



# FOREVER FREE

## LEADER'S MANUAL

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO  
**PLANNING**  
**LAUNCHING**  
**FACILITATING**  
**& GROWING**  
A THRIVING RECOVERY MINISTRY







# **FOREVER FREE**

## **LEADER GUIDE**



# Table of Contents

|                                                                    |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Table of Contents.....</b>                                      | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Introduction.....</b>                                           | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 1.....</b>                                              | <b>5</b>  |
| The Road to Forever Freedom: Relationship.....                     | 5         |
| Developing a Healthy Relationship with God.....                    | 6         |
| Developing Healthy Relationships with Others.....                  | 7         |
| Developing a Healthy Relationship with Self.....                   | 9         |
| <b>Chapter 2.....</b>                                              | <b>11</b> |
| The Reason.....                                                    | 11        |
| Why start a recovery ministry?.....                                | 11        |
| Why Forever Free?.....                                             | 12        |
| Who is Forever Free for?.....                                      | 13        |
| <b>Chapter 3.....</b>                                              | <b>17</b> |
| A New Approach to Recovery.....                                    | 17        |
| How is Forever Free similar to other recovery ministries?.....     | 17        |
| How is Forever Free different from other recovery ministries?..... | 17        |
| Biblical Theology of Forever Free.....                             | 18        |
| <b>Chapter 4.....</b>                                              | <b>21</b> |
| Strategizing, Planning, and Implementation.....                    | 21        |
| Evaluate.....                                                      | 21        |
| Strategize and Plan.....                                           | 22        |
| Forever Free Ministry Options.....                                 | 22        |
| Foundational Components of Forever Free.....                       | 23        |
| Gathering.....                                                     | 23        |
| Groups.....                                                        | 24        |
| Growth.....                                                        | 25        |
| Discipleship Classes.....                                          | 25        |
| Forever Free Life Groups.....                                      | 26        |
| Forever Free Elements.....                                         | 26        |
| Setup.....                                                         | 26        |
| Pre-Service Fellowship/Dinner.....                                 | 27        |
| Worship.....                                                       | 27        |
| Teaching and Testimonies.....                                      | 27        |
| Surrender.....                                                     | 27        |
| Groups.....                                                        | 28        |
| Newcomer Reception.....                                            | 28        |

|                                                              |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Freedom Café.....                                            | 28        |
| Finishing Crew.....                                          | 29        |
| Process Groups.....                                          | 29        |
| Freedom From the Inside.....                                 | 29        |
| <b>Chapter 5.....</b>                                        | <b>31</b> |
| Preparing to Launch.....                                     | 31        |
| Phase One: Communicate and Invite.....                       | 31        |
| Phase Two: Train, Plan, and Prepare.....                     | 32        |
| Planning is the Key.....                                     | 33        |
| Things to Consider.....                                      | 33        |
| <b>Chapter 6.....</b>                                        | <b>37</b> |
| Facilitation of the Primary Meeting Night.....               | 37        |
| Pre-Service Meal Ideas.....                                  | 37        |
| The Gathering.....                                           | 38        |
| Forever Free Curriculum and Teaching/Testimony Schedule..... | 38        |
| Gathering Meeting Format.....                                | 38        |
| Worship.....                                                 | 39        |
| Prayer.....                                                  | 39        |
| Announcements.....                                           | 39        |
| Offering.....                                                | 39        |
| Teaching, Testimony, & Freedom Night.....                    | 39        |
| Worship & Surrender.....                                     | 40        |
| Share Groups.....                                            | 40        |
| Share Group Format.....                                      | 40        |
| Opening Prayer & Welcome.....                                | 40        |
| Group Expectations.....                                      | 40        |
| Leader's Focus Question.....                                 | 41        |
| Wrap-up & Closing Prayer.....                                | 41        |
| Invitation to Newcomer's Reception & Freedom Café.....       | 41        |
| Newcomer Reception.....                                      | 42        |
| Freedom Café.....                                            | 42        |
| <b>Twelve Steps of Forever Free.....</b>                     | <b>43</b> |

# Introduction

The word “recovery” often gets a bad rap. When you mention the word, responses are varied, but frequently people say things like, “I don’t need recovery,” or “I would never go into recovery or attend a recovery meeting.” Most reasons are based on preconceived notions or ideas, such as the following:

- Recovery is only for *those* people: the alcoholic and addict who either lives in the streets or can’t hold down a job. He’s been married six times, has a history of arrests and violence, and hasn’t taken a bath in weeks.
- There is a stigma associated with recovery, so attending would cause others to judge or condemn.
- Alcohol or drugs isn’t the issue, so there isn’t any reason to attend.

The truth is recovery isn’t and shouldn’t be a dirty word. The stigma surrounding the word *recovery* can be erased if the culture is changed. Bringing **Forever Free** to your church will help to both erase the stigma and change the culture. It will create a safe environment where people from the most vulnerable sectors of society will find refuge and a solution to their struggles.

A wonderful benefit of offering a Christ-centered recovery gathering in your church and community is it will serve as a bridge to many unchurched individuals. Those who might not visit your church on a Sunday for church services are willing to attend a recovery meeting on a weekday. Those who attend **Forever Free** are introduced to the love of Jesus, and attending church services becomes a natural progression in their newfound faith walk.

I want to personally thank you in advance for starting **Forever Free** in your church and community. I am a product of Christ-centered recovery. I know firsthand the impact **Forever Free** will have on individuals, families, and generations to come.

My team and I are excited for you and are praying for you as you take this important step in bringing hope and healing to your church and community. We look forward to hearing stories of how God uses this simple yet effective program to bring freedom to many. You can be **Forever Free**!

*Layne*









# Chapter 1

## The Road to Forever Freedom: Relationship

It was early April 2003. I arrived at my 5:30 meeting with my home group at the Green Valley Group in Henderson, Nevada. I was a little over four months sober, but I was particularly restless that day. I listened as one after another, men and women shared their experience, strength, and hope. An old man named Don, who I really loved hearing from, shared something that would alter the trajectory of my recovery. He said, “The only way I have been able to stay sober and find peace and serenity, is I found a *relationship* with a god of my own understanding.” There were two words that stood out to me that day: *relationship* and *God*. I remember thinking to myself, “I have to find this *relationship* with God!” I realized I had never experienced genuine peace and serenity, and that was exactly what I was looking for. You see, I had renounced God at fourteen years old and had lived much of my life as an agnostic, and later an atheist. But I knew something had to change. On April 20, 2003, my wife and I showed up at a big church in Henderson, Nevada for their Easter service. That day, our lives were forever changed. I began developing a relationship with Jesus, and my recovery has flourished since then.

