the steps and principles.

Celebrate Recovery® is trademarked. This is for your protection. The following statement is on the value of using the Celebrate Recovery name for your new ministry:

The Value of Using the Celebrate Recovery® Name

Celebrate Recovery® desires to be a network of like-minded, Bible-based, Christ-centered recovery ministries. This growing network crosses denominational and cultural boundaries to help hurting people in our church and community.

There are many benefits of using the Celebrate Recovery® name. Here are just a few:

Connection

Your ministry is part of an international movement to bring Christ-centered, Bible-based recovery to the world. As a genuine Celebrate Recovery ministry you join in a network of thousands of other local Celebrate Recovery ministries reaching people for Christ and helping them break free from their hurts, hang-ups, and habits.

Support

Your ministry has the support and partnership of the Celebrate Recovery National Team, as well as assistance from your state and regional representatives. These entities work to help your ministry succeed.

Resources

Your ministry has access to the materials and resources from Saddleback Church that have proven to be invaluable tools in recovery.

Validation

Your ministry is validated in your church and community by being associated with Celebrate Recovery.

Promotion

Your ministry is listed with the other Celebrate Recovery programs on the official Celebrate Recovery® websites.

It is our desire for each local Celebrate Recovery ministry to have a clear and consistent character that identifies it as a genuine part of the Celebrate Recovery movement, yet maintaining its own creative distinctions of the local ministry and church.

To illustrate, here's an example of what it means to have consistency while allowing for creativity.

A McDonald's restaurant in Boulder, Colorado may have a Western theme and a McDonald's in Orlando, Florida may have a Mickey Mouse theme. Nevertheless, you can be sure when you order a "Big Mac" it will taste the same at both locations. Our desire is that no matter where newcomers or visitors attend a Celebrate Recovery meeting, they will experience the same quality content and program to find God's healing from their hurts, hang-ups, and habits.

The Celebrate Recovery® name is a registered trademark.

In a desire to protect the integrity of the broader ministry, Celebrate Recovery® requires that if you use the Celebrate Recovery® name that the following are an irreducible minimum of your program.

The DNA of an Authentic Celebrate Recovery® Ministry

1. Jesus Christ is the one and only Higher Power. The program is Christ-centered.
2. The Bible and Celebrate Recovery curriculum consisting of the leader's guide, the four participant's guides, and the *Celebrate Recovery Journal* are to be used exclusively. The large group lessons are taught from the leader's guide, keeping at least the acrostic and the Scriptures as the key points in the lessons. This is to keep consistency within groups, allowing teachers to be creative with the introduction and conclusion of each lesson.
 - *Life's Healing Choices* is part of the *only* approved curriculum. You will find this book may be used in many creative ways in your large group, newcomers group, and step study groups. For the five ways you can use *Life's Healing Choices* in your Celebrate Recovery ministry, locate the reference at www.celebraterecovery.com.
 - Celebration Station and The Landing are the *only* approved curriculums for kids and youth. They are the only children's and youth curriculums that tie directly with the Celebrate Recovery curriculum for adults.
 - Use of the *Celebrate Recovery Bible* is strongly encouraged due to the fact that it is the only Bible that corresponds directly to the Celebrate Recovery curriculum. The *Celebrate Recovery Bible* has been designed to work with the resources developed and tested in the national and international ministry of Celebrate Recovery.
 - The *Celebrate Recovery Bible* on Kindle, iBooks, and Nook is also approved curriculum.
3. The ministry is "group based." All groups are gender specific and use the group guidelines and format.
4. The Celebrate Recovery "Five Small Group Guidelines" are implemented and followed.
5. We expect each group to be accountable to Christ, their local church, and the model of Celebrate Recovery established at Saddleback Church. They agree to receive help and suggestions from their state representatives and regional directors.

A church or organization may decide to use the Celebrate Recovery® curriculum and mix it with other materials, or other programs, which is certainly up to their discretion. HOWEVER, they are prohibited from using the Celebrate Recovery® name.

All written materials and other items produced for commercial sale using the Celebrate Recovery® name are strictly prohibited.

New Groups

The sixth key for growing your recovery ministry is building new groups. Built around individual needs and recovery issues, new groups act like blood transfusions in your recovery ministry. People gain a sense of excitement and enthusiasm when a new group starts. Second Corinthians 9:12 says, “This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.”

I would, however, like to offer a word of caution: *Start your recovery ministry slowly.* I guarantee you that you will have masses of people coming to you saying, “Why don’t you have a group for this addiction or this compulsion or behavior?” or “Don’t you consider _____ as important as your chemically dependent group?” And being the compassionate person that you are, your first instinct will be to say, “We’ll start it next week!” Then you go off and try to find someone to lead it.

That’s the wrong way to start your recovery program. We started the Celebrate Recovery model with just four groups—chemically dependent men, chemically dependent women, codependent men, and codependent women. From there, I have used the following system for starting new groups.

When someone comes to me and asks why we don’t have a group for “XYZ” recovery, I usually respond, “Do you have any experience/recovery in that specific area?” (This experience could be Christ-centered or secular.) And then, “Do you know of anybody that has recovery in that area?” If the response to both of those questions is no, then I ask for the person’s name and phone number and keep the information on file so that we can notify the person when that group starts.

Also, we do not start a new group until we have a trained leader and coleader, trained by the leader, in place. Once we have the leaders, we run announcements for the new group in the church bulletin for two weeks. Next, we have the leader and coleader give their testimonies in our Celebrate Recovery large group time. After completing that process, the new group begins meeting.

I can’t tell you the number of women who asked me if we had a group

for sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. I had to say, “Not yet.” It was *two years* before God sent us the right leadership team. I would rather disappoint people by not having a group when they want it than cause someone great harm by having a group without trained and qualified leaders. It was during that time of waiting that God sent me eight very brave ladies. They had all experienced sexual, physical, or emotional abuse. We met every Wednesday morning for ten weeks and rewrote the 12 Steps for women in recovery from sexual, physical, or emotional abuse. You will find them in Appendix 3. Our regular 12 Steps would not have helped individuals recovering from this issue. Today, this is one of our largest and most successful groups.

At Celebrate Recovery we do not have coed groups. Let me share with you the two main reasons:

First, we have found that the level of sharing is not as deep when men and women are in the same group. How can someone struggling with sexual addiction share in a mixed group? It is simply inappropriate for them to share in a mixed group to the level that they need to.

The second reason is to increase the level of safety for the individuals in the group.

