





**COURSE MANUAL** 

# Leader's Manual

(with complete transcripts of talks)

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed" Psalm 34:18 (NLT)

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"Jesus...said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12

# **Acknowledgements**

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The Recovery Course

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John 8:12

# What is The Recovery Course?

The structure is pretty straightforward. Each session lasts around 2 hours 30 minutes and can start with either a meal or simply tea and coffee with some biscuits or sandwiches, which gives the guests a chance to relax and socialise for half an hour. This period is followed by a short talk, normally around 20-25 minutes although the first evening the talk is slightly longer as it is the introductory session.

This manual provides full transcripts of the talks that you can give yourself (edit as you wish, but please try and be faithful to the core teaching points) or alternatively DVDs of the talks are available so that you can view them via a television or laptop and then all your team needs to be concerned with is the simple task of leading the discussion that follows where the guests have the opportunity of sharing where they currently are on their journey.

Before the talk we have a team leader or helper share their testimony for around 10 minutes in order to encourage the guests and help them to understand that those running the course have also come from a dark place, but have managed to find a way out. At HTB we tend to have one of these testimonies every two to three weeks.

Some guests will already be familiar with the basics of *The Recovery Course* especially if they have ever attended a Twelve Step Fellowship such as *Alcoholics Anonymous* or *Narcotics Anonymous*. Like these *The Recovery Course* is a Twelve Step programme albeit one that focuses on all kinds of addiction from Alcohol and Drug dependency through to Gambling, Sex addiction, Self-harming and Eating Disorders.

Where *The Recovery Course* also differs from a typical *Anonymous Fellowship* is that it is designed to enhance our recovery work by integrating texts from the bible with the Twelve Steps, which we believe makes sense for a couple of reasons.

First, the original Twelve Steps written by *Alcoholics Anonymous* founders Bill Wilson and Dr Bob Smith are based on biblical principles and were written at a time when *AA's* primary spiritual source material was the Bible so we believe it makes sense to return to the foundation the original authors built their course upon.

Second, the Bible supports and strengthens our recovery in a number of ways:

- The bible gives insight to the spiritual truths behind the Twelve Steps
- The bible provides a fresh perspective on the connection between faith in a Higher Power and recovery
- The bible enlarges our understanding of God and how we relate to Him
- The bible corrects our distorted views of God that we may have learned in our dysfunctional family
- The bible shows us how to carry on healthy, functional relationships

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 The bible points us to biblical characters from whom we can learn how to have healthy and unhealthy ways of dealing with life

Many biblical characters had major character flaws. Noah got drunk, Jacob was a liar, Gideon was crippled by fear, Rahab was a prostitute (as allegedly Mary Magdalene was), Samson was a womaniser, King David was a liar, murderer and adulterer, St Paul was an accessory to murder and so on.

Many biblical characters grew up in what we would now call dysfunctional homes. Some made calamitous choices while others chose to face their fears and flaws, took responsibility for them and subsequently became greatly used by God.

Some of the guests on the course will say they have no particular faith and, maybe, some will be actually rather hostile to Christianity due to bad experiences with the Church in the past. If that's the case, we encourage them to put the biblical bits on the backburner and do what is done in other local Twelve Step Fellowships and appeal to a God of their own understanding.

We don't at any point pressurise anyone to believe what we believe, but we do regularly assure every guest that there is a Higher Power who likes them, loves them, is not disappointed or disgusted with them and is for them.

After the talk we split into groups and within that safe environment we discuss some of the issues raised and also share stuff about ourselves if that is something the guests feel comfortable doing. Nobody has to share if they don't want to.

At the end of each course our guests have an opportunity to fill in a questionnaire giving their views on how the course was for them. Two of the questions are, What did you enjoy most about the course? and What did you find most difficult?

On a recent course replying to the first question, 'What did you enjoy most?' someone wrote, 'The sharing'. Responding to the question, 'What did you find most difficult?' the same person wrote, 'The sharing.'

For many it is the best *and* worst part of the course. It is so difficult and, at times, painful to open up, but such a liberating and healing thing to do as well.

The primary rules on the course apply to these small group discussions.

**Confidentiality** – 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.

**Respect** – Everyone, whatever their issues or background, is a valuable human being made in the image of God and is to be respected as such. There is NO cross talk. Cross talk is when two individuals engage in conversation while another is speaking. The group is an open space where we listen to others' opinions and views. Each person is free to express his or her feelings without interruption.

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**Encouragement** – We are here to support one another – working together for change by sharing ideas and experiences. We are not here to 'fix' another.

*Honesty* –We want to hear views and feelings honestly expressed, but we may need to try and limit ourselves to around two to three minutes per guest to start with so that everyone will have the opportunity to share if they would like to. Some leaders find it helpful to use a timer that buzzes after two minutes so that the guest knows they need to be finishing over the next 60 seconds.