When I began working on the **Forever Free** curriculum in the Spring of 2022, the Lord spoke a very powerful message to me about recovery. No, He didn’t audibly speak to me. Instead, He quietly spoke this message in my spirit: “Recovery is about relationship.” Over the next several months, He revealed that the word relationship is one of the key points of recovery.

Three relationships form the foundational core of **Forever Free**:

- God
- Others
- Self

Furthermore, these three relationships begin to grow and flourish by incorporating the Three Gs’ of **Forever Free**:

- Gathering
- Groups
- Growth

The most important relationship in recovery and in life is our relationship with *God*. An active, ongoing relationship with us was God’s intention from the beginning, but sin entered the picture and separated the Creator from His creation. In the same way, when

addiction, compulsive behaviors, or hurts become our focus, communication with God is hindered.

Relationship with *self* is also hindered when addiction or compulsive behaviors become the means by which we cope with difficult situations or emotions. The ability to “feel” is deeply affected. Unhealthy coping mechanisms interrupt a person’s ability to process normal emotions, react in healthy ways, and deal with adversity. Instead of feeling and then dealing with a situation in a healthy way, we suppress emotions, and the ability to process is negatively affected.

Relationships with *others* are impacted by unhealthy coping mechanisms. Over time, healthy relationships give way to very unhealthy ones. Often, a healthy circle of influence is replaced by an unhealthy one. The cycle of dysfunction feeds on itself, and the ability to recognize healthy behaviors versus unhealthy ones becomes skewed.

### *Developing a Healthy Relationship with God*

The first and most important relationship we can ever have is with our Creator. When God created humankind, He did so with relationship in mind. We are made in His image and created for His glory. Over and over, the Bible affirms that we are His workmanship and are called to love Him:

- *Genesis 1:27* **So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**
- *Isaiah 43:7* **Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.**
- *Ephesians 2:10* **For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**
- *Matthew 22:37* **And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”<sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment.**

The Gathering is where many people new to recovery have their first encounter with God, and where their newfound relationship with Him is fostered. The service starts with worship music, which creates an environment rich for connection with God.

Twice a month, a powerful, uplifting, Gospel-centric message of hope and healing is presented. The **Forever Free** curriculum combines the traditional Steps of recovery with powerful biblical truths. The primary goal at **Forever Free** is developing an abiding relationship with Jesus. This results in connecting to the power of the indwelling Holy

Spirit who directs and guides the life of the believer. When an abiding relationship grows, those with life-controlling addictions or compulsions are better equipped to fend off the urge to act out.

One critical component of the Gathering is a monthly, live testimony of life change and restoration. Testimonies help participants develop a deeper connection with God. As participants listen to how others' lives have been transformed, they are filled with a sense of hope and the realization that change really is possible by connecting to and trusting in God.

Another element of the Gathering is periodic services dedicated specifically to worship. Connect with God nights are extremely beneficial in ushering in the presence of Jesus. The majority of the Gathering is spent in worship on these special nights. For many who attend **Forever Free**, worship is their introduction to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Like the Psalmist, invite participants to "come, ...worship and bow down; ...kneel before the Lord, our Maker!" (Psalm 95:6).

Process Groups are another important step in developing a healthy relationship with God. This is because of the significant emphasis on Jesus and His work on the cross. Working through the Twelve Steps leads participants into a deeper reliance on God.

### *Developing Healthy Relationships with Others*

People who find themselves at a crossroads where unhealthy behaviors, compulsions, or addictions are prevalent in their lives often have strained relationships with others. In fact, they often have no healthy relationships. Dysfunction in life and relationships becomes the norm. At **Forever Free**, healthy relationships with others is a key focus. The biblical model taught by Jesus and His disciples is our model for how to develop and keep healthy relationships:

- Love one another.
  - *Matthew 22:39* *And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*
- Put others first.
  - *Philippians 2:3* *Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*
- Choose the right relationships.
  - *1 Corinthians 15:33* *Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."*



- Resolve conflicts biblically.
  - *Matthew 18:15* If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.
- Be a good example for others.
  - *Romans 14:21* It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.
- Share Jesus and recovery with others.
  - *Matthew 28:19* Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age (NLT).
- If someone stumbles and falls, help them up.
  - *Galatians 6:1* Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person. Back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.
- Isolation is never good. Everything is better in teams.
  - *Ecclesiastes 4:9* Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. <sup>10</sup> If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. <sup>11</sup> Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? <sup>12</sup> A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

Healthy relationships with others are developed in the Gathering as participants get together for worship, teaching, and testimonies. Groups are another venue in which relationships develop and grow. Consistent weekly attendance allows participants to connect with one another. Personal and community growth occurs in closed groups, specifically in Process and Discipleship Groups. Transparency creates an environment where intimacy and trust develop. The end result is healthy relationships with others.

## *Developing a Healthy Relationship with Self*

Developing a healthy relationship with self is a journey of self-discovery. For many who are starting the recovery journey, ignoring obvious signs of emotional, physical, and spiritual struggles and deficiencies is the norm. Ignoring the problem may seem like the right thing to do in order to cope, but it actually leads to deeper issues.

A healthy relationship with self is biblical:

- Jesus says to love yourself.
  - *Mark 12:30* *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’<sup>31</sup> The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*
- Examine yourself.
  - *Lamentations 3:40* *Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord!*
  - *Galatians 6:3* *For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. <sup>5</sup> For each will have to bear his own load.*
- Don’t be a people pleaser.
  - *Galatians 1:10* *For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.*
- Take care of your body.
  - *1 Corinthians 6:19* *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body.*

Developing a healthy relationship with self has three distinct parts:

1. How you feel about yourself.
2. How you treat yourself.
3. How you make decisions for yourself.

At **Forever Free**, participants learn how to address and maneuver through these questions by learning from others who have similar life experiences and victories. In group settings such as Share Groups and Process Groups, individual relationships with accountability partners and mentors also foster growth in this area of self-care and self-awareness. Over time, a healthy relationship with self becomes a reality by working through this simple program.





2





# Chapter 2

## The Reason

There must be a valid reason to start any ministry. In this section, we will address three key questions that must be addressed: Why start a recovery ministry? Why **Forever Free**? Who is **Forever Free** for?

### Why start a recovery ministry?

You might have already answered this question because of glaring needs in your church or organization. If your community is like most, you have already encountered people who struggle with drug or alcohol use, or a substance use disorder.