Let me give you an example: Let’s say a woman shares about how her husband mistreats her. She opens up and shares about the way that she would really like to be treated. And there is a guy in the group who is not there for all the right reasons. After the meeting he starts sharing with her how he is all the things that her husband is not. If your Celebrate Recovery is going to last and grow, it has got to be a safe place. Having same-sex groups helps keep it safe.

Allow me to offer you a suggested pathway for new group growth:

Celebrate Recovery’s Suggested Pathway for Growth

Phase 1 (Less than 10 participants)

- Have your large group time together—the worship, teaching, and testimony time. Then break into accountability teams for sharing.
- Develop men’s and women’s accountability teams for sharing. An example: you may have three men and six women. You can have the three men form an accountability team and the six women form two accountability teams of three persons each.
- As you grow, the goal is to form two same-sex groups—ASAP!

Phase 2 (10 to 20 participants)

- Have your large group time together—the worship, teaching, and testimony time. Then break into your groups for sharing.

- Start separate men's and women's groups. You can begin to break into your recovery specific groups. Let's say that you have ten men and ten women. Five women are all dealing with codependency. You can have them break into their own issue-specific women's codependency group and have the other five women, all with different recovery issues, meet in a mixed-issues women's group. Of the ten men, let's say five are dealing with alcoholism. You can have them break into their own men's chemically dependent group and have the other five men, all with different issues, meet in a mixed-issues men's group.

Phase 3 (20 participants and above)

- Have your large group time together—the worship, teaching, and testimony time. Then break into your groups for sharing.
- Start men's and women's groups for specific addictions and compulsions.
- Suggested beginning groups:
 - Chemically dependent men's
 - Chemically dependent women's
 - Codependent men's
 - Codependent women's
- Over time, all of your other new groups can grow out of these.

Outreach

The last of the seven keys for keeping your recovery ministry healthy and growing is outreach.

Matthew 5:14–16 tells us that we are to be “the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

It's great to have Celebrate Recovery for those who attend your church. So many of our new people come into the church full of the world and all its baggage. Celebrate Recovery provides a safe place for them to begin their journey of stepping out of their denial and into God's grace, as well as helping them to start dealing with their life's hurts, hang-ups, and habits.

While just “being” here is great, it falls short of putting our lamps on a stand and letting our light shine before others.

In this key, we want to look at some of the possible areas for your Celebrate Recovery ministry to consider for outreach. You can actually model Jesus when He said, “I’m here inviting outsiders, not insiders—an invitation to a changed life, changed inside and out” (Luke 5:32, MSG).

So what are some areas of outreach for your recovery ministry to consider?

One way we have been successful is by *starting meetings at local recovery houses*. The ones we have been successful in working with use the Celebrate Recovery curriculum in their recovery houses. Our leaders volunteer to lead their weekly meetings. On Friday nights, they take vans and attend Saddleback’s Celebrate Recovery meetings. (Just a note: They started just attending our Friday night Celebrate Recovery meetings, now the vans show up for church on Sunday mornings!)

Also, we have been successful in *bringing Celebrate Recovery to rescue missions*. In December 2000, the Orange County Rescue Mission asked if we could supply leaders to start the Celebrate Recovery program in their women’s and men’s facilities. We started Celebrate Recovery small group step studies every Wednesday evening.

At first, the residents were decidedly resistant to these “do-gooders” from Saddleback. They felt these church people had no idea about their lives and struggles. They believed that we were there to take them through “just another program.” But week after week, share after share, God did His work with His program. Over time, trust and relationships were built.

Today, we have transitioned the running of the mission’s Celebrate Recovery program completely over to their staff.

Another outreach opportunity is to *help other churches start recovery ministries*. There are several ways we do this. First, we go to a local church with our Celebrate Recovery band and leadership team. We spend the day giving testimonies and teaching on the third principle: “Consciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ’s care and control.” This attracts church members who are already attending secular recovery programs or Christ-centered recovery programs at other churches.

Pastors have often said to me, “We don’t have those kinds of problems in my church.” When I hear this, I say a short, silent prayer. The truth of the matter is that every church has people in it who are struggling with hurts, hang-ups, and habits. They also have people who have had years of experience with secular 12-Step recovery programs and who could help lead this kind of ministry. They are just waiting until they know it’s safe to come forward and serve.

The second way we have helped local churches is by having their leadership attend Celebrate Recovery meetings at Saddleback Church.

A third way of helping other churches is to have a “Testimonies to Go Ministry.” At Saddleback, we help provide testimonies to Celebrate Recovery churches that are just getting started. The individuals serving in this Celebrate Recovery ministry will travel and share their story with a new Celebrate Recovery within a two-hour driving radius of Saddleback. This is very important because when a church is just starting the program it may have difficulty in finding two testimonies per month.

I encourage you to share your testimonies with other Celebrate Recovery churches in your area. The issues we are dealing with are much too important to be territorial over—it’s a matter of life and death! We need to forget denominational affiliations and all work together!

An additional opportunity for outreach is to send out short-term mission teams. Over the years we have sent Celebrate Recovery teams to over thirty countries. The Celebrate Recovery material has been translated into twenty-three languages. Once you let the light of the Lord shine, it keeps shining.

The fourth suggestion is to *inform local Christian counselors about your program*. At Saddleback we have a list of church-approved Christian counselors and therapists who have been interviewed by two of our staff pastors. This ensures that their counseling is built on God’s Word and not on the world. We work very closely with these counselors and they refer many of their clients to Celebrate Recovery.

Yet another suggestion is to *invite guest speakers*. Dr. John Townsend and Dr. Henry Cloud are regular guest speakers at the Celebrate Recovery model. When they speak, our attendance increases by 20 percent. I try to have a guest speaker once per quarter. Not only does this attract new people, it’s a refreshing change for the participants of Celebrate.

The sixth outreach opportunity is to encourage your members to *attend secular recovery meetings* and share the one and only true Higher Power, Jesus Christ! We cannot wait for the unsaved to come to us. We need to get out and reach them where they are! Remember, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

We make Celebrate Recovery hats and shirts available to our participants. We ask them to wear them to their secular meetings. We encourage them to share the “Good News” when someone asks them, “What’s Celebrate Recovery?” Items can be found at www.shop.celebraterecovery.com.

The last outreach opportunity we will discuss here is to *visit area prisons*. Isaiah 61:1 tells us, “The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, because the LORD has appointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to announce that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed” (NLT).