**Focus** – The purpose of this course is to try and get on top of our addictive nature. One thing that has traditionally thrown people off course is romance and emotional attachment to another person. No matter how attractive they might find someone else in the room this is not the place to develop that relationship. Ask your guests to avoid this at all costs as time and time again it has been shown that relapse is often caused by emotional upheaval

Likewise, this is a Recovery Course and not a lending bank or charity for the hard up, therefore we do not want anyone directly asking another person for money or indirectly trying to obtain money by manipulating another guest's good will. No doubt there may be very good reasons why they need the money, but the course is the wrong place to try and get it and we ask anyone who is approached either inside or outside the course while it is running over the 15 sessions to refuse the request with a clear conscience and to tell one of the Leaders so that they may have a quiet word with the person concerned and remind them of this rule.

After the small groups we then meet back centrally and run through the Coursework, which we have called *Pause For Thought*. This is an important part of our recovery. Nobody has to do the Coursework, but it's fair to say that those who do attempt it will gain a lot more than those who don't. Once again it is entirely confidential and nobody else sees it. It is for the guest's own benefit and is a way for them to explore how they have become the person they currently are.

Finally, we encourage everyone to search out any local *Anonymous Fellowships* that they might find helpful. In this manual are the web addresses and phone numbers for all the main Fellowships in the UK, but courses in other countries will need to search out their own.

If for any reason a guest misses a week due to illness or some other commitment then they can be given a copy of the talk and Coursework that they have missed so that they can catch up and don't get left behind.

Sometimes potential guests say they cannot come at the time we are running the course and can we send them the material so they can do it on their own at home. The answer to that is a firm 'No'. The most affective part of recovery is the sharing of stuff that we have kept secret for many years and do not want to disclose to anyone, but as James says in James 5:16 it is through sharing our sins with one another that we will ultimately find healing. Recovery rarely works in isolation.

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Finally, anyone can join the course regardless of whether they are still 'using' or not. The only boundary is that they don't attend a session openly under the influence of their addiction. For instance, if someone attends smelling of alcohol then they should be lovingly, but firmly asked to leave and return the following week when sober as their attendance will not be helpful to themselves and may even have a detrimental effect on the Leaders and Guests who may also struggle with alcohol.

Relapse during the course is never an issue and should be seen as a natural, albeit undesirable part of the recovery journey. We take it seriously, because of the damage it causes to the person concerned and those around them, but it is never a reason for excluding a person from the course.

Whatever boundaries are put in place they should be exercised with the same grace and love that God gives to each one of us. God embraces us with open loving arms even when we are sinning and we should do the same

.

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# **The Twelve Steps and Their Biblical Comparisons**

# 1. We admitted we were powerless over our addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable.

"But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realise that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time."

Romans 7:17-20 – The Message

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

"Jesus...spoke up, 'Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? I'm here inviting outsiders, not insiders - an invitation to a changed life, changed inside and out'" Luke 5:31-32 – The Message

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" 1 Peter 5:7 - NIV

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

"Is anyone crying for help? God is listening, ready to rescue you." Psalm 34:17 – The Message

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

"Let's take a good look at the way we're living and reorder our lives under God." Lamentations 3:40 – The Message

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

"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed."

James 5:16– The Message

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

"When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you... Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs" Jonah 2:7-8 – New International Version

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## 7. We humbly asked God to remove all our shortcomings.

"God can do anything, you know – far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us."

Ephesians 3:20 - The Message

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

"Here is a simple rule of thumb for behaviour: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them!...I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You'll never—I promise—regret it...Be easy on people; you'll find life a lot easier. Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way"

Luke 6:31-37 – The Message

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

"If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God."

Matthew 5:23-24 – The Message

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

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me...Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place...Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" Psalm 51 – NIV

# 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 peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing...Let the Word of Christ...have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives....Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way"

Colossians 3:15-17 The Message

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

"Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day's out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived." Galatians 6:1-3 - The Message

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# **Twelve Step Fellowship Groups**

### **Alcohol**

Alcoholics Anonymous www.aa-gb.org.uk Helpline: 0845 769 7555

### **Anorexia and Bulimia**

Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous www.aba12steps.org

### Cocaine

Cocaine Anonymous www.cauk.org.uk Helpline: 0800 612 0225

## **Co-Dependency**

Co-Dependents Anonymous www.coda-uk.org Information: 07000 263645

## **Compulsive eating**

Overeaters Anonymous www.oagb.org.uk Helpline: 07000 784985

### **Debt**

Debtors Anonymous www.debtorsanonymous.info Information: 020 7644 5070

## **Depression**

Depressives Anonymous www.depressionanon.co.uk Information line: 0870 774 4320

# **Drugs**

Narcotics Anonymous www.ukna.org Helpline: 0845 3733366

### **Gambling**

Gamblers Anonymous www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk National Helpline: 020 7384 3040

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## Sex

Sexaholics Anonymous www.sauk.org Helpline: 07000 725463

Sex & Love Addicts Anonymous www.slaauk.com Information: 07951 815087

Sex Addicts Anonymous www.sexaa.org

Sexual Compulsives Anonymous www.sca-recovery.org

# **Smoking**

Nicotine Anonymous www.nicotine-anonymous.co.uk Information: 020 7976 0076

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# **Prayer for Serenity**

God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace;
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it;
Trusting that You will make all things right
If I surrender to your will;
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.
Amen.