Here are some alarming statistics from the *2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health* conducted by the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (SAMHSA):

- Among the 138.5 million people who were current alcohol users, 61.6 million were classified as binge drinkers and 17.7 million (28.8 percent of current binge drinkers and 12.8 percent of current alcohol users) were classified as heavy drinkers.
- More than 59.3 million people 12 or older used illicit drugs in the past year, including 49.6 million who used marijuana.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, drug and alcohol use have increased. People have become more isolated, and as a result, drug and alcohol use, abuse, and dependence are on the rise. People are more desperate than ever.

Alcohol and drug use and abuse are reason enough to start a **Forever Free** program in your church or organization. However, men, women, and even students and children struggle with many other issues. Oftentimes, these aren't nearly as obvious but can be every bit as debilitating. Here are just a few:

- Rejection
- Grief
- Fear
- Finances

---

<sup>1</sup> SAMHSA, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Binge alcohol Use and illicit drug use among Persons Aged 12 or Older.  
<https://www.samhsa.gov/newsroom/press-announcements/202110260320>.

- Depression
- Low-Self Esteem
- Guilt and Shame
- Inability to Forgive
- Holding on to the Past
- Stress
- Need to Control
- Perfectionism
- Marriage Issues
- Divorce
- Codependency
- Gambling
- Eating Disorders
- Food Addiction
- Lust
- Sexual Addiction
- Love & Relationship Addiction
- Pornography
- Abuse (Physical/Emotional/Sexual)
- Self-harm
- The list goes on and on...

Many addictive or compulsive behaviors fall under one category: *sin*. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Notice Paul didn’t say “some” have sinned, or “the really bad people” have sinned. He didn’t even say “those people” have sinned. No, he said, *all people*. That means you and me and every other human being who ever walked—or will walk the earth—has sinned and will sin. Some sins become hang-ups, while others become habits. And when people talk down to, criticize, harm, or abuse others, they inflict hurts that leave scars.

Hurting and addicted individuals in your community desperately need help, hope, and healing. Your church can be the place where they find it.

### **Why Forever Free?**

Traditional recovery programs are often based on and utilize the Twelve Steps, which were created by the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill Wilson, in 1938. Millions of people have gone through the steps and have achieved long-term sobriety. For nearly ninety years, the Twelve Steps have proven to be a solid method by which abstinence can be achieved.

The realization that the Twelve steps can be utilized for various hurts, compulsions, and addictions has resulted in numerous programs being created, such as Narcotics Anonymous, Al-Anon/Alateen, Cocaine Anonymous, Sexaholics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, and a host of other groups. These programs have proven to be effective in helping countless individuals stay sober. However, the only goal of these programs is to achieve a state of sobriety or abstinence from the behavior.

One of the concepts introduced in these meetings is the need for a “Higher Power” in order to recover from addiction. The problem with this terminology is that it does not necessarily refer to a deity or supreme being. The Higher Power is a god of your own understanding, and if one does not believe in a god, they can simply rely on the recovery group or an object as this “higher power.”

In **Forever Free**, we believe the one and only Higher Power is Jesus Christ. Without Him, true recovery and freedom cannot be achieved. The pathway to recovery, which leads to peace and serenity, is paved by and grounded in a healthy relationship with Jesus. While we utilize the Twelve Steps as a familiar and effective path to experiencing freedom, the foundation of this program is the Bible. By trusting in Jesus Christ and working this simple program, you can be **Forever Free**!

There is a long-standing belief in traditional recovery that a person will always struggle with his or her addiction or compulsion: “Once an alcoholic/addict, always an alcoholic/addict.” In other words, a person will always be bound by the addictive or compulsive behavior and will never be free of it. They can only hope to avoid participating in the behavior and experiencing its consequences, a state known as “sobriety.”

It is our assertion that sobriety does not have to be a daily struggle; instead, one can live in continual freedom and victory. As a new creation in Christ, you are no longer bound by the addiction or compulsion. You can be **Forever Free!** *John 8:36 If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

Becoming free—**Forever Free**—should be the goal of every redeemed addict. **Forever Free** is the promise of God to all of us. You are God’s child, and He wants you to be free from the chains of bondage, free from the stranglehold of sin, free from the controlling forces of evil in the world, and free from the corrupt ways of thinking you once had. Not merely free for a day, a week, or until your next meeting. No—**FOREVER FREE**.

### **Who is Forever Free for?**

One of the most common questions asked is, “Who is **Forever Free** for?” Usually that question is followed by, “Will I fit in?” Most people realize that those with life-controlling



addictions attend recovery programs. **Forever Free** is a place for those who fit this description. However, those with substance use disorder are actually the minority. At our home campus of First NLR, only 40% of those in attendance attend for chemical dependency. The other 60% attend for other life-issues.

As mentioned earlier, **Forever Free** is for people who have all kinds of life-issues. Groups are offered as the need is evident. For example, if there are four or more women (or men) who struggle with a particular issue, a new group is formed for those women (or men). All groups are issue and gender specific, so those who attend will be with people they can relate to and learn from.

Below are a few of the issues addressed at **Forever Free** and their definitions:

- Chemical Dependency: abuse of drugs or alcohol that continues even when significant problems related to their use have developed.<sup>2</sup>
- Codependency: a psychological condition or a relationship in which a person manifesting low self-esteem and a strong desire for approval has an unhealthy attachment to another often controlling or manipulative person (such as a person with an addiction to alcohol or drugs).<sup>3</sup>
- Sexual Addiction: excessive sexual thoughts, desires, urges or behaviors that can't be controlled and cause distress and harm to your relationships, finances and other aspects of your life.<sup>4</sup>
- Food Addiction: reward signals from highly palatable foods may override other signals of fullness and satisfaction. Compulsive overeating is a type of behavioral addiction meaning that someone can become preoccupied with a behavior (such as eating, or gambling, or shopping) that triggers intense pleasure. People with food addictions lose control over their eating behavior and find themselves spending excessive amounts of time involved with food and

---

<sup>2</sup> John Hopkins Medicine. Health. Substance Abuse/Chemical Dependency.  
<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/substance-abuse-chemical-dependency>.

<sup>3</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Codependency. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/codependency>.

