

How "Celebrate Recovery" Restores Hope

By **Mary Jones**

At some point in our lives we will all need some kind of healing. Whether because of an illness, a broken relationship, financial instability, or emotional distress, there will be times when we look for answers and ask God for healing. But what about healing from addiction? For many of us who have never faced a personal kind of addiction such as drugs, alcohol, or pornography, we tend to measure those types of struggles with a different kind of ruler. It's easy to have empathy for illnesses, broken hearts, financial concerns, and emotional struggles, yet why do we practice a different kind of judgment towards those with addiction?

The book of Proverbs is loaded with admonitions or warnings about life. It only takes the influence of one "friend" to guide you into things you really have no desire to do. Addictions are frequently started because of adverse circumstances in our lives. Perhaps one thinks that drugs or alcohol will make the hurt go away, but as many know, it only causes things to worsen.

John Baker, a man addicted to alcohol, knew all too well the need for empathy, guidance, shelter, and love for those suffering with addiction, so he began the ministry that we call Celebrate Recovery. Celebrate Recovery was started in 1991 at Saddleback Church in California. Dr. Rick Warren, Senior Pastor at Saddleback Church, once said,

"You may think recovery is only for drug addicts and alcoholics, people whose lives seem out of control. But that's just not true. The Bible teaches that all of us have addictions in our lives. Sin is addicting, and the Bible says that all have sinned. Not one of us is perfect. We've all blown it, we've all made mistakes. We've hurt ourselves, we've hurt other people, and others have hurt us. Because of sin, each of us needs repentance and recovery in order to live the way God intended."

In September of 2018, Dawson launched a new Celebrate Recovery Ministry under the leadership of Kristen Torres, Dawson's Minister of Spiritual Development. This ministry offers a place where people can have hope and see that they do have a future. To "celebrate" is to mark off an occasion or event, especially a joyous one. "Recovery" means rescue, a regaining of something lost. Haven't we all felt loss in one way or another?

On Tuesday nights, I serve alongside a group of volunteers as part of Dawson's Celebrate Recovery ministry. We come every week because we want to pour love into men and women who are suffering with addictions. Every volunteer involved has a heart for service, but for many of us, there is an even deeper meaning behind our commitment. We are there because we, too, are healing from heartaches caused by the addictions of our own family members.



Volunteers with Celebrate Recovery are committed to letting the participants know that God cares about their future. We look forward to seeing every attendee on Tuesday nights, as we greet them with open hearts, open arms, and big smiles on our faces. Giving our time, energy, and attention to the people that participate in this celebration is easy, not just because we want to show God's love to them, but also because God shows us every week how His love is poured right back into us through each of these men and women. We have become a family—a family I am proud to be a part of.

Celebrate Recovery begins with a meal. Serving this meal always makes me think about how Jesus served His people when He walked on this earth. Next, we have music—we have a fantastic live band every week. Some of the band members are actually from Brother Bryan Mission. We all enjoy making a joyful noise praising the Lord. After the music, we have a speaker; different people share messages of hope, perseverance, and steps to recovery, along with personal testimonies of overcoming addiction through Christ-centered recovery. After the program, we give out awards celebrating individual milestones toward recovery. That always makes me cry. I know how hard it is for these men and women to overcome addiction. Every day is a challenge. After the program, they break into small groups where they share and pray about challenges they are facing that week. All of these conversations are completely confidential. After the small groups meet, everyone enjoys dessert and leaves happy and full, both physically and spiritually.

I can't begin to tell you how much this program has meant to me. It has helped me get through my son's death. My son, David, was an alcoholic. He once told me he took his first drink at age 14 while attending a wedding reception. That one drink led to a lifetime of heartache and struggle. Upon completion of X-ray Technology school, where he was voted

"Most Outstanding Student" by his professors, he began a wonderful career working closely with doctors and surgeons in different hospitals here in Birmingham, AL. He was recognized for his skills and outstanding patient care, so eventually was promoted to work side-by-side with top cardiologists, performing heart catheterizations. He had a loving wife and an adoring daughter. David eventually landed his dream job with a medical company. From the outside, it looked like he had it all.

But he had a demon that challenged him every single day, the demon of alcohol. He was a follower of Jesus and hated what this addiction was doing to him. He tried with every fiber in his body to stop, but the addiction was more powerful than his ability to surrender it to God. He lost his dream job because of the addiction, and his marriage eventually crumbled as well.