Reinhold Niebuhr

# The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your Kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom,
the power and the glory are yours.
Now and for ever.
Amen.

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# Preparing to run a course

### Who should I have on the Team?

The criteria for helping on this course is you must be a Christian (but that can have been for just a fortnight) and a recovering addict who has, by and large, been clean for at least a year (preferably more, but beggars can't be choosers).

The course is not appropriate for someone wanting to help who has a heart for addicts, but doesn't know what it is to personally experience the insanity of addiction. We wouldn't run a Bereavement Course with people who didn't have personal experience of the death of a loved one, or a Divorce and Separation Course with people who haven't experienced the pain of divorce and a course devoted to recovering from addiction is no different. An exception to this rule is where you may have a qualified drugs worker or counsellor wanting to participate.

If your leaders have experience of the Twelve Steps and of attending an Anonymous Fellowship then so much the better. If they don't, then consider running the course for potential leaders first before running the course for the church in general. Anyone who has done a 12-Step programme will tell you that there are some challenging Steps along the way and it is better if the leaders have travelled that road themselves before embarking on the journey alongside someone else.

Members of the church who have a heart for helping with addicts, but have never struggled with addiction themselves should be encouraged to go on the Prayer Support Team

Groups are single sex so you will need a team of both men and women. For the first course you may not have too many guests turn up and you will lose around 50% by the end so for your pilot courses consider having just one men's and one women's group. For each of these you will require at least three male and three female leaders and helpers. This is a long course and it is likely that some leaders and helpers will occasionally be unable to attend due to illness, holidays or work commitments, which is why you need three to ensure there is always someone to lead the group each week in the event of the other two being absent.

Maximum group size should be around 12 people to ensure everyone has time to share.

It is imperative that your leaders and helpers are totally open about their own flaws and failings. This course is not a place to pretend to be better than we actually are. This includes openly sharing our current temptations and so on. We are not there to teach; it is a journey we travel side by side. Our own failings aren't too important as long as we are a 'person after God's own heart'.

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Leaders and helpers need to be laid back (*The Recovery Course* is not rehab). Relapse is all part and parcel of the Recovery journey and realistically is to be expected. Relapse is not a problem for God; it's what we learn from the relapse that is important. If a Leader's background is one where that is not acceptable and they feel more rigid boundaries are required then this is not a course for them to be helping on.

### Back-up team

If you are planning to have food you will need a volunteer to cook and wash up.

### Venue

Maybe for the first one look for somewhere 'neutral'. Christians turning up to a church to share their darkest thoughts may find that a bit intimidating first time around. Having said that, when we moved from a community hall into a church the course doubled in size overnight so it is not as big a turn-off as we may fear. In fact, one Crack Cocaine addict came on the course *because* it was held in a church and suspected people would be less judging of her in that environment.

### **Prayer Support**

It is essential to have an external prayer team of at least three people who will pray daily for the leaders and the course itself. The spiritual battle is intense and your leaders will be battered and bruised before during and after each course. It's not a 'call' for the faint-hearted.

Leaders who have been comfortably abstinent for years will now find the desire to use again intense. The devil is not stupid. To destroy this course he will try and destroy your leaders. From my experience of running this course over several years we win every battle, but the collateral damage can be very bloody and painful along the way. If we are not prepared for the bloodshed and paying the price, then once again this is not the right course to be using.

People who would like to help on the course and who are not addicts themselves should be encouraged to become one of these prayer partners. You can send them prayer requests for each guest on the course when necessary, referring to the guest by a letter as confidentiality is paramount.

Once every couple of weeks email your prayer team with an account of how the course is going and any amazing things happening as this will encourage them to keep going.

### **Promotion**

Maybe link up with the other churches in your area. If ten churches each send along two participants you will have a good-size first course.

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Put promotional material out at places like your local doctor's surgery and maybe on the counter at your local chemist if they are happy about that. Touch base with the Salvation Army. Get your local Alpha Courses towards the end to plug *The Recovery Course*. Their guests may have become Christians but they will still have issues that now need dealing with.

### Follow-up

This is important. At the end of the course ensure each guest knows about their local Anonymous Fellowships and go along with them for the first night if needs be.

Alternatively, you could run your own *Recovery Course Fellowship* one evening a week when the Course itself is not running. Then when the next Course starts the Fellowship evening can end and all the attendees can be helpers on the course itself. This way there will be a Recovery night every week throughout the year for people to attend. These evenings can be modelled on a traditional Anonymous Fellowship: Coffee and tea, a chair or testimony, prayer for specific needs, and lots of fun socialising.

If that is all a commitment too far then ensure guests have the opportunity to join one of your Church Fellowship Groups that they would feel comfortable in.

Those guests who have begun a spiritual journey could also be encouraged to find out more about God/Jesus/Holy Spirit by joining a local *Alpha Course* or Christian discovery group.