<sup>4</sup> Cleveland Clinic. Sex Addiction, Hypersexuality and Compulsive Sexual Behavior.  
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/22690-sex-addiction-hypersexuality-and-compulsive-sexual-behavior>.

overeating or anticipating the emotional effects of compulsive overeating. They eat more and more, only to find that food satisfies them less and less.<sup>5</sup>

- Abuse (physical, emotional): cruel, violent, or unfair treatment of someone.<sup>6</sup>
- Sexual Abuse: the act of making someone take part in sexual activities, against their wishes, or without their agreement.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> WebMD. Food Addiction.

<https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/eating-disorders/binge-eating-disorder/mental-health-food-addiction>.

<sup>6</sup> Cambridge Dictionary. Abuse. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/abuse>.

<sup>7</sup> Cambridge Dictionary. Sexual Abuse. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/sexual-abuse>.





**3**





# Chapter 3

## A New Approach to Recovery

Any new endeavor generates many questions and details to be ironed out. In this section, we will answer the “how” questions.

### **How is Forever Free similar to other recovery ministries?**

When you walk into a **Forever Free** meeting, there will be some similarities to other recovery programs. First, you will smell fresh coffee brewing. I’m not sure you can have a recovery program without coffee. There is probably some kind of ordinance that requires the brewing and consumption of this delectable beverage. Second, like some other Christ-centered programs, a meal or snacks are served. Food brings people together and creates an atmosphere for connection. A third similarity is the Twelve Steps. The Twelve Steps of recovery are a tried method of working through the underlying defects of character. Character defects are at the core of dysfunctional behaviors that often lead to an addiction or unhealthy compulsion. The final similarity is the open share group format. Share groups are also a proven method of hearing and sharing experience, strength, and hope. Realizing you are not alone in your struggle is powerful.

### **How is Forever Free different from other recovery ministries?**

In secular recovery, one cannot argue the effectiveness and impact Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Sexaholics Anonymous, Food Addicts Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, Codependents Anonymous, and so many others have had and will continue having on the lives of those who attend and work these programs.

Some Christ-centered, biblical-based programs ascribe to the use of the Twelve Steps because of the proven results. Other Christian programs follow a model in which the traditional Twelve Steps are considered unnecessary. The only steps needed, according to these programs, are placing one’s belief and faith in Jesus Christ and then connecting with a healthy local church.

Are any of the above-mentioned options wrong? Certainly not. Whatever works for each individual to get sober and maintain sobriety in his or her particular area of recovery is wonderful! Complete abstinence is certainly the goal (or at least one of them). I have personally known dozens of men and women who have had success in every type of recovery program described above. I even met one man who hasn’t done any of these things to get and stay sober.

Because of their effectiveness, **Forever Free** implements the Twelve Steps. We consider them a pathway to a closer, more intimate relationship with Jesus. They are the vehicle by which a deeper, more thorough method of self-examination is achieved. The Steps are an easy-to-follow discipleship tool for those new to recovery and new to faith. By working through these simple steps, individuals are able to expose and release the chains that kept them in bondage. God molds and transforms them as they work with a mentor through this journey of self-discovery.

What differentiates **Forever Free** from secular programs as well as other Christ-centered programs is our approach to the recovery journey. While we use the Twelve Steps, we also encourage a deep reliance on the promises in scripture and discipleship, which ultimately leads to freedom – Forever Freedom!

### *Biblical Theology of **Forever Free***

The road to recovery is a process of discipleship and becoming like Jesus. While the process itself is different for each individual, everyone starts at the same spot: Before coming into relationship with Jesus, their actions, feelings, and thoughts were corrupted by sin. They lived broken, immoral lives with horrible consequences. Some people's choices created more damage than others. Sinful desires led them into addictions, bad habits, and dangerous lifestyles. When they follow Jesus, the spiritual consequences of that lifestyle are defeated. He sets people free!

The process of resisting temptation and living out the healing that freedom brings is more difficult for some. Addiction is a terrible result of sinful living. While some are instantly healed, the majority must get help in the battle against the temptation to return to old patterns of living.

**Forever Free** is guided by the belief that freedom is promised in scripture. Five core principles define the **Forever Free** ministry.

**Forever Free** is:

1. **God Focused** – *We believe God is our only hope of salvation, transformation, and freedom.*

God is loving, merciful, kind, and gracious, and He is the one who saves (2 Timothy 1:9; Psalm 145:8). God loved the world so much, He gave Jesus to save mankind by dying on the cross (John 3:16). God is not just a higher power; He is the creator of the universe who revealed Himself and gave us the Bible as the authority and guide for how to live our lives (John 1:14-18; 2 Peter 1:16-19; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

God, the creator and restorer of all things, makes His miraculous power available to anyone who puts their faith in Him. The transformation of each person's life is both spiritual and physical. He renews the soul, body, and mind (Eph. 2:3-10). His power brings freedom for the captive and the addict. Healing, transformation, and freedom come from Him alone (Eph. 3:20-21; John 14:12-14).

**2. Gospel Centered** – *We believe we are set free from sin and set free from our old lifestyle.*

When we sin, relationship with God is broken (Rom. 5:12; Eph. 4:17-18). Sin's impact cannot be overstated. It results in spiritual and physical death (Rom 6:23; Eph. 2:1-3). Addiction is a result of sin and death. It controls us and leads to destructive behavior impacting every part of our lives (1 John 2:15-17; Rev. 21:8; Gal. 6:7-8).

The Gospel, the Good News, is that Jesus won the victory over sin, death, and the devil (1 Cor. 15:56-57; Col. 2:13-15). Before Jesus, we were all slaves to sin, but now, Jesus has set us free, and "If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed" (John 8:36). Followers of Jesus Christ are new creations. The old is gone and the new is here (2 Cor. 5:17)! Freedom in Christ means we are no longer in bondage to sinful choices and behaviors. We can face temptation and defeat it (1 Cor. 10:13). We are free!

**3. Growth Enabled** – *We believe transformation and freedom is possible through God's miraculous power and our daily decision to become more like Jesus.*

Growing in Christ is normal for Christians. Freedom comes from both God and our managed, daily decisions (Heb. 6:1; 1 Timothy 4:11-16), Peter wrote God's "divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness to escape the corruption of this world," but he also said we need to **make every effort** to add to our lives goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness and love (2 Peter 1:3).

*Making every effort* includes the daily discipline of saying "No" to sin. Regardless of whether we were instantly healed of addiction or are working hard to defeat lingering temptation, we are called to grow in faith and become more like Jesus every day.

*Making every effort* is a process that must be worked out every day in humility and trust in the Lord as He works in us (Phil. 2:12-13).

*Making every effort* means we abandon our ways of living in the world and embrace the new life through Christ Jesus (Rom. 12:1-2).