That verse calls us to minister to the physical, emotional, mental, and, most importantly, spiritual needs of:

- The homeless—“Appointed me to bring good news to the poor”
- Those in crisis—“He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted”
- The addicted—“And to announce that captives will be released”
- Those in prison—“And prisoners will be freed”

Not only do we need to start Celebrate Recovery ministries in our churches for the congregation and the community, to help those trapped by their pain and their past. But we also need to take Celebrate Recovery into the prisons.

Leticia’s story is just one example of what Christ can do through Celebrate Recovery to change the life of someone in prison:

During the years of my incarceration, I attended substance abuse classes, NA and AA meetings. Even though those programs may work for others, they didn’t work for me. Finally, I began attending Celebrate Recovery.

The principles used and brought to light through the Scriptures opened my heart and mind and got me on my way to “real” recovery. I say real because it opened my mind to change and gave me hope. The Scriptures and principles showed me that I still needed to admit that I was still in denial about many things, but at the same time the Word gave me courage to “accept the things I cannot change,” but to use that time in prison to change the things I can.

Upon my release, I continued applying the principles to life and of course continued reading the Scriptures. They have both helped me to maintain a drug-free life, which in turn helped me obtain employment and become a productive member of society again.

I believe that the forgiveness lesson impacted my life most of all. I finally forgave myself and asked forgiveness from those I had injured during my addiction.

It is my opinion that Celebrate Recovery should be made available in all correctional facilities; not only for the residents, but the staff also. We all have issues, whether we are behind bars or imprisoned in our minds and hearts. Celebrate Recovery and the Word of God will definitely help.

A unique advantage of the Celebrate Recovery program for prisons is that while the inmate is getting recovery inside, the family can get recovery and support from a church in their area that has the Celebrate Recovery program. Also, when the individual is released, he or she can make an immediate connection with and receive support from a local Celebrate Recovery church.

That’s the power of Jesus Christ— that’s outreach!

Meeting Formats and Materials

This section will provide you with the “nuts and bolts” of starting and running the three types of Celebrate Recovery meetings.

One-Year Large Group Teaching Schedule and Curriculum Plan

First, we will look at the one-year large group teaching schedule and curriculum plan. This plan is designed to cover the twenty-five lessons in the four Celebrate Recovery *The Journey Begins* participant’s guides—all of the eight principles and 12 Steps—over a one-year period. A lesson is taught one week and then supported by a testimony or other special service the following week.⁵ This schedule is repeated annually.

Participant’s Guide 1: *Stepping Out of Denial into God’s Grace*

Week	Principle	Large Group Teaching
1		Introduction of Program
2	1	Lesson 1: Denial
3	1	Testimony
4	1	Lesson 2: Powerless
5	1	Testimony
6	2	Lesson 3: Hope
7	2	Testimony
8	2	Special music or outside speaker
9	2	Lesson 4: Sanity
10	2	Testimony
11	3	Lesson 5: Turn
12	3	Testimony
13	3	Lesson 6: Action
14	3	Communion

5. Several testimonies are included in this leader’s guide. Use them as examples to guide you as you choose members from your own group to share their stories.

Participant's Guide 2: *Taking an Honest and Spiritual Inventory*

Week	Principle	Large Group Teaching
15	4	Lesson 7: Sponsor
16	4	Testimony
17	4	Lesson 8: Moral
18	4	Testimony
19	4	Lesson 9: Inventory
20	4	Testimony
21	4	Special Music or Outside Speaker
22	4	Lesson 10: Spiritual Inventory (Part 1)
23	4	Testimony
24	4	Lesson 11: Spiritual Inventory (Part 2)

Participant's Guide 3: *Getting Right with God, Yourself, and Others*

Week	Principle	Large Group Teaching
25	4	Lesson 12: Confess
26	4	Testimony
27	4	Lesson 13: Admit
28	4	Testimony
29	5	Lesson 14: Ready
30	5	Testimony
31	5	Lesson 15: Victory
32	5	Testimony
33	6	Lesson 16: Amends
34	6	Testimony
35	6	Lesson 17: Forgiveness
36	6	Testimony
37	6	Lesson 18: Grace
38	6	Testimony
39	6	Special Music and Communion

Participant's Guide 4: *Growing in Christ While Helping Others*

Week	Principle	Large Group Teaching
40	7	Lesson 19: Crossroads
41	7	Testimony
42	7	Lesson 20: Daily Inventory
43	7	Testimony

44	7	Lesson 21: Relapse
45	7	Testimony
46	7	Lesson 22: Gratitude
47	7	Testimony
48	8	Lesson 23: Give
49	8	Testimony
50	8	Lesson 24: Yes
51	8	Testimony
52		Lesson 25: The Seven Reasons We Get Stuck

Since individuals will join the program at different times throughout the year, you need to caution them against trying to catch up with the teaching. For example: If a newcomer enters the program during week 35, when you are teaching on Principle 6, he or she should still begin in Participant's Guide 1, *Stepping Out of Denial into God's Grace*, working on Principle 1. Newcomers need to understand that this is an ongoing program and that they need to work through the principles and join a new step study group. What they are learning in the large group teaching time will be extremely valuable to them when they get to each particular principle. In addition, they should be encouraged to get a sponsor and/or accountability partner as soon as possible.

1. Large Group Meeting Format: Worship and Teaching Time

The large group worship and teaching time at Celebrate Recovery is designed to enable those attending to set aside the busyness and the stresses of the outside world by participating in a twenty-minute time of prayer, praise, and worship. It also includes a time for teaching a lesson from the *Celebrate Recovery Leader's Guide* or a testimony. This time begins to unfold the "safe" environment that is essential to any recovery program. It allows all those present to get in touch with the one and only Higher Power, Jesus Christ.

"Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD." (Psalm 150:1–6)

During the large group time everyone meets together; all the men and women combined.

Following is the agenda for Celebrate Recovery's large group worship and teaching time:

6:30 p.m.	Doors open — greeters in place
7:00 p.m.	Opening song Welcome and opening prayer
7:05 p.m.	Song #2 Song #3 Song #4
7:20 p.m.	Reading of the eight principles and their corresponding Beatitudes or the 12 Steps and their biblical comparisons
7:25 p.m.	Announcements (Celebrate Recovery news)
7:30 p.m.	Special music
7:35 p.m.	Teaching or testimony
7:55 p.m.	Serenity prayer Closing song
8:00 p.m.	Dismissal to small groups

Greeters

Greeters are extremely important both in making a positive first impression on all newcomers and in encouraging regular attendees. In addition to greeting, they also hand out the Celebrate Recovery bulletin for the evening.