### **Optional Workshop**

At some point in the course (immediately after Session 6 or immediately after Session 9 consider running a Workshop on dealing with the addictive 'voice'. More details can be obtained by emailing <a href="mailto:therecoverycourse@gmail.com">therecoverycourse@gmail.com</a>

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# **Preparing for each session**

1) Ensure that you have your talk prepared. Please stick to the points made in the talk transcripts, but feel free to add your own stories, illustrations and favourite quotes. Please remain faithful to the spirit of the course if you intend to call it *The Recovery Course*. If you feel the need to make major changes please call your course something else. We can happily live with minor alterations that you feel you need to incorporate for your own situation.

Alternatively you can show the DVD of the talk and then you only need to be concerned about chairing the discussion group. Every 2-3 weeks it can be helpful for one of your Group Leaders or helpers to give their testimony before the talk as these kinds of personal stories can be enormously encouraging.

- 2) On arrival at the meeting place each guest should be given a copy of the Serenity Prayer and the verses for that week's talk. This avoids guests having to fumble through a bible they are not familiar with and also allows you to use a variety of translations within the one session. The verses for printing out can be found at the end of this folder in Appendix 1.
- 3) Print out the discussion group notes for the leaders (Appendix 2). Please feel free to make up your own questions if you would prefer to do that, but ensure they fit in with the talk that has just been given.
- 4) At the end of each week provide your guests with a copy of the Coursework found at the end of each session in this manual. Reassure your guests that what they put down is entirely confidential and for their own benefit. We do not get to see their Coursework.

The Twelve Steps are a programme for life and we can't expect them to be completed in a period of only four months, so encourage your guests to relax and simply do what they feel they can manage. If they can get to Step 3 by the end of the course then they will have achieved an enormous amount that can be built upon in subsequent courses.

- 5) For closing each session there are prayers you can use in Appendix 3 at the back. Please feel free to use your own, but always include either the *Serenity Prayer* or *The Lord's Prayer* at the end of each session.
- 6) The day after each session contact your guests by Text or Email to encourage them and thank them for attending the meeting. Often when guests share something that they may never have shared before they can very easily listen to that condemning voice in their heads that tells them, "You shouldn't have done that. You can't go back now because everyone will be disgusted with you. And when you cried they all thought you were pathetic". A short note simply saying that you hope that they enjoyed the evening, that what they shared was enormously helpful and that it was really good meeting them can work wonders.

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The day before the next session, or even on the day itself, it can also be helpful to send out another short text or email reminding them that the group is meeting again and you are really looking forward to hearing how, for better or worse, their week has gone. *The Recovery Course* is all about encouragement...and more encouragement. Please bear in mind though that many of your guests may not have an active faith so it's not always helpful to bombard them with 'encouraging' bible texts and the temptation to do this should be resisted.

- 7) We must not pressurise guests to accept Jesus as their Higher Power if they are reluctant to. If they want to go with an alternative Higher Power then encourage them to explore that route too. Having said that, in gently supporting the Steps with verses from the bible we find that reaching out to Jesus in Step 3 becomes a very natural thing for many of the guests to do. As with *The Alpha Course*, Jesus does not need a hard sell. Love the guests in all circumstances, allow the Spirit to work, hold your nerve and you will see some astonishing conversions taking place without having to force the pace.
- 8) Finally, this Course has a flexible structure that can be adapted to your own guests' needs. For instance, at HTB we run a straight 16-week course where the guests are encouraged to do the Coursework at home, but other places have found that because the Coursework is such an important part of the programme and so few people actively do it (especially if they struggle with basic literacy skills) they do a session one week and then the following week they do the Coursework for that session within their individual groups. The disadvantage with this is that it doubles the length of the course to 32 weeks. An alternative is to hold a typical session on one night of the week and then run a 'homework club' for the coursework on another night. Whatever you find works best for you the important thing is to encourage your guests to complete the Coursework; it really does make a massive difference.

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# **Large Group Format**

7.00pm	Doors open – Welcome Team at the ready and smiling!		
7.30pm	Welcome and Notices		
7:35pm	Optional Testimony		
7.45pm	Talk		
8.15pm	Dismissal to small group		
Small Group Format			
8.20pm	Coffee/Tea, Welcome and Group discussion with open sharing limited to a maximum of two or three of the recommended		

is fine too.

Individual prayer requests within small group (from Session 5 onwards)

9.20pm Return to central group

9:10pm

Explanation of Coursework

Group reading of Serenity Prayer/Lord's Prayer and closing

questions. If you only have time to look at one question then that

prayer by leader.

9.30pm Evening ends. Go home!

Total time 2 hours 30 minutes

The Recovery Course

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# Introduction

# Session 1 – To Change Or Not To Change?

"Anyone who meets a testing challenge head-on and manages to stick it out is mighty fortunate. For such persons loyally in love with God, the reward is life and more life"

James 1:12 (The Message)

What were we thinking when we were on our way here today?