*Making every effort* means we learn more about God and ourselves through reading the Bible, praying, and studying our lives. It means making amends for past wrongs and learning what parts of our lives still need help.

*Making every effort* means getting help from others by coming together with other people working toward the same goal. We need each other to hold us accountable, to encourage us to make better decisions, and to support us when we are weak (Heb. 10:24-25). Different people need different levels of help during transformation. Whether the need is for a mentor, accountability partners, a group to process with, or a residential program, the goal is growth and transformation. We are not learning to merely cope; we are learning to live free.

**4. Grace Based** – *We believe our freedom causes us to show compassion and grace to others on their journey of transformation.*

When others fail, we are the first to help and restore. We carry others' burdens as we walk in freedom together because we understand the need for help. When someone falls back into sinful habits, we do not reject them but gently and compassionately restore them (Gal. 6:1-2). Through Jesus, we expect victory and freedom from Christ, but we anticipate the struggle in resisting temptation. We are in a spiritual battle that requires preparation, cooperation, and restoration (1 Peter 5:8-9; Eph. 6:10-13). When someone fails, we will embrace them, love them, and work with them to continue their journey to freedom.

**5. Goal Oriented** – *We believe in freedom and victory over sin and addiction.*

We look forward to the day when, with our spiritual leaders and friends, we celebrate forever freedom. "Recovery" is returning to a normal way of living through natural methods. "Freedom" is a transformed way of life through supernatural power. When recovery principles are joined with supernatural power, Forever Freedom happens.

After all, we are promised victory in scripture! We have hope in the power of Jesus (Heb. 10:23). We believe that in Christ we are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37-39). There is no attack of the enemy or temptation that cannot be defeated (1 Cor. 10:13). When we obey God, we overcome the world and freedom is ours (1 John 5:3-5)!

The freedom journey is one that must be carried out daily with fear and intentionality (Phil. 2:12,13). At the same time, we acknowledge that every person's journey is different. At some point, an individual will no longer need as much support on their freedom journey. When that happens, we will celebrate together what God has done in our lives.







# Chapter 4

## Strategizing, Planning, and Implementation

The first thing you and your church need to do is *evaluate* needs and objectives, and then *strategize* and *plan*. A successful endeavor will incorporate all these elements in sequence.

### Evaluate

**Forever Free** isn't a ministry that simply meets a need. It's a ministry where many unbelievers will be introduced to Jesus for the first time in their lives. Their eternal security hangs in the balance. In addition, some will attend whose physical, mental, or emotional well-being are uncertain. Others' safety and security are at risk. And still others will lose their lives to their addictions if radical changes don't happen. Not to mention the family and friends who are also affected by the chaos.

**Forever Free** is a ministry that not only addresses the above scenarios but also offers practical and spiritual solutions. During this critical pre-planning stage, several questions must be proposed and then answered. A "ready, shoot, aim" approach yields poor results. Details matter in any important endeavor.

A clear and concise **evaluation of objectives** will lead to a solid plan. Consider the questions below:

- What led you to start a Christ-centered recovery program?
- What addictions, compulsive behaviors, or hurts are most prevalent in your community and church or organization?
- Who is your "target" audience?
  - People who attend your church, those outside the church but within the community, or both?
  - Jails, prisons, re-entry/recovery houses?
  - Online, in-person, or both?
  - All of the above?
- Are your expectations of "success" realistic?
  - What does a successful **Forever Free** ministry look like to you?
- Does the leadership of the organization or church fully support starting this ministry?

Then, ask questions relating to **resources and limitations**:

- Do you or someone in the church or organization have recovery experience?
  - If not, who might lead this ministry?
- What resources do you have?
- What facility/facilities are available to use?
  - How many rooms will be needed?
  - If ministry is in the church, what night would there be no conflict with other ministries?
- Has a budget been established?
  - If so, what is it?
  - If not, are funds available?

Keep in mind, **Forever Free** has been purposely designed so that ANY size church or organization can start and facilitate a successful program. If you have limited resources or manpower, don't give up!

## Strategize and Plan

Once you've done a thorough evaluation of ministry goals and objectives, it's time to strategize and plan. One of the gravest mistakes made when launching a new ministry is the lack of planning. King Solomon was an incredible planner. It's not surprising he said, "Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty" (Proverbs 21:5).

Though it is tempting to rush through this stage of strategizing and planning, a "one size fits all" approach rarely works. Do not cut short this critical part of the process. By investing the time to evaluate the options and elements, you'll ensure the ministry will meet the needs of the church, community, and the individuals attending.

### *Forever Free Ministry Options*

It's time to determine the model of **Forever Free** that will best fit your needs and ministry context. We have options that will fit every context.

1. **Forever Free Live:** In-person, in-house. This is the full, in-person experience. It includes a Meal (or snacks), Gathering (live worship, live teaching/testimony), Groups (gender/issues specific share groups), and Freedom Cafe (coffee & desserts).
2. **Forever Free Online:** All attendees and ministry services are online only. Various options are available for live or video worship and teaching/testimony.
3. **Forever Free Live Ultimate (hybrid):** This model includes live Gathering and Groups as well as livestream Gathering and online Groups. This model reaches participants in every context.

To determine which model is best suited for your organization, ask the following questions:

- Do you have a facility located in a central location where attendees can meet? The facility can be a church, community center, or a home. The key is location and availability to meet every week, 52 weeks per year.
- Do you have an adequate number of volunteers/leaders available for a weekly onsite program?
- Will participants have a reasonable commute to the facility?

The answers to these questions will determine which model is best for your organization. Keep in mind, location of the facility is a key factor that will determine the likelihood and number of in-person attendees. If your facility is located an hour away from most participants, an online model would be best suited for your needs. If your facility is centrally located, but many of the potential participants are also located outside a reasonable travel distance, the **Forever Free** Ultimate (hybrid) model would be best.

## Foundational Components of Forever Free

### The Three G's: Gathering, Groups, Growth

#### *Gathering*

The Gathering is the corporate meeting for all in attendance at Forever Free. There are necessary elements during the service that can be implemented in various ways.

