\*Names have been changed to protect privacy. Individuals willingly shared their stories for this publication.

**Yeah, I’m One of “Those” People…**

*Andrea Barilla*

It’s the first Thursday night of the month here at New Life Baptist Church in New Wilmington, and the tables are filled. The grill is fired up with hotdogs, and the spread is down-home potluck—chips, salads, and desserts. At the tables sit people from all walks of life: corporate sales managers, teachers, stay-at-home moms, soccer dads, former prisoners, teenagers recovering from addictions. Many wear T-shirts that say, “Yeah, I’m one of those people.”

The people breaking bread together have struggled with hard life issues—some with addictions of all types (alcohol, drugs, pornography) while others struggle with self-worth, depression, codependency, or anger. But here, there is no judgment. Here is a safe place, a place where people can be their most authentic, knowing their words will be kept in the strictest of confidence. In fact, confidentiality is required.

Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered 12-step program now in 19,000 churches worldwide, is making a difference in this little corner of Western Pennsylvania.

According to John Baker, founder of Celebrate Recovery and associate pastor at Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church, “The vision God gave me was to create a safe place that was not only [for] alcoholics … But [also] a place for codependents, people with eating disorders, those struggling with sexual addictions, anger, those dealing with past or current physical or sexual abuse issues, those in need of financial recovery … In short, anyone dealing with any kind of hurt, hang-up or habit.”

New Wilmington’s Celebrate Recovery, with its demographic mixture, is certainly fulfilling Baker’s vision.

The group, started in 2005, is led by Pastor Ron Nagel and meets every Thursday from 7 – 9 p.m. at New Life Baptist Church in New Wilmington on Rt. 208. The first Thursday of each month, there is a cookout-style dinner at 6.

“At first I was embarrassed to say I came here on Thursday night, that I was one of ‘those’ people,” says Kerry\*, a stay-at-home mom who struggles with self-worth and emotional eating. “Now, I think everybody needs to go through this program. Absolutely. Everybody has hurts, habits, and hang-ups, and it’s debilitating if you don’t deal with those issues.”

Recently, Celebrate Recovery has been garnering more attention with endorsements from *Duck Dynasty*’s Phil Robertson and movies like *Home Run*, which features the group as the main character’s rehab program. (Shenango Valley Cinemas is playing the film until May 16. Call 724-983-7737 for showtimes.)

The first hour of CR involves music as well as a lesson, testimony, or guest speaker. Volunteers then read the 12 steps and their Biblical comparisons as well as eight recovery principles based on the Beatitudes. Lessons are based on these steps and principles—one per week—and include such topics as stepping out of denial; admitting we are powerless to change our habit, hurt, or hang-up with our own strength; and making amends.

Sometimes, group members share their testimonies of how they have walked through recovery from all types of struggles, including alcoholism, anger, codependency, pornography, and drug addiction.

There is no requirement to give a testimony; however, these personal stories of recovery can inspire others still knee-deep in the struggle. And the lessons provide practical, real-life guidance on how to deal with the day-to-day difficulties of habits, hurts, and hang-ups.

“Celebrate Recovery has helped me to see that I have the possibility of being clean with His [God’s] help. The lessons have given me a kind of syllabus to work through to guide my recovery,” says Nick\*, a teenager who has struggled with addiction. “CR gives me something to live by, to work by, a direction to keep me on the straight and narrow.”

Kerry has found practical help at CR as well: “Something I have found helpful is the concept of retreat, rethink, and respond. This past week, I had company. Typically, I get really stressed when these family members come, and I just can’t handle it. At one point this past week, I started to tense up. But then I retreated. I went up to my room and prayed. Then, I was able to come back down to my family. Even my husband commented on how well I handled that. I was able to get past the stress a lot quicker, and it didn’t ruin our whole day as it would have in the past.”

After this first hour, there is a short break to grab some coffee or tea, and then the second hour is spent with gender-specific small (open-share) groups, each tailored to a specific struggle and led by a leader who has recovered from that struggle. There are groups for teens and children as well. Free nursery care is provided.

These groups begin with a reading of small-group guidelines, which drive home the requirements of confidentiality and the group’s focus on supporting, not fixing each other. Then, the group leader opens the floor for discussion of that night’s lesson—sometimes, though, group members dive right into sharing their lives and their struggles, victories, and hopes.

“I’ve made some really good friendships here,” says James\*. “It’s helped to have a group of guys to be real with. Most of the time men put up a front like ‘hey, I don’t struggle with anything,’ They won’t say outright, ‘I have a hard time being a good husband’ or ‘I have a hard time avoiding temptation.’ But in this group, guys can share that, and it’s not like ‘let me tell you how to fix that’ as much as it is ‘hey, thanks for being honest.’ You can be really honest here about having real struggles and real frustrations. You can’t really do this anywhere else.”

Dave\*, a dad who struggles with chronic illness and impulsive spending, adds, “Most of us guys share each others’ phone numbers. If we have a question, problem, or need a prayer, we just text or call somebody from our group, and there’s usually somebody on the receiving end more than willing to help out.”

Shari\*, an administrator and mom who struggles with codependency and anger issues, says CR “is a place where I allow myself the freedom to not ‘have it all together.’ I tend to put the burden of perfection on myself in which I must get it *all right*—be a terrific mom, a great wife, an employee who is well spoken of. Here at CR, though, I’m allowed to say without repercussions that I can’t do it correctly all the time. I find the freedom here to lay down my perfectionistic tendencies and release them—at least for a few hours each week.”