Maybe there is a sense of relief - at last a chance to do something about the issues we've been living with. Even just walking in here today feels like a step forward.

For others of us there is a sense of fear and vulnerability, "Are the people here going to be judging and condemning me if I begin to open myself up?"

Perhaps we are a little embarrassed, "Everyone else I know is so well-sorted. Surely I shouldn't be struggling with these things; nobody else seems to be."

Others of us will be feeling a bit more robust, "I know I have a bit of an issue, but it's not as bad as it is with some people I know. It's not like I can't get by."

For some of us the smell of defeat is already strong in our nostrils, "I've tried so many times before to get on top of my struggles, but I always end up losing. Why should it be any different this time? Maybe I should just accept I'm simply not strong enough."

All of these feelings are understandable because we live in a world where people are forever comparing one person to another and judging one another.

And the media seems determined to peddle the idea of the perfect person, with the perfect body, the perfect lifestyle, who lives in the perfect house with the perfect car parked on the driveway, the perfectly raised children playing on the perfectly manicured lawn and the perfect spouse putting the perfectly cooked dinner on the table before retiring to bed for perfect sex followed by a perfect night's sleep.

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The perfect truth is, there is no such thing as the perfect person! Not on the outside, and certainly not on the inside. This is a world in which everyone has issues. No one gets to become an adult without having *serious* issues; some habit they know is not healthy, some addictive behaviour that controls their life.

[Testimony – 10 mins]

The Recovery Course is about you having the chance to stop for a moment, to take a look at what's going on in your life, to recognise the issues - what it is that is holding you down - and then to explore the possibility of *change*.

Not that you will become the perfect person by the end of the course, but we do believe that you can find a new freedom from the issues, begin to see yourself differently and have the chance to lead a life with God's power at your disposal.

You are not doing the course alone and you will not be trying to sort things out by yourself and in your own strength. As God has promised, "Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track. Don't assume that you know it all. Run to God! Run from evil! Your body will glow with health, your very bones will vibrate with life!" Proverbs 3:5-8 (The Message).

The great monotheistic religions believe this world is not some form of random cosmic accident that just exploded into being by chance. And the same goes for human beings; they don't believe we are here because lots of little cells just happened to split millions of times by chance and we are the result. But instead there is a God who made this world and created life. A God who, the Bible tells us, "...created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." Psalm 139:13 (NIV).

And the Christian faith believes this God didn't just wander off and leave us to it. He wants to be involved in our messy human lives, so much so that He chose to be born as a person, Jesus, who was just like us.

As the writer in his letter to the Hebrews put it, "We don't have a priest (Jesus) who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help." Hebrews 4:15-16 (The Message).

This is the God who will help you every step of the way on this journey of change and recovery- if you want Him to.

This course is intended primarily for those who suspect that they might have an addiction and who have decided that now is the time to do something about it.

We are not going to waste time debating what an addiction is. John Coats, who himself was in active addiction to alcohol, cocaine and other drugs for nearly twenty-five years, defined addiction in his book *No Big Deal* like this, "It's not a problem, unless it's a problem".

Simply put, if your behavioural patterns are causing a problem for you or those around you then it's a good idea to start making some changes.

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A great deal of scientific research has been done looking at the causes of addictive behaviour and there is plenty of evidence suggesting that a predisposition to addiction is actually inherited from our parents, so to some extent we are in this place today through no fault of our own; it's the way we have been 'wired'.

Having said that, we are also responsible for our actions. I may be a fearful person, but it is possible for me to choose to display courage. By nature I may be an indecisive and chaotic person, but I still have the potential to choose to take steps to incorporate order in my life. I may have an addictive personality, but at the end of the day, for whatever reason, *I chose* to use drugs, alcohol, sex, food or something else to excess and just as I chose to indulge, there are also steps I can choose that will allow me to be free.

Back in the mid-1930s, two men, Bill Wilson and Dr Bob Smith founded *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Wilson had been influenced by psychiatrist Carl Jung's opinion that alcoholism could be cured by a genuine spiritual experience and so started the Twelvestep Programme that some of us may be familiar with today.

Over the last 75 years a large number of people once written off as incurable drunks have begun to get well and all because they began to look upwards towards a powerful force outside of themselves who would empower them to change.

What is even more extraordinary is the success of the Twelve-steps is not just restricted to those with a drink problem. In the intervening years they have been shown to be effective with all kinds of addiction.

The reason this is a spiritual programme is because addiction is a disease of the human spirit. Addiction destroys love, trust, hope and all the other spiritual values that give life its significance. Then there is the collateral damage caused by our addiction - to our physical and mental health, our social relationships, marriages and our finances. Everything we hold dear is ultimately destroyed by our habit.

And of course merely treating any of these consequences still leaves the root causes unchecked and ready to continue their destructive path again at the first opportunity.

There's hardly a day that goes by when our newspapers don't have an article about a celebrity from the world of sport or entertainment going into a high profile rehab. Some survive and some don't. In the past few years there have been the deaths of Michael Jackson, Gerry Rafferty, Amy Winehouse and Whitney Houston.