The Celebrate Recovery Bulletin

The Celebrate Recovery bulletin contains the following information:

- Song sheet (unless words are projected on screen)
- Small group meeting room assignments
- Solid Rock Cafe/Bar-B-Que information sheets
- Small group meeting guidelines
- Eight recovery principles
- Twelve steps and their biblical comparisons
- List of all the open share groups that are meeting that night
- List of the open step study small groups that meet during the week
- Announcements of upcoming special events
- Prayer request sheets

A sample bulletin (jacket and inside pages) as well as examples of some of the above elements can be found in Appendix 4.

Opening Song, Welcome, and Prayer

We attempt to begin each week promptly at 7:00 p.m., and end by 8:00 p.m. This will ensure that you have a full hour for the small group meetings. Choose an opening praise song that is very upbeat and familiar. After the song, someone on the leadership team welcomes everyone, especially newcomers, then prays the opening prayer.

Set of Three Songs

The music continues with songs chosen to go along with the particular principle the group will be working on that evening.

Some examples would be:

Principle 1: “The Power of Your Love”

Principle 2: “I Have a Hope”

Principle 3: “The Potter’s Hand”

Principle 4: “Fear Not,” “White as Snow”

Principle 5: “Great Redeemer,” “Change My Heart, O God”

Principle 6: “God Can Make It Right,” “Healing Grace”

Principle 7: “Everyday,” “More of You in My Life”

Principle 8: “The Road to Recovery”

This praise and worship time is extremely important!

Reading of the Eight Principles and Their Corresponding Beatitude or the Twelve Steps and Their Biblical Comparisons

Two individuals are selected to read the eight principles or the 12 Steps and their biblical comparisons. The purpose is twofold: (1) to reinforce the biblical foundation for the program, and (2) to allow increased participation for Celebrate Recovery attendees.

One person is asked to read the principle/step and another reads the Bible verse for that principle/step until all eight principles/12 Steps are completed.

Example:

First reader: “Principle 1: Realize I’m not God. I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable.”

Second reader: “Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor.”
(Matthew 5:3, GNT)

The opportunity to read is used to reward regular attendees and encourage prospective new coleaders.

Announcements

The purpose of the announcements is to help the newcomers feel welcome and inform them about the special group for newcomers where they can get their questions answered—Newcomers 101. While an important part of the program, announcements can be rather “dry,” so we attempt to make them light and fun. The remainder of the time is used to announce upcoming events and introduce the “special music” for the evening.

Special Music

Special music supports the teaching or the testimony for the evening. It is usually a solo performed by one of the Celebrate Recovery singers. In the past we brought outside singers from other groups in the church, but we have found that the group really enjoys supporting “one of their own.”

Also, during the special music selection, a collection, or “love offering,” can be taken. The money collected could be used to support child care, to pay for special speakers, and to offset regular expenses.

Teaching or Testimony

As mentioned previously, we teach the twenty-five lessons from the *Celebrate Recovery Leader’s Guide*. Typically, we follow a teaching week with a testimony week, which supports the teaching of the previous lesson. Appendix 5 is a guide to help you generate healthy testimonies.

Serenity Prayer, Closing Song, and Dismissal to Small Groups

The large group meeting ends with one of the leaders leading the group in the reading of the complete version of Reinhold Neibuhr’s Serenity Prayer. The prayer is printed on the inside cover of the bulletin jacket. Then we sing the closing song and everyone is encouraged to quickly go to their small group meetings located throughout the church campus. Meeting locations are also noted in the bulletin. If people have questions, they can stop by the Celebrate Recovery information table or ask one of the Celebrate Recovery leaders. The leaders are easy to spot because they wear a Celebrate Recovery leader’s shirt.

Celebrate Recovery's Small Group Formats

2. Open Share Small Group

These small groups meet immediately after the large group concludes. There are separate groups for men and women.

Format

8:00 p.m.	Opening prayer and welcome Introductions Reading of Celebrate Recovery's small group meeting guidelines
8:05 p.m.	Leader's focus on the principle
8:10 p.m.	Group open sharing
8:50 p.m.	Wrap-up, prayer requests, closing prayer
9:00 p.m.	Invitation to the Solid Rock Cafe

Opening Prayer, Welcome, and Introductions

This time allows the small group to again focus their attention to the Lord and to feel the bond of their small group. It is also another opportunity to softly welcome newcomers.

Reading of Celebrate Recovery's Small Group Meeting Guidelines

Read at every small group meeting, these five simple rules (see box) are designed to keep the group *safe!* If your recovery meetings are not safe, they will fail! It is the responsibility of the group leader and coleader to ensure that these guidelines are followed. To reinforce their importance, the guidelines are also read every four to six weeks during the large group time.

Small Group Guidelines

READ AT EVERY SMALL GROUP MEETING. These five simple rules are designed to keep the group safe! If your recovery meetings are not safe, they will fail! It is the responsibility of the group leader and coleader to ensure that these guidelines are followed. To reinforce their importance, the guidelines are also read every four to six weeks during the large group time.

- 1. Keep your sharing focused on your own thoughts and feelings. Limit your sharing to three to five minutes.**

This is a very important guideline. Focusing on one's own thoughts and feelings will keep sharing short, eliminate cross talk, and keep the person sharing from "wandering" to other people's problems or non-group related topics. Please be strict about the three-to-five-minute rule. It is very frustrating for others in the group to miss an opportunity to share because someone else spoke for ten minutes or more. Come up with a signal, if necessary, and announce it at the start of the group. If anyone goes over his or her time, give the "signal" to stop, so no one feels singled out.

2. **There is NO cross talk. Cross talk is when two individuals engage in conversation excluding all others. Each person is free to express his or her feelings without interruptions.**

Cross talk can also be identified as someone saying, "I can relate to you because . . ." or "I can't relate to you because . . ." comments, asking questions, and so on. We don't have to be legalistic about it, but we must be very careful not to offend anyone. If this guideline is abused, someone may get very hurt and give up on recovery altogether.

3. **We are here to support one another, not "fix" another.**

We all have wonderful intentions and want to share the wisdom we have gained from being in this awesome program. Many times, however, a person is not in the proper emotional state to hear or understand. The members of your group are going to look to you to protect them and enforce this guideline. Fixing can be described as offering advice to solve a problem someone has shared, offering a Scripture, offering book referrals, or offering counselor referrals.