- **Worship:** Worship is a necessary component of Forever Free. While live worship is optimal, it isn't always possible. Live worship can include an entire worship team with guitar, bass guitar, keyboard, and vocalists, or it can be one person with a guitar and microphone. If musicians are not an option, use a CD player, YouTube worship videos, or an iPhone or iPod with wireless speakers.
- **Teaching:** Determine who will be teaching the **Forever Free** lessons. This can be one person or several people who teach on a rotation basis. If there are no communicators, have no fear! Your subscription to the **Forever Free** curriculum includes access to ALL of Pastor Layne's video teachings. All outlines with fill-ins are also included, so you can just print the outlines and play the video!
- **Testimonies:** Testimonies of life-change through Christ-centered recovery are also necessary elements of the **Forever Free** program. At least one testimony per month is recommended, although two per month are even better! Video

testimonies are also part of the **Forever Free** subscription. If there are no live testimonies available, simply show a video testimony.

- **Special Messages or Guest Speakers:** Another great option is to periodically have special messages that may or may not be focused on the Step of the month. At First NLR, we have special messages periodically that center on a specific topic. During November, we teach a message on developing a grateful mindset. At Christmas, we often feature a message on Jesus' birth as the greatest gift in history. You may consider other ideas to suit your context. For instance, during National Mental Health Month (May), you might have a mental health professional come speak about anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and other mental health issues. If you have mental health groups or wish to start one, this would be a great way to promote the new group and to introduce the need. The testimony that month could be someone who has had victory in this area of recovery. Another idea you might consider during National Recovery Month (September) is having a local Peer Recovery Support Specialist visit to speak about available resources. There are many ideas to consider. However, make sure the main focus each month is the Step. It's easy to go down the rabbit hole of focusing on new topics rather than the main topic: Christ-centered recovery.

## *Groups*

*Share Groups* are small groups which are issue and gender specific. These groups take place immediately following The Gathering. Participants are given the opportunity to share what impacted them from the teaching, as well as the struggles or victories they have had during the week. When starting **Forever Free** groups, consider the following:

- We suggest starting with four groups: Men's Chemical Dependency, Women's Chemical Dependency, Men's Codependency, and Women's Codependency. Smaller churches may start with two groups: Men's Life Issues and Women's Life Issues. Life Issues groups will have those with various compulsions or addictions in the same group. The only time a mixed-issues group such as this is advised is when the number of participants in Groups only warrants a single group rather than multiple groups. As needs change and trained leaders are raised up, additional groups will be added.
- Share Groups are facilitated by leaders with experience, strength, and hope. Group leaders will come from the start-up training. Those with recovery experience (in their area of recovery) will be chosen prior to the **Forever Free** launch date.



## *Growth*

**Twelve-Step Process Groups** are part of the Growth element of Forever Free. They are held during the week and meetings generally last 90 – 120 minutes. Men and women, separated by gender, utilize the Recovery Alive Handbook that helps them work through the Twelve Steps in order to discover core issues that have negatively affected their lives. Groups meet weekly for 5-6 months under the compassionate and encouraging guidance of a trained leader and/or co-leader.

- We advise waiting until the completion of the initial leader's Process Group before offering new Process Groups to the attendees at Forever Free. The timeframe for completion of the leader's Process Group should be approximately three months after the launch. Leaders of the new groups will come from those who completed the leader's Process Group.
- Sign-ups for new Process Groups should be offered for thirty days prior to the start of new groups. This will ensure adequate time for promotion. We advise periodically offering Process Groups to satisfy the need for deeper growth in recovery. Depending on the need and number of available leaders, starting new Process Groups on a quarterly basis is optimum.
- Keep the Process Groups small. Because the material in the Recovery Alive Handbook often evokes strong emotions and memories, it is important to keep the group numbers small and intimate. The ideal number of participants in a Process Group is 7 – 10. This will result in an atmosphere rich in vulnerability and honesty. Tears and breakthroughs happen when trust is developed between participants.

## **Discipleship Classes**

Growing in Christ is critical for long-term sobriety and freedom from addictive and compulsive behaviors. Without a deep, committed relationship with Jesus, freedom is rarely a reality. The power of the Holy Spirit is how one stays **Forever Free!**

Discipleship Classes are another unique component of **Forever Free**. We have a twofold goal at **Forever Free**: freedom from addictive and compulsive behaviors, and developing life-long followers of Jesus Christ. At First NLR, we offer easy to teach Discipleship and Connection Classes for new Christians, developed by the pastors at First NLR in North Little Rock, Arkansas.

- *First Steps* is a four-week class for new Christians which is designed to foster a deeper, more intimate relationship with Jesus. Attendees will learn more about prayer, studying the Bible, and other key elements of the Christian faith.
- *Life Recovery Central (LRC)* is a weekly Connection Class (Sunday School) at First NLR. LRC is a Christ-centered and Bible-based addiction recovery class that addresses issues individuals often struggle with and offers solutions to daily problems, compulsions, and addictions. The class combines the power of relationships with other Christ-followers and sound Biblical principles to overcome various hurts, habits, and hang-ups.

## **Forever Free Life Groups**

Most dysfunctional people lack healthy relationships in their lives. Strong mentors and accountability partners are necessary to develop healthy habits and a new lifestyle. One of the unique features of **Forever Free** are the *Life Groups*. These are gender-specific groups of six to eight participants. A senior leader spends time on a monthly basis with the men or women in the group. The focus is not on recovery principles in these groups; instead, the focus is on fellowship. Fellowship activities can include meals, movies, bowling, crafting, game nights, and the like. The purpose of these groups is to fellowship and develop friendships with healthy, like-minded people who are on the recovery journey together. Recovery is all about healthy relationships with Jesus, others, and oneself. **Forever Free** Life Groups are extremely beneficial in learning this new life skill.

## ***Forever Free Elements***

Various elements comprise the **Forever Free** experience, both in-person and online. In this section, these components will be described in detail. Though you should always incorporate some key elements, others are optional and should be included as relevant and helpful to your specific community. To give you an example of every element, we will use the model at **Forever Free** First NLR.

## **Setup**

For all in-person or hybrid models of **Forever Free**, you'll need to allow ample time for volunteers to set up. At First NLR, volunteers arrive a minimum of an hour before attendees are expected for coffee and dinner.



## **Pre-Service Fellowship/Dinner**

Relationship is at the core of **Forever Free**, and one of the most important times of the entire night is the fellowship time before the Gathering. At First NLR, we serve dinner and desserts at 5:30 p.m. The breaking of bread creates a welcoming environment. We also serve some of the best coffee in Arkansas. The reasons are simple: Connection and fellowship are critical to recovery. Healthy relationships are fostered during this time.

## **Worship**

Worship is an essential element in the **Forever Free** experience. One of the Core Values of First NLR and **Forever Free** is *We Connect with God Through Worship and Prayer*. We spend 15-20 minutes at the start of the Gathering and up to 10 minutes at the end of the Gathering to purposefully connect to Jesus, the source of the most important relationship in our lives.

