



After Grace Group Ends...



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Grace Groups: for Wackos and Weirdos?



John Kuiper

Grace Groups seem to occupy a special niche in the church. Grace Groups often get placed under the supervision of the Care Pastor. He is the fortunate one who gets to oversee the ministries to the sick, hurting, shut-ins, depressed, wackos, weirdos and others we don't know quite what to do with. Churches take pride in knowing they have provided a place for "those" people. It looks good on their resume, and hopefully looks good to God. It reminds me of the stories surrounding the very first women groups we had 20 years ago; they wanted to sneak in the back door with a bag over their head, to a room where there was paper covering the window in the door, so they could remain anonymous from the rest of the church.

So what is the purpose of Grace Groups, and where do they fit in the church? I want to remind you, (and you can remind your pastor/leadership team) of three very important aspects to this ministry:

First of all – we believe and the Bible supports that we have all been wounded (or abused) since the fall in Genesis 3. All have sinned against God and all have sinned against another. So intentional or unintentional, all have experienced wounds. In our Grace Groups we ask people to look back into their childhood to identify the damage that was done to them (Looking at the Past).

Secondly – we believe that wounded people wound others. We ask people to identify the ways in which they are currently damaging others with their junk (Looking at the Present). That is hard ground to plow, to acknowledge the harm we are perpetrating on others. That can feel a little too close, a little too personal.

Thirdly – we believe that Jesus is the Wounded Healer and only He can heal our wounded hearts. We are incapable of healing ourselves. So when others are able to help me connect the past with the present and identify harmful patterns, I have a choice. Will I stay stuck in my mess and remain "wounded" for life, or will I submit my newfound insights to an all powerful God? Will I allow Him to walk with me through the muck (even before I emerge from the mess) in my struggle with people, family, self and God? (Looking at the Future).

The Bible teaches the process of sanctification – our growth after we have trusted in Christ as our personal Savior. If the Church of Jesus Christ is to be about the business of helping men and women in their walk with Christ, then I believe Grace Groups are not just for “weirdos”. If we are all wounded – then all of us need help in the life long process of becoming more like Christ.

In Grace Groups we learn a number of skills that are necessary for ministry:

- *How to connect with and tell my story*
- *How to listen to another’s story*
- *How to respond when someone tells their story*
- *How to affirm one’s God-given dignity*
- *How to confront sinful depravity*
- *How to help someone see God in their story*

These look like some important skills to me. It might be good if all of our leadership people were growing in these areas. Then they could be more effective in all the areas of their life – at home, at work, and at church (Elder, Deacon, Sunday School Teacher, Youth Leader, Choir member, Care team, etc.)

The church has a choice to make – to make room for Grace Groups to be part of their program or, much better, to encourage this ministry to weave into the fabric (the DNA) of every ministry in the church. To do that, we will honestly have to admit that everyone in the church is needy.

None of us have arrived. That won’t happen until Jesus returns to retrieve all of us weirdos.

There is still room at SALTS (April 21-26) – but you must move quickly to apply. Register online at: www.ohmin.org or contact our office. Also, register for the October 13-18 SALTS before September 1 and save \$100.

Scholarship help is urgently needed!

We have applicants for the April SALTS training who cannot attend without help. Our fund is depleted and we need at least \$3000 immediately to assist these people. If you can help, send your check payable to Open Hearts Ministry with Scholarship Fund in the memo line!

Grace Groups and the Heart of Worship

We have often explained to pastors that our desire is not to simply be a program offered by the church, but to be a part of the DNA of the church and the way it ministers. The following interview with John MacMullen, worship director at Third Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, helps illustrate this:

OHM: John, what have you found relevant to your role as worship director that relates to your Grace Group experience?

John: I have become more in touch with my own heart. As a result I find myself taking more risks to share my heart with others. I believe I am moving toward a truer, more authentic kind of worship. I am more real before people. I had comments after my group experience that the change in worship was noticeable. As I have shared my own struggle and pain, I have sensed a real connection with the hearts of worshippers.

OHM: As worship director you lead a team of artistic, creative people who assist with the worship experience. Did anything you learned in Grace Group help in these relationships?

John: I have been able to share parts of my story with others on the worship team. I have come to understand a more loving way to respond to their struggles and challenges. I can be more empathetic, connecting with what they are sharing in a way that encourages, rather than doing further damage. One worship leader expressed gratitude in really being heard – that I was sensitive to the guilt they were feeling.