4. **Anonymity and confidentiality are basic requirements. What is shared in the group stays in the group. The only exception is when people threaten to injure themselves or others.**

It can be very hurtful to discover that someone's sharing is being discussed outside of the small group time. Most of the people in recovery have never been able to "tell the secret" — they need to be assured that this is the safe place to do it. When making phone calls to members of your group, you must be careful about protecting anonymity when leaving phone messages.

5. **Offensive language has no place in a Christ-centered recovery group.**

Because many of us grew up hearing and/or using offensive language, this can be a painful trigger to members of our group.

NOTE:

- *The above explanation of each guideline is given for your understanding. Only the guidelines themselves (bold type) are read in the small group.*
- *Read the guidelines at every single meeting no matter how long you have been together!*
- *Continue to read the guidelines even if you have been together six months or a year. In fact, the guidelines become even more important if your group is extremely bonded.*

Thank your group in advance for honoring these guidelines.

As your group matures, it is not necessary to elaborate on each guideline; however, if one particular area starts to be a problem, address it at the next meeting by reemphasizing that particular guideline. This might be all it will take to refocus the group. If it continues to be a problem with one particular person, address it with him or her individually.

Leader's Focus on the Principle

The leader spends just a few minutes going over the key points from the evening's lesson, then asks the group to start their sharing about one or two of the questions provided from the lesson's exercise. For example, if the teaching was on lesson one, the leader could ask the group the question from Principle 1 of the *Stepping Out of Denial into God's Grace* Participant's Guide: "What areas of your life do you have power (control) over?"

If there was a testimony that evening, the leader could ask the group to focus on what part of the testimony touched them the most.

Group Discussion and Open Sharing

The participant can choose to share on the focus question or just share whatever is on his or her heart.

Wrap-Up, Prayer Requests, Closing Prayer

Wrapping up the session is the leader's responsibility. It is up to him or her to see that the group has enough time for closure—that the meeting does not just come to an abrupt halt or go on and on and on. Before the session ends, there should also be a time for participants to give specific prayer requests and for the group to close in prayer. If there were any major issues raised in the group, the leader should be sure to get the individual's name for follow-up.

Invitation to the Solid Rock Cafe

The meeting can now continue “unofficially” at the Solid Rock Cafe, a place designed specifically for fellowship. At the cafe, individuals have an opportunity to continue to share with those with whom they feel safe. It is a time for participants to develop accountability partners and sponsorship relationships.

3. Step Study Small Groups

The step study groups are the second type of Celebrate Recovery small groups. They meet a different night of the week from the large group and open share groups meeting. The step study groups actually go through the Celebrate Recovery participant’s guides together. They answer and discuss the questions at the end of each lesson together. They close the group (i.e., no new participants) after they have completed the lessons on the third principle. Step study groups meet together for approximately twelve months. There are separate groups for men and women.

Now, in addition to the original participant’s guides (Books 1–4), renamed *The Journey Begins*, a brand new curriculum, *The Journey Continues* (Books 5–8), takes participants even further in their recovery. To read more about this revolutionary series—who it’s for, how it works—as well as check out one of the twenty-five lessons, please see pages 255–265 in this leader’s guide.

We need to encourage our members to get into a step study group, because this is where they get into the heart of the program and true healing from their lives’ hurts, hang-ups, and habits occurs. It is from these groups that your new leaders are born.

Format

7:00 p.m.	Opening prayer and welcome Introductions Serenity Prayer Reading of the eight principles and/or the 12 Steps and their biblical comparisons Reading of Celebrate Recovery’s small group meeting guidelines Leader’s focus on the principle or topic
7:15 p.m.	Group discussion of that night’s lesson from the participant’s guide. Go around the group and let all members have a chance to share their answer to each question. Depending on the size of the step study, it may take two weeks to cover one lesson.

8:50 p.m. Wrap-up, prayer requests, closing prayer
9:00 p.m. Closing

The following illustration will help you see the components of each of the three types of Celebrate Recovery groups: large group, open share small group, and the step study small group.

Large Group

- Worship
- Read the steps or principles
- Announcements
- Teach lesson from the *Celebrate Recovery Leader's Guide* or have a testimony
- Serenity Prayer
- No obligation to share
- Mixed group
- Dismiss to open share groups or Newcomers 101
- Information table

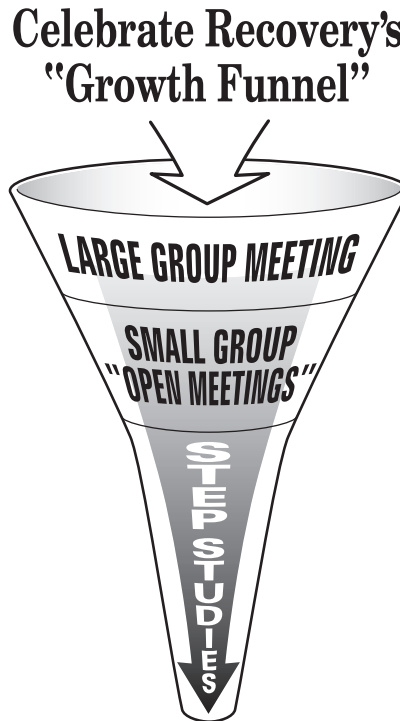
Open Share Group

- Recovery issue specific
- Follows large group
- Gender specific
- One-hour meeting
- Share struggles and victories
- Acknowledge sobriety (chips)
- Open to newcomers
- Find a sponsor
- Follow the five small group guidelines

Step Study Group

- Use *The Journey Begins* (Books 1–4) and *The Journey Continues* (Books 5–8) participant's guides
- Answer and discuss questions at the end of each lesson of the guides
- Two-hour meeting
- Mixed recovery OR recovery issue specific
- High level of accountability
- Weekly attendance expected
- Follow the five small group guidelines
- Gender specific

The Celebrate Recovery “Growth Funnel” will help you visualize how the large group meeting ties into the program’s two types of small groups: open share small groups and step study small groups. With Jesus Christ as “The Higher Power,” this is a winning combination for a “changed life.”



Newcomers 101

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4)

It is essential to remember that when a person comes to Celebrate Recovery for the first time, he may be overwhelmed with feelings of pain, humiliation, sadness, and hopelessness. The whole concept of recovery may be unfamiliar and a little frightening. Selecting and identifying with an open share group may seem to be an impossible task.

With the newcomers’ feelings in mind, the most important thing to remember about leading Newcomers 101 is to project a friendly, open, approachable

demeanor. Also, by wearing a Celebrate Recovery leader's shirt, you identify yourself as someone who "has worked the program" and achieved credibility with your church.