For more than 10 years, I spent countless hours with him in hospitals and in many rehab facilities, encouraging him and praying that he would be able to live without dependency on alcohol. It seemed at one point he was really turning a corner. He found a new job that he really enjoyed and had gotten involved in a Men's Small Group Bible Study. We were all so encouraged, especially me. Little did I know the demon was not gone. The struggles were still there, even though he was fighting the good fight to resist the temptations.

At the end of the day, I lost my son. David had his Small Group friends lifting him up, encouraging him, walking the battle with him, but one night, he chose to join a different group of friends; friends that shared the same addiction that he had. That night, David left the house to go out to dinner with these people, but he never came home. The next time I saw my son was the day we buried him.

A mother's love for her son is a precious thing, and God's love for us is even more precious. I am grateful that I felt God's presence, strength, and guidance throughout this tumultuous journey.

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I am thankful that despite the hard times and dark days, my son and I shared wonderful, happy times together. I now cherish every one of those moments. David was my only son, but he is also God's son, and because I know David was a believer, I find comfort knowing he is with his heavenly Father now. David is free from addiction, free from guilt, and free from any insecurities.

Celebrate Recovery is a very special program to me. If we can save one life, it is worth everything. I feel God blesses me every Tuesday night because now I have 25+ sons and daughters who really make a difference in my life. God wants to give us a life not consumed with dependencies, addictions, and obsessions. No matter how hopeless we feel, God's love will find us. If we just look to Him, He will be there. And when we find God, our loneliness will vanish. Jeremiah 29:13 says: "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart." No Christian has ever been called to "go it alone" in his or her walk of faith. God is always with us.

Dawson's Celebrate Recovery group is a community of people who are diligently trying to find their way home. I am thankful for the many volunteers and the staff at Dawson who are walking alongside them and serving every Tuesday night in an effort to show God's love through this ministry.

I mentioned that we greet each person with open hearts, open arms, and big smiles every Tuesday night. Well, this is exactly how I envision that God greeted my son when He brought David home. God celebrated David's rescue to heaven, so every week I feel rescued from grief as I serve all of my new "sons" and "daughters" at Celebrate Recovery.

If you would like to come join us on Tuesday night as a driver, a volunteer, a speaker, or a musician, we would truly welcome you with a smile and open arms. †



Mary Jones is a devoted wife and mother who exemplifies her love by serving others, especially her family. She has been a member of the Dawson Family of Faith for over 30 years and has been dedicated to service in many ministries, including Celebrate Recovery, the Seasons Widow Ministry, Dawsonaires, and her Life Group. Mary credits her strength through difficult times to God's faithfulness.





Celebrate Recovery®

Celebrate Recovery is a Christian recovery ministry that began at Saddleback Church in California more than 25 years ago. Each week, 20 to 30 participants and leaders gather on Tuesday nights for a meal and time of worship, teaching, and sharing. We are grateful for the opportunity God has given Dawson to provide Celebrate Recovery in this community and are excited about its continued growth through Christ-centered recovery. If you or someone you love is facing the challenges of addiction, please contact Kristen Torres at ktorres@dawsonchurch.org for more information on the Celebrate Recovery Ministry at Dawson.

Celebrate Recovery's Eight Recovery Principles The Road to Recovery Based on the Beatitudes

- (Step 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 that they are spiritually poor." Matthew 5:3a TEV
- (Step 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 TEV, NIV
- (Step 3) **C**onsciously choose to commit all my life and will to Christ's care and control.
"Happy are the meek." Matthew 5:5a TEV
- (Step 4 & 5) **O**penly examine and confess my faults to myself, to God, and to someone I trust.
"Happy are the pure in heart." Matthew 5:8a TEV
- (Step 6 & 7) **V**oluntarily submit to any and all changes 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 5:6a TEV
- (Step 8 & 9) **E**valuate all my relationships. Offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me and make amends for harm I've done to others when possible, except when to do so would harm them or others.
"Happy are the merciful." Matthew 5:7a TEV; "Happy are the peacemakers." Matthew 5:9 TEV
- (Step 10 & 11) **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.
- (Step 12) **Y**ield 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 TEV

If you or someone you know is struggling with addiction, please visit dawsonchurch.org/CelebrateRecovery to learn more about the program.