And in the glare of this media spotlight it is only too easy to forget that addiction does not respect age, sex, status, nationality or background.

One in three adults in the UK smoke cigarettes, over 1 million are estimated to struggle with anorexia and bulimia, 15 million are obese largely due to compulsive eating through stress and anxiety. Addiction to prescription drugs is rife. Then there is the person who feeds off internet porn for hours on end. Compulsive shopping and habitually overspending ruins lives and over the last few years Internet gaming among the young is of increasing concern. Problem gambling is on the increase too with an estimated 350,000 people in the UK addicted.

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And new addictions are surfacing with every passing year such as addictions to Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. On the surface it may look laughable, but many lives are being impacted negatively and all of us are becoming ever more vulnerable.

But the good news is *we can change* and the change can be for good. This course is not intended to merely improve the quality of our existence, but to help us have a new life. As Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10 (NIV).

Recovering from any addictive behaviour might seem a little bit daunting in the early stages. The process demands perseverance, honesty and, most importantly willingness; a willingness not just to think differently about others, but also primarily ourselves.

Of course we can continue to try and live with our addictions. After all there are periods of time when things don't seem so bad and in a way seem preferable to the uncertainty that 'change' may bring. It's true that many of us can get by, but is that really what we want? Anyone who suspects they are addicted deep down knows they will never have a life that is truly fulfilling.

Addiction ultimately steals everything we value; our money, our self-respect, our friendships, our marriages, our children, our jobs, our time, our accomplishments and dreams. Very quickly it steals the person we know deep down we really are.

As John Coats poignantly writes, "In my own case the most significant thing it stole from me was my freedom. It stole my freedom to choose, my freedom to act, my freedom to travel, my freedom to create, my freedom to enjoy the company of others, my freedom to take pleasure in this staggeringly beautiful world and all that it contains. It stole my horizons and it stole my dreams. For no matter what I did, or where I went, the ability to satisfy my addictions had to be my first priority".

And, of course, it steals our health, our sanity and finally our life itself. John Coats again, "One way or another it will get us. It is versatile. It is patient. It is subterranean. It is fatal."

Finally, most of us are not just susceptible to one addiction but to many and we will jump from one addiction to another as the mood takes us. We might start out on nicotine and then end up on alcohol and drugs as well, or we might be a compulsive eater who then drifts towards pornography and excessive spending. As one addict said, "I have five dustbins, but only four lids".

The idea that an addiction is not something to get over worried about is a dangerous delusion. As long as we are able to persuade ourselves that we don't have a problem or that we can control it whenever we want we are deceiving ourselves and our lives will continue to deteriorate.

C S Lewis wrote, "The safest road to Hell is the gradual one — the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."

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In other words I don't believe there is a single child in the world currently thinking, "When I grow up I want to be a Heroin addict". The person who starts exploring soft drugs for first time doesn't usually intend to end up a crack addict and the person who starts viewing pornography certainly never intends to download hardcore child pornography.

The American actor Corey Feldman said about his drug addiction, "It did not feel like something that was going to take over my life and destroy it. It felt like a subtle flower instead of a manipulative demon. That's the mystery of heroin". That's the mystery of all addictions.

All of us here suffer from an addiction in one of its many forms, but these are just symptoms, the ways in which we try and soothe an underlying condition. It is, therefore, the underlying condition that needs to be addressed.

We embark on an addictive course of action to 'medicate' our troubled feelings. The comedian and actor Russell Brand, who was a heroin and crack addict for many years, was recently asked what he was looking for in his addiction and he replied, "To anaesthetise the pain. I always felt desperately unhappy. When I first started taking drugs I thought, 'Oh thank God, something that makes you feel less miserable'. The reason you take drugs is to prevent yourself from confronting what you actually are".

When we feel 'bad' the quickest way to abolish these feelings is to 'use' something; alcohol, pornography, shopping, drugs, gambling, anything we think helps. Unfortunately, it works the other way too. When I feel 'good' I also want to prolong or intensify the feeling - once again with alcohol, sex, drugs, shopping, gambling, anything!

Russell Brand made another important point in an article he wrote for *The Spectator* magazine, "Drugs and alcohol are not my problem — reality is my problem. Drugs and alcohol are my solution. I looked to drugs and booze to fill up a hole in me".

TV Chef Nigella Lawson speaking about her Cocaine and Marijuana usage said, "I don't have a drug problem, I have a life problem."

It is not enough to go through a period of detoxification and then kid ourselves that the problem is now resolved. A personal transformation is required. If we leave this course fundamentally the same people we were when we came in then sooner or later we will fail and relapse. Recovery is all about change – *profound*, *radical*, *personal change*.

Most of us don't like change and try and resist it for a variety of reasons. Some of us are angry that we have to change; some of us feel shame that we need to change and probably most of us are afraid that we will not be able to change. Certainly there will be times on this course when we'll say to ourselves, "I can't do it, I'm not up to this".