The support network provided by these groups has been invaluable; in fact, it is often the key piece in helping people navigate their way toward recovery.

If individuals want to go more in depth with their healing, they can join a step study, which sometimes meets during the second hour on Thursday nights and sometimes during an additional time during the week. Strong relationships are formed during these step studies, and a lot of healing takes place. For one couple, it has saved their marriage.

Matt\*, an electrician, started coming to CR because of anger issues, and then continued on into a step study. His wife would come along for the free nursery care and the chance to have a relaxing hour to read her book and drink some coffee, child-free.

Matt had experienced struggles with pornography in the past, struggles that almost destroyed his relationship with his now-wife in their early years, and one that he still struggled with. But it wasn’t until CR that he really began to confront these issues.

“I had a history of pornography from the age of 8 when I found somebody’s library in the woods. It was one of those things where you get nervous looking at it because you know you shouldn’t be, but there’s an adrenaline rush that comes from finding something like that. It’s one of the more powerful drugs. I didn’t ever want to admit that I was addicted to it. My wife was always the one who said I was addicted to it.”

“[When she would say this], it would send me into spiraling anger,” he continues. “It’s like a causality loop. One thing causes you to do another, and the other leads back to the first, and it’s a nasty loop that you get into. Because one is to deal with the pressures of the other, and having to hide the addiction is what causes the anger. A lot of these realizations came from working things out with the guys and finding out that I’m not the only person that ever struggled with these problems and that if I don’t work on these things they will fester and become a disease.”

“Now, I daily try to seek out God’s will for me rather than what I choose to do for myself. Even though I still make mistakes, I don’t beat myself up about it, and it doesn’t send me into that causality loop like it used to. CR has given me the tools to break that cycle. I may start to notice these things happening [the struggles arising again], but it’s not one of those things where I’m going to go and hide from the world because I can’t deal with it. Now, I have an avenue to talk it out at least once a week, if not twice.”

This authenticity is a hallmark of Celebrate Recovery; this is a place where people can get real about their struggles and find support from others who will not judge or try to “fix” him or her. Sometimes, individuals move on to additional counseling, but this is their choice. In Matt’s case, CR gave him the courage to tell his wife the secret that had been eating away at him for six years—a night in which he had been unfaithful two years into their relationship. He used one of the CR brochures available at every meeting, “Codependent Woman in a Relationship with a Sexually Addicted Man,” to tell his wife of his infidelity.

His wife, Angela\*, was shocked. “By this time we were married, had two children, and I lived far away from my family. I had always told Matt that if he were ever unfaithful, I wouldn’t stay. I thought women who stayed were weak.”

The next week, full of intense anger and hurt, Angela attended CR with her husband. But this time, she put away her book and went into a small group herself.

“I was humiliated. I didn’t want any of my friends or family to know he had been unfaithful,” she says. “It was just the two leaders that week, which rarely happens, and I just spent the whole hour pouring out my heart. They listened to me and didn’t judge me. They were a much needed voice of reason that cut through the chaos in my mind. They comforted me and helped me work through all the powerful emotions I was feeling: pain, anger, rage, bitterness, resentment, regret, and self-pity, to name a few. After admitting all these issues in Thursday night open-share group, I began to learn about codependency and recognize it in myself. I also learned that many marriages suffer from the repercussions of pornography addiction. By being embarrassed and silent on the issue all these years, I was giving it power.”

The couple went on to marriage counseling and still attend CR together. In fact, they are two of CR’s biggest advocates.

“I don’t judge people like I used to,” says Angela. “I never thought I’d stay, and the pain still comes up sometimes. There are triggers. But I do know that the more I talk about it [in CR and to people she trusts] the less power it has over me. I want others to find freedom too.”

Celebrate Recovery is for everyone, with *any* type of hurt, habit, or hang-up.

“My life was upside down when my friend invited me to Celebrate Recovery,” says Tony\*, who is navigating his way through a divorce. “But CR has a different flavor, an authenticity. The leadership here has reached out to me. The messages are down-to-earth. Guys from my small group have extended the hand of friendship to me; sometimes we go out to dinner before CR. There’s a dose of reality here.”

Says Luke\*, a teenager who has struggled with addiction, “I’ve been away from my family for seven months [in placement]. But this place feels like home. Everybody is so nice and welcoming.”

“If you haven’t been to Celebrate Recovery, and you have even the littlest inkling that you’d like to see what it’s about, come out,” says Pastor Ron. “Especially the first Thursday of the month with our cookout. Come out and see what we have to offer—the prayers that we give, the support, the encouragement—come out and try Celebrate Recovery.”

I did. And I’m not ashamed to say that I’m now one of “those” people.

**Sidebar/Media**

**Pictures (attached to email)**

**Celebrate Recovery New Wilmington**

***Where:*** New Life Baptist Church, 3414 State Route 208, New Wilmington

***When:*** Thursdays 7 – 9 p.m. (First Thursday of the month is cookout at 6.)

***Who:*** Anyone struggling with a hurt, habit, or hang-up. Confidentiality is required.

***For More Information:*** Pastor Ron Nagel, 724-946-2816 x 211

**Celebrate Recovery website:** [www.celebraterecovery.com](http://www.celebraterecovery.com)

**Celebrate Recovery at New Life Baptist Church:**

YouTube video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyCArL2VA7M>

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***Home Run* trailer:** <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2051894/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1>

**Phil Robertson from *Duck Dynasty*** **supports Celebrate Recovery:** <http://vimeo.com/65251149>