In keeping with the format of the regular meeting night of Celebrate Recovery, the Newcomers 101 group will be divided into two parts: a large group meeting and an open share group. **It is imperative to go through the large group time as quickly as possible, twenty minutes at most, in order to move to the open share group time that is so important for the newcomer. The purpose of this sharing time is to help the participant choose the group to attend next week.**

An audiovisual presentation is advisable so the participants can follow along. A welcome slide would be appropriate as the newcomers enter the room.

1. Distribute Solid Rock Coupons

Begin walking around the room and greeting the men and women who are new to the program. Pass out Solid Rock coupons, the coffee time hosted after the meetings, or coupons for the meal your program provides before the meeting. This allows you to connect and "break the ice." Mention that these fellowship events are great opportunities to meet others in the program.

During this time, if there are other leaders present, do not stand in groups talking to one another! Move around, smile, and look approachable. Give the impression that you are looking forward to Newcomers 101. And you are! What a wonderful opportunity to share what Jesus has done in your life!

2. Open in Prayer

Wait until all of the newcomers are settled and then open in prayer. Keep the prayer upbeat. We want to give hope and victory!

3. Welcome Participants; Show a Newcomers' Video

We strongly suggest that your program develop its own newcomers' video. This video should show leaders from different areas of recovery talking about the changes the program has made in their lives. If your senior pastor is willing to be a part of the video, the newcomers know, right from the start, that your program has senior pastor support.

Until you are able to create your own newcomers' video, Saddleback's newcomers' video, called "Words" is available through www.saddlebackresources.com.

4. Introduce the Leaders

Leaders can rotate into Newcomers 101 so that they may continue to attend their own meetings. However, they must have strong coleaders to run the groups in their absence. Or leaders may choose to attend Newcomers 101 because their meetings are on another night of the week.

In order to get through all of the information needing to be covered during the large group part of the evening, the introductions need to be very concise—one to two minutes maximum. The emphasis should focus on the important difference between Celebrate Recovery and a secular program: that we believe in the one and only true Higher Power, Jesus Christ. We also want to make it clear that our lives have changed as a result of this program.

An example of an introduction for this group is: “Hi, my name is _____ and I’m a believer who struggles with codependency. After attending this program, my marriage was reconciled, and I love to give back to this ministry.” In this example, newcomers learn the name of the leader; that she is a Christian who struggles with codependency; and that she feels she has changed enough to give back to the program. The underlying message is upbeat and gives hope to newcomers.

These introductions help the newcomers to relax, without the fear of having to speak in front of the entire group while also being able to relate to the leaders.

5. Very Briefly State the Goal of Newcomers 101

Summarize briefly the goal of Newcomers 101. For example, you might say, “The goal of Newcomers 101 is to explain how Celebrate Recovery works and to help you find a group to attend next week. The Newcomers group is a one-time attendance group only.”

Explain that the large group will be divided into a men’s group and a women’s group during the second half of the evening—just like the open share groups that are meeting throughout the church.

Again, we want to help the newcomers feel comfortable in our program. So for that evening only, you can explain that questions will be welcomed after the open share group sharing. However, questions are not a part of the regular open share groups.

6. Announce Time and Place for Celebration Station and The Landing

Announcing the provision of programs for elementary school, junior high, and high school students emphasizes that the entire family can find healing in one program. This will open up your Celebrate Recovery to more people.

7. Explain the Different Components of the Program

Very briefly mention that the tools of Celebrate Recovery are the *Celebrate Recovery Bible*, the four participant's guides, and the *Celebrate Recovery Journal*. *Life's Healing Choices* is the recommended book to better understand the eight recovery principles and be encouraged by the sixteen great testimonies. (PowerPoint slides showing these tools are recommended for familiarity.)

Although the step study groups are an important part of Celebrate Recovery, it might be too confusing to explain at this point. A long explanation about sponsors and accountability partners might also take up too much time. A question time has been provided at the end of the open share group. If time permits, at the end of this group, information about the step study groups, accountability partners, and sponsors could be covered.

In conclusion, finish with a quick review: "The dinner or Bar-B-Que meets at 6:00 p.m., at 7:00 we meet for our large group time, and at 8:00 we break up into our smaller open share groups. After our groups, at 9:00, we go to Solid Rock Cafe for coffee and dessert. At the dinner and coffee, you can make new friends and start to form accountability partners and sponsors which you will learn about in our large group meetings."

8. Next Read the Five Small Group Guidelines

Mention that these guidelines are to protect the participants of Celebrate Recovery and to provide a safe place for sharing. (Refer to page 54.)

1. Keep your sharing focused on your own thoughts and feelings. Limit your sharing to three to five minutes.
2. There is no cross talk. Cross talk is when two individuals engage in conversation excluding all others. Each person is free to express their feelings without interruptions. (Tell these newcomers that for tonight only, we will be breaking the cross talking guideline when we accept questions at the end of the sharing. At future meetings, this guideline will be obeyed. Otherwise, we will abide by the rest of the guidelines.)
3. We are here to support one another. We are not here to "fix" another.

4. Anonymity and confidentiality are basic requirements. What is shared in the group stays in the group. The only exception is when someone threatens to injure themselves or others.
5. Offensive language and graphic descriptions have no place in a Christ-centered recovery group.

9. Divide into Men's and Women's Groups

Couples who have come together might be uncomfortable splitting up. Gently explain that this division makes the program a safe place for people to share.

Tell the open share group that you will be abiding by the five small group guidelines. Let newcomers know your signal for “wrapping up” their sharing.

Encourage newcomers to give their name, to name a specific recovery group if they can identify with one already, or to say what brought them to Celebrate Recovery for the first time.

Give them the opportunity to pass if they are not ready to share.

Explain some of the basics: “We say ‘Hi’ and the person’s name after they have introduced themselves in order to get better acquainted, and we clap as an affirmation after someone has shared.”

After the group has completed their sharing, open up for questions, again emphasizing that this will not happen in their regular open share groups. If there are no questions, and time permits, you can explain accountability partners, sponsors, and/or step studies.

Encourage attendance for several weeks before deciding to try a different group. It may be that the regular attenders have been absent, or because of denial, the group may feel uncomfortable. If, after several weeks, the group still feels uncomfortable, suggest trying another group. Leaders will not be offended.

If there is any time remaining, you might encourage the group to talk informally. They might want to walk to the Solid Rock Cafe together or arrange to return together to Celebrate Recovery the following week.