But if we want to have life to the full, the life Jesus promises is available to us, we must firstly want to be transformed. For God to work in us He will require us to look at ourselves at a deep and emotional level.

Secondly, we must want to be transformed more than we want to remain in our addictive lifestyle.

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And thirdly, we need to understand there is *no alternative to God*. He has the power to change me, I don't - I know because I've tried. I am therefore reliant on His power to complete the process I am saying I am willing to begin.

Of course change for many of us is not an entirely attractive idea. Part of us hates the control our addiction has over us from the moment we wake up and certainly the broken relationships we have created, the sense of disgust and self-hatred we feel, the living of a life of dishonesty, the fear of people finding out what we are really like underneath the mask, the wasteful haemorrhaging of money, the damage to our health and the underlying guilt, shame and fear is something that, in our more rational moments, we wouldn't think twice about dumping.

But on the other hand it is an existence I have come to cope with at times and the idea of transformation, especially at the hands of an all-knowing, all-powerful God is even scarier.

We find ourselves between a rock and a hard place. On the one side is the *transforming God* and all the uncertainty that prospect entails and on the other is my *addiction* of choice, which all these years has helped me to cope with the bad feelings, the anger, inadequacy, shame, guilt and fear.

In a strange way our addiction is our friend and saviour. It has helped me cope with the uncertainties and pain of this life.

John Coats recognises the loyalty we feel we owe to this 'friend', "We do not want to believe that, all the time, it has been undermining us, cheating us, telling us lies, luring us into places we never wanted to go. Nor do we want to admit that this friend, this help, this support has now become our master – that it has now become indispensable to us and that we would do almost anything, no matter how base, in its service.

"We pretend to ourselves that we are still in control. We may even manage to abstain – for a while. But we always go back to our 'friend'. Why should we give up our only real, reliable friend? Most of the people we thought were our friends are deserting us, one by one – because of our deteriorating behaviours. But this, our only 'true' friend, can be relied upon to do what it has always done – to make us feel better; or at least not quite so bad...for a time".

Of course the truth is we are slowly getting worse but are refusing to acknowledge this and this is called 'denial'. If you are willing to begin this exciting and transforming voyage of discovery and recovery we will look at this next week.

Dr Rick Warren wrote, "You've undoubtedly heard the expression 'Time heals all wounds.' Unfortunately, it isn't true. 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".

This course is for those who know the time has come when 'the problem' has to be dealt with if we are really going to have a life in which we begin to realise our full potential.

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It is also a course for those who may have been through treatment before and have found themselves continually relapsing and who may have lost the hope that they can ever change.

As King David wrote in the Psalms about his own struggles and how a Higher power was his solution, "Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped." Psalm 28:6-7 (NIV).

This can be our claim too if we would like it to be.

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# **Small Group Leader's Guide**

# Session 1 – To Change Or Not To Change?

# **Introduction** (20 minutes)

**Leader:** Keep this first night really light and relaxed, after all it is only an introduction to the course! Encourage everyone to introduce themselves by first name only. There is no pressure on anyone to disclose their problem and on this first night it is probably best to avoid that.

As people introduce themselves ask them what they are hoping to get out of the course. Don't ask why they have come as this will pressurise them to disclose more than they may wish at this stage.

# **Establish Credibility**

Let everyone know that every single leader and helper on this course is someone who has and is struggling with an addiction. We are not here to 'fix' anyone, but to work alongside each person as a fellow struggler who God loves and is proud of.

As group leader you will encourage the guests by showing how the Twelve Step programme and your faith in Jesus has worked for you and how God has helped you through the Twelve Step programme.

Remember, we want to encourage people to come back next week so let's give them plenty of hope that there is an answer to their problem.

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# Discuss the issue (30 minutes)

**Leader:** Throw the session open to general discussion about tonight's talk. Don't allow any one person to dominate (time limit of around 2-3 minutes per person) and everyone should be given the opportunity of sharing briefly if they wish. Anyone can 'pass'. Now is a time for people to express frankly their feelings, fears and hopes. Was there anything in the talk that encouraged them and gave them hope? Was there anything in the talk that has given them cause for concern?

Questions you could ask to encourage people to contribute are things like:

"Recovery is all about change – profound, radical, personal change. Does that give rise to any concerns?"

"For God to work in us He will require us to look at ourselves at a deep and emotional level. How does that make you feel?"

"We must want to change more than we want to remain in our addictive lifestyle. Does anyone want to comment on that statement?"

"There is *no alternative* to God. He has the power to change me, I don't. What is your response to that statement?"

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# Pause for Thought

# <u>Introductory Session – To Change Or Not To Change?</u>

There are no right or wrong answers to the following questions, just honest answers. Honesty is the key because as Jesus says in John 8:32: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

"If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done."