## **Teaching and Testimonies**

Since there are Twelve Steps and twelve months, we focus on one step each month. **Forever Free** provides you with everything you need to teach biblically based, Christ-centered messages that focus on each of the Twelve Steps of recovery. In addition, there are special messages that can be utilized for specific holidays and events. Each message is approximately 25 minutes in length and customizable so that the person delivering the teaching can incorporate personal stories. Our ever-growing library of messages also includes outlines (fill-in handouts) so participants can engage and learn more easily.

Recovery stories are especially important for your attendees to hear each month. People are inspired and encouraged when they hear real life stories of freedom from those who have at least one year of sobriety or abstinence. These stories can be presented live from your own recovery family, or presented in video format from the powerful testimonies provided in the **Forever Free** Video Library.

## **Surrender**

One of the most important elements of the **Forever Free** Gathering (worship service) is the time set aside to invite attendees to surrender their lives to the one and only Higher Power, Jesus Christ. In addition, this time in the service gives participants the opportunity to get a **Forever Free** Surrender Chip to commemorate this monumental event. Surrender Chips are also provided for participants who have identified a new area of recovery they wish to work on.

The online community can also participate. We offer a virtual Surrender Chip (sample provided in the **Forever Free** Launch Kit) or send an actual chip to those who make a surrender decision while participating online. We want online participants to always remember they are a valuable part of the **Forever Free** community.

## **Groups**

Share Groups immediately follow the Gathering. This gives group attendees the opportunity to share how the teaching or testimony impacted them. Groups are the venue where personal growth through the steps of recovery occurs on a weekly basis. Healthy coping mechanisms are introduced and fostered in Groups. Online and in-person Groups follow the same format and facilitation and are 45 minutes in length.

Groups are issue and gender-specific, which means participants attend a group that best fits their recovery needs with people of the same sex. This creates an environment which is both safe and transformative. Online Groups are typically only gender specific. However, if the need arises to also incorporate issue specific groups, feel free to do so. For example, if there are ten men online who identify as struggling with drugs or alcohol, a men's chemical dependency group is advisable.

## **Newcomer Reception**

The Newcomer Reception is a great way to acclimate new attendees to **Forever Free**. Leaders from the Groups invite and then guide first-time guests to the reception area after Groups have concluded. The reception should be hosted by the Recovery Pastor and or Ministry Leader, as well as two or three friendly volunteers. The goal is to connect with Newcomers and answer any questions they might have. We recommend having Newcomer Information Forms so a welcome card can then be mailed out to all new attendees. This provides another level of care and concern for new attendees of **Forever Free**.

For those offering **Forever Free** online, we also recommend an online Newcomer Reception. An experienced online host will provide the same level of care as those in person, including sending a welcome card via text or by mail.

## **Freedom Café**

At the end of the night, it's important to provide 20-25 minutes for connection and fellowship. Often, this is where accountability partners and recovery mentors connect. Creating a space and environment for networking is part of the **Forever Free** experience. Desserts and coffee are recommended.

## Finishing Crew

Be great stewards of the facilities by assembling a finishing team that puts things back in their proper places and leaves everything sparkling clean.

## Process Groups

Process Groups are small group sessions offered throughout the week on days/evenings other than your weekly **Forever Free** primary meeting night. Process Groups function as a vehicle for participants to work intentionally and intensely through the Twelve Steps. Getting participants into Process Groups should be a goal of your **Forever Free** ministry. It is vital to emphasize the importance of Process Groups during the weekly Gathering and Groups and to allow attendees to sign up to participate. All Process Groups, in-person and online, utilize the Recover Alive Handbook.<sup>8</sup>

## Freedom From the Inside

*Freedom From the Inside* is the prison and jail ministry of **Forever Free**. There is a significant need for recovery programs in prisons and jails. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 85% of the prison population has an active substance use disorder or were incarcerated for a crime involving drugs or drug use.<sup>9</sup> This is a startling statistic that must be addressed. Local jails and prisons are very short on volunteer organizations willing to come and provide services at their facilities. In addition, the opioid epidemic has had a significant impact on residences of the jails and prisons. Inmates with opioid use disorder are at a higher risk for overdose following release from incarceration.

The **Forever Free** services you provide within the correctional system will depend on the limitations set by individual facilities. As a result, it is important to find out what services can be provided. You might consider the following options:

- Full **Forever Free** Experience – Some facilities will allow an entire team into the facility. The service would include worship and a teaching or testimony. Then, after the Gathering, Groups can be facilitated. In some instances, the facility may allow desserts to be served.

---

<sup>8</sup> Recovery Alive.

<sup>9</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse

<https://nida.nih.gov/sites/default/files/drugfacts-criminal-justice.pdf>



- **Forever Free** Groups – If the full worship experience is not an option, Groups are typically allowed. It is always best to have male facilitators work with men, and women work with women. Groups are conducted in the same way they are in a regular **Forever Free** meeting.
- Process Groups – Process Groups are extremely effective in the correctional system setting. In the county jails, a full 12-month Step Study is almost never an option because inmates are not incarcerated for that length of time. Since Process Groups only take 15 – 20 weeks (depending on the size of the group), they are an excellent option.

Another part of the *Freedom From the Inside* program is providing resources for those who are being released. One of the biggest contributors to high recidivism rates is the lack of connections inmates have on the outside. At **Forever Free**, the goal is to provide lists of local resources including housing for felons, food banks, medical clinics, churches, recovery meetings, and transportation, just to name a few. At our flagship facility, First NLR, we provide transportation to **Forever Free** and church services for several re-entry and recovery homes. We are seeing incredible changes in the men and women's lives who attend on a consistent basis. The goal of **Forever Free** is to provide a safe, welcoming environment for all attendees.







# Chapter 5

## Preparing to Launch

To ensure your **Forever Free** launch is successful, step-by-step instructions are provided on how to effectively start and lead a thriving Christ-centered recovery program. Included are easy to follow instructions on every aspect of the program. Following the 150-day start-up plan will ensure you cover every detail in order to have a smooth launch of the program. It includes the meeting format, materials lists, and instructions on how to use and implement every aspect of the ministry.

This simple and effective start-up plan is designed to help you organize and launch **Forever Free** in your facility or church. By following this plan, you are less likely to miss details that are critical to successfully launching and implementing the program. In approximately five months, you will be ministering to the hurting and addicted within your church and community.