Those who decided to pass in their sharing can meet with the leader one-on-one while the rest of the group talks informally. However, if persons do not want to share, we need to let them know that we understand how difficult it is to share for the first time. Encourage them to go to the open share group the following week, emphasizing that they are not required to share until they are ready.

10. Close in Prayer

11. Remind Them of Your Availability

Let the group know that you are always available to answer any questions they may have in the future.

The Information Table and Materials

The information table is a key part of helping the newcomer feel welcome. The location of the information table is very important. After the newcomer has been greeted, the information table should be their next experience. They do not have to go to it upon their arrival, but it is important that they know its location.

The table should be staffed by at least one man and one woman. We do this to be sensitive to those in attendance. A woman with abuse issues, for example, would find it difficult to seek information from a man. Also, it is important to have an information table leader who is responsible for staffing the table, maintaining fresh handouts, and for administering curriculum and Bible sales.

Handouts should be colorful and have some uniformity. The following are some examples of the handouts we use at the information table at Saddleback:

- Welcome Newcomers (Appendix 6)
- 8 Recovery Principles Based on the Beatitudes
- Celebrate Recovery's 12 Steps and their biblical comparisons
- 12 Steps for Sexual, Physical, and Emotional Abuse (Appendix 3)
- Things We Are, Things We Are Not (Appendix 7)
- Codependency Description (Appendix 8)
- Chemical Addiction Description (Appendix 9)
- Freedom from Anger
- Sexual Addiction Men's Group

How This Leader's Guide Is Organized

As stated earlier, this leader's guide is designed to cover the twenty-five lessons found in the four Celebrate Recovery *The Journey Begins* participant's guides—all of the eight principles. Each lesson has been written so that you can either read it in its entirety or “cut and paste” in your own illustrations. Just follow the basic format. Be sure to include the recovery acrostic and Bible verses for each lesson. May God bless you and your ministry as you lead others on their road to recovery.

PRINCIPLE I

Realize I'm not God. I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable.

"Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor." (Matthew 5:3)

DENIAL

Principle 1: Realize I'm not God. I admit that I am powerless to control my tendency to do the wrong thing and that my life is unmanageable.

"Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor." (Matthew 5:3)

Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors, that our lives had become unmanageable.

"For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." (Romans 7:18)

Introduction

Tonight we begin a journey together, a journey on the road of recovery. This journey begins with Principle 1, where we admit that we are powerless to control our tendency to do the wrong thing and that our lives have become unmanageable, out of control. But before we begin this exciting journey together, we need to ask ourselves two questions:

- Am I going to let my past failures prevent me from taking this journey?
- Am I afraid to change? Or, what are my fears of the future?

Failures from the Past

Let's look at Hebrews 12:1 (TLB):

Since we have such a huge crowd of men of faith watching us from the grandstands, let us strip off anything that slows us down or holds us back, and especially those sins that wrap themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up; and let us run with patience the particular race that God has set before us.

There are two things I would like to point out in this verse. First, God has a particular race, a unique plan, for each of us. A plan for good, not a life full of dependencies, addictions, and obsessions.

The second thing is that *we need to be willing* to get rid of all the unnecessary baggage, the past failures, in our lives that keep us stuck. Again, it says, “Let us strip off anything that slows us down or holds us back, and especially those sins that wrap themselves so tightly around our feet and trip us up.”

For many of us, our past hurts, hang-ups, and habits hold us back, trip us up! Many of us are stuck in bitterness over what someone has done to us. We continue to hold on to the hurt and we refuse to forgive the ones who had hurt us.

You may have been hurt deeply. Perhaps you were abused as a child, or maybe you were or are in a marriage where your spouse committed adultery.

I want you to know that I hurt for you. I’m truly sorry for you, sorry that you had to go through that hurt. But holding on to that hurt and not being willing to forgive the person who hurt you in the past is allowing them to continue to hurt you today, in the present.

Working this Christ-centered recovery program will, with God’s power, allow you to find the courage and strength to forgive them. Now don’t get all stressed out. You don’t have to forgive them tonight! But as you travel your road to recovery, God will help you find the willingness to forgive them and be free of their hold on your life.

Some of you are bound by guilt. You keep beating yourself up over some past failure. You’re trapped, stuck in your guilt. You think that no one anywhere is as bad as you are, that no one could love the *real* you, and that no one could ever forgive you for the terrible things that you have done.

You’re wrong. God can. That’s why Jesus went to the cross, for our sins. He knows everything you’ve ever done and everything you’ve ever experienced. And there are many here tonight that have faced similar failures and hurts in their life and have accepted Christ’s forgiveness. They are here to encourage and support you.

The apostle Paul had a lot to regret about his past. He even participated in Stephen’s murder. Yet in Philippians 3:13 (TLB) he tells us, “No, dear brothers, I am still not all I should be but I am bringing all my energies to bear on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead.”

Here’s the bottom line if you want to be free from your past hurts, hang-ups, and habits: You need to deal with your past bitterness and guilt once and for all. You need to do as Isaiah 43:18 tells us, “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.” That doesn’t mean *ignore* the past. You need to *learn*

from your past, offer forgiveness, make amends, and then release it. Only then can you be free from your guilt, grudges, and grief!

Let's face it, we have all stumbled over a hurt, hang-up, or habit. But the race isn't over yet. God isn't interested in how we started, but how we finish the race.

Fears for the Future

You may worry about your future and be afraid to change. We all worry about things that we do not have any control over and do not have the power to change. And we all know worrying is a lack of trust in God.

The truth is, we can say without any doubt or fear, "The Lord is my Helper and I am not afraid of anything that mere man can do to me" (Hebrews 13:6, TLB).

You may have been in your hurt, habit, or hang-up for so long that it has become your identity. You may be thinking, "What will happen if I really give recovery a chance? Will I change? If I give up my old hurts, hang-ups, and habits, what will I become? Who will I be?"

You may have been abusing alcohol, prescription drugs, or food. You're afraid of what you will do without your substance of choice.

You may have been enabling someone in a dysfunctional relationship for years. Perhaps you wonder, "What if I change and my alcoholic husband gets mad at me?"

God doesn't want you to stay frozen in an unhealthy relationship or a bad habit. He wants you to do your part in becoming healthy.

Even if our past was extremely painful, however, we may still resist change and the freedom that can be found in really working this program. Because of our fear of the unknown or because of our despair, we just close our minds because we think that we don't deserve any better.

As you work the principles and steps, remember 1 John 4:18 (NCV): "Where God's love is, there is no fear, because God's perfect love drives out fear."