Ecclesiastes 11:4 - The Living Bible

## 1. Make a note of your main triggers.

We know there are some obvious situations that trigger off our addictive urges. For instance, you are an alcoholic and you just can't walk home past The Pig and Whistle without dropping in for a drink. Solution; take another route home. You compulsively overeat; solution, clear out the fridge and get rid of those secret hordes of chocolate biscuits; you are bored and feeling lonely and so log on to a porn website for solace; solution, put on some music instead or read a book. One word of warning, the list will never be comprehensive enough. Someone with an addiction is susceptible to every situation becoming a possible trigger, because the real triggers are not the external situations, but the internal feelings provoked by that situation. So you may take the long way home past the pub only to find that in keeping yourself busy you go off to a football match and at half time end up having a pie and a pint or ten and that situation wasn't on your list. Addiction feeds off any kind of feeling; it will soothe bad feelings and it will prolong good ones and therefore all situations can potentially set you off.

Even so it can still be useful to make a list of the main situations that have caused you problems in the past. Divide a sheet of paper into two columns. In the left hand column put the situations that might cause you to use and in the right hand column put down how you intend to deal with that situation.

The aim of the exercise below is not just to find a mechanical solution to the problem, but also to change the way we <u>feel</u> about the situation.

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Situation	Strategy
Passing the pub	Take another route home
Raiding the fridge at night	Keep the fridge empty
Looking at porn late at night	Avoid looking at magazines, films or websites with sexual images in them (including advertisements)
Reward for successful business deal completed	Go to the cinema instead of the wine bar
Going clubbing on a Friday night	Find an alternative drug-free venue
Dealer keeps ringing you	Change your Sim card
Sitting at home alone, feeling anxious	Keep yourself busy; get out with reliable friends

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## 2. Write your life story

It can be a really good idea to write down your life story. This might sound terrifying as it reminds you of being back at school and you failed then. Don't panic; you are not writing your autobiography for publication or to pass an exam. It is not a blow-by-blow account of your life, it is not an act of confession, it does not have to be painstakingly accurate in every chronological detail and it does not have to be a literary masterpiece. It does not matter one iota about your ability to spell or master basic rules of English grammar. It is also not being done to supply the leaders on this course with a source of information about you.

In an article for the BBC by Brendan O'Neill he reports that back in 2007 the bestseller lists were full of memoirs about miserable childhoods. At one point there were six such books in the top 10. Waterstone's bookshop even has a 'Painful Lives' section.

What lies behind the rise of what has become known in the trade as the 'misery memoir' or 'mis lit'?

Some of the authors say they write in order to come to terms with their traumatic experiences and to help readers to do likewise.

Toni Maguire, author of the top-selling paperback *Don't Tell Mummy*, in which she writes of her abuse at the hands of her father, said in a recent interview it was "difficult going back over the past, but writing helped me deal with the past."

James W Pennebaker, a professor of psychology at the University of Texas says that writing about traumatic experiences can indeed help the writer to deal with his or her emotions. "There's compelling evidence that writing about serious emotional upheavals can improve mental and physical health".

Professor Pennebaker admits scientific research into the value of expressive writing is still in the "early phases", but his research seems to show that trauma-writing is beneficial.

"In our studies we bring a group of people into the lab and randomly select some to write about a personal traumatic experience and others to write about something superficial. They write for 15 or 30-minute bursts over a period of three or four days. We found that those who write about trauma tend to see some improvement in wellbeing."

O'Neill also reports that the trauma-writers experienced health benefits - including improvement in immune function – and also reported feeling *"less haunted"* by their traumatic experiences.

What you need to understand is this testimony is for the benefit of you, no one else and it has three main functions:

1) To help you get an understanding of what has been happening in your life and possibly how and why you have become the person you are.

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- 2) To help you to begin to tell others, in a small way, little bits about yourself. As these small disclosures are shared you will begin to learn to trust other people.
- 3) To give your group a rough idea of where you are coming from and where you are now. Consequently they will be in a better position to draw alongside you.

### How do I write it?

You can write it out word for word or you can just make some rough headings that will remind you of specific things that have shaped your life. Keep it simple

As addicts we are by nature secretive people and there is real benefit to be had in being able to share openly and honestly about ourselves. We have become very skilled at keeping our defects well hidden. The trouble is healing only begins as we allow light to shine into the darkness and the quickest way to do this is to choose to bring those things that are in the darkness out into the light. The sooner we begin to openly share with our fellow human beings, the sooner the healing process will begin.

At the next meeting you may have the opportunity to share with your fellow strugglers your life story if that is something you would like to do (you don't have to). Just the thought of that at this moment in time might get you into a complete panic. The thought of sharing your testimony with someone else is the last thing on your mind, but we would like to encourage you to think about it. Your fellow strugglers will not only admire your courage, but will also probably be inspired by you to share their own story.

Another interesting thing will probably also happen. The fact that others have listened to you and can empathise with your story may help you feel as though a one ton weight has been lifted from your shoulders, leaving you with such a lightness of being you will probably feel quite euphoric. And we can all do with some euphoria now and again.

Finally, you are not writing an epic autobiography of every facet of your life for publication, so try restricting yourself to no more than a few pages at most, - just covering the main influential events,

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# My Story

# "The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed"

**Psalm 34:18 (NLT)** 



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# **COURSE MANUAL**