I have learned that the worship team needs to be and can be a safe place, a place that lowers the fear and anxiety that the team feels. Then we can focus more on worship and less on performance. Artists are enormously sensitive to rejection, to any sense of failure, to criticism and conflict. A lot of their “stuff” is carried inside, where they obsess about themselves and their performance. They long for a level of community where they experience grace, trust and honesty. Then they can be free to worship and lead others to the same place.

OHM: What do you tell others about Grace Groups?

John: I tell them that, if you are open, this experience will impact you personally, connecting with your own heart at a deep level. It will impact your relationship with your spouse, friend, son, daughter, mom or dad – taking you to deeper levels of intimacy. It will impact your relationship with God and with ministry, connecting you with the very heart of worship.

Let us know how you have been impacted by your Grace Group or SALTS experience. Write to us at office@ohmin.org.

Allender to Speak at Celebration

We look forward to Dr. Dan Allender joining us at our Anniversary Celebration on May 30-31. Dan will be sharing on the topic, “Retelling the Story”. As we grow in emotional and spiritual health, our perspective on our story changes. Clearly Joseph’s perspective changed from being the victim in the pit and the prison to being able to proclaim in Genesis 50:20 – “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” How might your story be retold on the other side of “but God...”?



Dr. Dan Allender
joins our celebration!

Our banquet will acknowledge what God has done and what we are trusting God to do as we look to the future. Our capital campaign will be presented and you will have opportunity to deepen your partnership with us. This is a conference and celebration you won't want to miss!

**Mark your 2008
Calendars!
May 30-31
at Maranatha.**

After Grace Group ends...what's next?



Mary Jane Hamilton
SALTs Trainer

People often wonder: What will I do once my Grace Group has ended for the season? Often participants have grown close to their group and they have developed deep relationships, especially if they have experienced both the “Journey Guide” and “My Journey Continues.” There may be a feeling of wanting to continue, yet they do not know what that could look like. Here are a few directions that your Grace Group experience could take you in ministry to the body:

1. **Home Group:** Start a group in your home with couples from your church or neighborhood. Use the format of story telling and responding as a way to get to know one another and eventually to “dig deeper” into lives and relationships. You will need to move slower but you can continue to open up your life, share meaningful experiences and respond to others as you learned in Grace Group.
2. **Job:** Many of you work in the mental health profession, schools, social work, youth organizations etc. How could what you have gleaned from Grace Group be translated into your profession as you work with people and the situations in their lives?
3. **Leadership:** Take what you have learned from your Grace Group experience and apply it as you lead others. This could be in business, clubs, neighborhood, family or other secular organizations.
4. **Ministry:** Use your Grace Group skills as you lead other ministries in your church. For example, in my church three women have started a Divorce Care Group using listening, pursuing, and responding skills they learned from Grace Group. Others employ the same skills in working with the youth, and some use their new freedom to engage in worship with deeper passion. Still others have found what they have learned very useful on mission trips, in Sunday school groups, and in simply being better listeners and responders to members and staff.

*Plan to attend the Great Lakes Leader Retreat on August 23rd.
Mark your calendars – details will be in our next letter.*

Some of you may have an interest in being a Grace Group leader in your church. It is important that the leadership in your church affirm your passion for ministry. You might start by being mentored by a trained leader. Hopefully you will be encouraged to attend SALTS for further training. Your passion may even lead you to enroll in Advanced Leadership Training at SALTS (ALTS) after your initial SALTS experience. ALTS is offered two times a year along with our regular SALTS training.

Keep in mind that Grace Groups are NOT intended to be an “end all”. They launch us into deeper growth as we delve into our stories and they strengthen our relationships with God and others. Grace Groups are adaptable. They connect us. They are a gift that “keeps on giving” when we invest what we learn in the lives of others.

I want to encourage you to be thinking: How then can I use my Grace Group experience? Contact us with your ideas so that OHM can pass them along to others on our blog.

Order your Journey Guides before May 15!

After May 15 we are facing a significant price increase in the production of the Journey Guides. New prices will be as follows:

***Participant’s Journey Guide and
Participant’s “My Journey Continues”
will cost \$23 each.***

***Leader’s Journey Guide and Leader’s “My Journey Continues”
will cost \$28 each.***

***Order received prior to May 15 will be processed at the
old prices of \$18 and \$25 respectively.***

Group leaders are delighted with the impact that using “My Journey Continues” is having on their groups. 450 copies were sold in January and February. Watch upcoming newsletters for details of what participants are learning.



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Group Ministry!

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with OHM Enclosed!*