You are not here by mistake tonight. This room is full of changed lives. It is my prayer for each of you that you will not let your past failures or your fear of your future stop you from giving Celebrate Recovery a real try.

Are you wearing a mask of denial tonight? Before you can make any progress in your recovery, you need to face your denial. As soon as you remove your mask, your recovery begins—or begins again! It doesn't matter if you're new in recovery or have been in recovery, working the steps for years. Denial

can rear its ugly head and return at any time! You may trade addictions or get into a new relationship that's unhealthy for you in a different way than the previous one. So this lesson is for all of us.

We have a saying around here: "Denial isn't just a river in Egypt." But what is it?

What Is Denial?

Denial has been defined as "a false system of beliefs that are not based on reality" and "a self-protecting behavior that keeps us from honestly facing the truth."

As kids we all learned various coping skills. They came in handy when we didn't get the attention we wanted from our parents and others or to block our pain and our fears.

For a time these coping systems worked. But as the years progressed they confused and clouded our view of the truth of our lives.

As we grew, our perception of ourselves and our expectations of all those around us also grew. But because we retained our childish methods of coping, our perceptions of reality became increasingly more unrealistic and distorted.

Our coping skills grew into denial, and most of our relationships ended up broken or less fulfilling than they could have been.

Did you ever deny that your parents had problems? Did you ever deny that you had problems? The truth is, we can all answer yes to these questions to some extent. But, for some of us, that denial turned to shame and guilt.

Denial is the "pink elephant" sitting in the middle of the living room. No one in the family talks about it or acknowledges it in any way. Do any of the following comments sound familiar to you?

- "Can't we stop talking about it? Talking only makes it worse."
- "Billy, if we *don't* talk about it, it will go away."
- "Honey, let's pretend that it didn't really happen."
- "If I tell her that it hurts me when she says that, I'm afraid she will leave me."
- "He really doesn't drink that much."
- "It really doesn't hurt when he does that; I'm fine!"
- "Paul drinks more than I do."
- "Joan has been married three times; I've only been married twice."
- "I eat because you make me so mad!"
- "If you didn't nag me all the time, I wouldn't ..."

- “Look honey, I have a tough job; I work hard. I need a few drinks to relax. It doesn’t mean that I have a problem.”

Folks, that’s DENIAL.

As I said earlier, before we can take the first step of our recovery, we must first face and admit our denial. God says in Jeremiah 6:14 (TLB), “You can’t heal a wound by saying it’s not there!”

Effects of Denial

Okay, let’s look at tonight’s acrostic:

DENIAL

Disables our feelings

Energy lost

Negates growth

Isolates us from God

Alienates us from our relationships

Lengthens the pain

The *D* in denial stands for **DISABLES** our feelings. Hiding our feelings, living in denial, freezes our emotions and binds us. Understanding and feeling our feelings is where we find freedom.

Second Peter 2:19 (GNT) tells us: “They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of destructive habits—for we are slaves of anything that has conquered us.”

For me, the basic test of freedom is not what I’m free to do, it’s what I’m free not to do! I’m free not to take that drink.

We find freedom to feel our true feelings when we find Christ and step out of denial.

The next letter in denial is *E*, which stands for **ENERGY** lost.

A major side-effect of denial is anxiety. Anxiety causes us to waste precious energy dealing with past hurts and failures and the fear of the future. As you go through this program you will learn that it is only in the present that positive change can occur. Worrying about the past and dreading the future make us unable to live and enjoy God’s plans for us in the present.

We let our fears and our worries paralyze us, but the only lasting way we can be free from them is by giving them to God. Psalm 146:7 (TLB) says, “He frees the prisoners, . . . he lifts the burdens from those bent down beneath their loads.”

If you will transfer the energy required to maintain your denial into learning God's truth, a healthy love for others and yourself will occur. As you depend more and more on your Higher Power, Jesus Christ, you will see the light of truth and reality.

Let's move on to the *N* in denial.

Denial NEGATES growth.

We are as sick as our secrets and, again, we cannot grow in recovery until we are ready to step out of our denial into the truth. God is waiting to take your hand and bring you out. The Bible says, "They cried to the Lord in their troubles, and he rescued them! He led them from the darkness and shadow of death and snapped their chains" (Psalm 107:13–14, TLB).

As you travel the road of your recovery you will come to understand that God never wastes a hurt; God will never waste your darkness. But He can't use it unless you step out of your denial into the light of His truth.

Denial also ISOLATES us from God.

Adam and Eve are a great example of how secrets and denial separate us from true fellowship with God. After they sinned, their secret separated them from God. Genesis 3:7 tells us that Adam and Eve hid from God because they felt naked and ashamed.

Of course, good old Adam tried to rationalize. He said to God, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree" (Genesis 3:12). First he tried to blame God, saying, "The woman you put here with me . . ." Then he tried to blame it on Eve: "*She* gave me some fruit."

Remember, God's light shines on the truth. Our denial keeps us in the dark. "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:5–7).

Our denial not only isolates us from God, it ALIENATES us from our relationships.

Denial tells us we are getting away with it. We think no one knows, but they do. But while denial may shield us from the hurt, it also keeps us from helping ourselves or the people we love the most. We don't dare reveal our true selves to others for fear of what they will think or say if they knew the real us. We must protect ourselves—our secrets—at any cost. So we isolate ourselves and thereby minimize the risk of exposure and possible rejection from others. But at what price? The eventual loss of all our important relationships.

What's the answer? Listen to Ephesians 4:25 (TLB). "Stop lying to each other; tell the truth, for we are parts of each other and when we lie to each other we are hurting ourselves."

Remember it is always better to tell the ugly truth rather than a beautiful lie. Finally, denial LENGTHENS the pain.

We have the false belief that denial protects us from our pain. In reality, denial allows our pain to fester and grow and to turn into shame and guilt. Denial extends your hurt. It multiplies your problems.

Truth, like surgery, may hurt for a while, but it cures. God promises us in Jeremiah 30:17 (TLB), "I will give you back your health again and heal your wounds."

Wrap-Up

Tonight I encourage you to *step out* of your denial! Walking out of your denial is not easy. Taking off that mask is hard. Everything about you shouts, "Don't do it! It's not safe!" But it is safe. It's safe at Celebrate Recovery. Here you have people who care about you and who love you for who you are—people who will stand beside you as truth becomes a way of life.

Jesus tells us, "Know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Step out of your denial so you can step into Jesus' unconditional love and grace and begin your healing journey of recovery.