### *Phase One: Communicate and Invite*

Weeks 1 & 2: One of the most effective ways to communicate a new program is by doing a church-wide event such as a Movie Night showing the movie *Home Run* on a Friday or Saturday night. *Home Run* is a compelling movie about a professional baseball player who is introduced to a Christ-centered recovery program and experiences a transformed life. Make sure you have plenty of free food or snacks. Promote the event for two weeks via Facebook, Twitter, in the church bulletin, announcements in all services, and on the church website. Create some excitement and chatter about the event to get a good crowd.

Week 3: Show *Home Run* – After the showing, the Ministry Leader(s) announces an informational meeting about the plan to launch **Forever Free** and begin to recruit support. It's important to inform movie attendees that all are welcome to attend the informational meeting, but we especially need those who have experience with traditional and/or Christ-centered recovery to attend. The date of the informational meeting is given (week six, after church service).

Weeks 4 & 5: Promote the new ministry, **Forever Free**, to the church for the next two weeks via social media, in the church bulletin, announcements in all services, and on the church website. Continue to create some excitement and chatter in the church about this incredible life changing ministry!

Week 6 (optional): A great way to introduce the ministry of **Forever Free** to the entire church congregation is by preaching a special message (included in subscription) entitled, *Is **Forever Free** for Me?* This message was written to explain who **Forever Free** is for and why one should attend. Having a pastor of the church deliver this message gives a strong impression to the congregation of pastoral support for the ministry.

Week 7: Informational Meeting: Inform attendees about the **Forever Free** program by outlining a brief history and the benefits of having a Christ-centered program at the church. Play the introductory video with Pastor Layne (provided in the start-up kit), lay out the vision and plan, explain ministry opportunities, and answer questions. Announce the official start date.

- Some attendees will be potential leaders; others may want to come alongside the ministry as volunteers in other areas such as the Worship Team, Technical/Sound Team, Greeters, Food Team, etc.
- Set up tables for volunteers and potential leaders to sign up for ministry opportunities. Ministry Leader(s) should be available to answer questions and assist in the process.

### *Phase Two: Train, Plan, and Prepare*

Meet on a weekly basis with the initial volunteer/leadership team to provide training. This ensures that, even though some may have Twelve-Step experience, all in attendance learn various aspects of **Forever Free** so they may lead others with integrity.

The next 90 days are spent training both the volunteers and the leaders.

The Worship Team and Technical/Sound Team are assembled, and rehearsals take place on a weekly basis. The Food Team (if you are serving a meal), Greeters, and all other non-leader volunteers are also assembled during this period.

Weekly Planning/Leadership Training (60 minutes) is conducted, and all aspects of the **Forever Free** program are taught. Examples:

- Facilitating the Gathering (worship, teaching/testimony)
- Share Group Format
- Share Group Guidelines
- Twelve-Step Process Group
- Newcomer's Reception

## Weekly Meeting Format (2 hours)

- Planning (15-30 minutes): Childcare, Worship, Teaching/Testimony, Share Groups, Coffee/Dessert, etc.
- Training (30-45 minutes)
- Twelve-Step Process Group (1 hour): Break up into Men's and Women's Process Groups

## Planning is the Key

One of the keys to launching a thriving **Forever Free** program is planning. There are numerous elements and options to consider, depending on the needs of the church/community and the resources available. However, some foundational elements are critical: The Gathering, Share Groups, and Process Groups. The Gathering and the Share Groups are part of the **Forever Free** primary meeting night. Process Groups do not meet on the same night as the primary meeting, but instead meet on separate nights. Below are some things to consider for each of the groups.

## Things to Consider

- Night of the week to meet: Any night of the week is a good night to have **Forever Free**; however, some nights will attract families more than others. A full **Forever Free** ministry night is three hours in length. At First NLR, the meal is served at 5:30pm and Share Groups end at 8:30pm. For families with children who are in school, getting home at 9:00 p.m. on a school night isn't optimum. This is one of the reasons why Friday or Saturday nights are the most favored night for this ministry. Another reason Fridays or Saturdays work so well is those with addictive or compulsive behaviors tend to act out on the weekends. By providing a safe, healthy alternative, they are less likely to have weekends filled with bad decisions.

However, not all churches or organizations can facilitate a meeting on the weekends due to conflicting events such as weddings and other church services. In these cases, another night of the week will work. At First NLR, we have facilitated **Forever Free** on Thursday and Tuesday nights. In such cases, it is quite important to serve a meal so that families have one less reason to not attend. Offering a meal makes **Forever Free** convenient, even on weeknights.

- Budget: Launching a successful recovery ministry does require resources; however, it doesn't have to break the bank. When looking at a budget, consider issues like these:
  - Is this a volunteer-based ministry or will there be paid workers?



- o Will a weekly meal be served? If so, can many of the staples be donated by local grocery stores/bakeries, or will everything need to be purchased?
- o Will there be paid childcare staff or volunteer staff?
- o What is the cost for all start-up materials and supplies for a thriving **Forever Free** ministry?
  - What is the anticipated ongoing monthly cost for supplies?
    - Monthly supplies such as sobriety tokens, coffee, advertising via Social Media, etc.

\* See Appendix for sample annual budget.

- Food/Snacks/Desserts & Beverages: Fellowship is an important aspect of a thriving **Forever Free** program. Food, snacks, or desserts before the Gathering bring people together.
  - o The optimal scenario is to offer a meal. A simple meal at a reasonable cost will improve attendance, especially for those with children. Think about it: If individuals or families go home and prepare a meal, the likelihood of them having the desire to get back out and then go across town to **Forever Free** is diminished. Everyone is settled in, and then excuses start to mount as to why they should stay home. Providing an affordable meal is attractive to families with children, couples, and singles alike. Furthermore, the “breaking of bread” is a time of fellowship. The early church understood this well: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).
  - o If a full meal is not an option because of budget or manpower, snacks or desserts work well before the Gathering and after the Share Groups. Beverages such as water, iced tea, and coffee are also great staples at recovery gatherings.
  - o Another option is to have snacks every week except Freedom Night. For that night, serve an affordable meal. Make that evening a celebration by including a time of eating together. Freedom Night is a very special monthly celebration, and a meal will make it even more special!
  - o Keep in mind, food and beverages are optional but are suggested.<sup>10</sup>
- Child Care – Providing childcare encourages families with children to attend. Determine ages that will be served, and the number of volunteers or paid workers required. Remember to always follow church guidelines including

---

<sup>10</sup> If there are budgetary concerns, contact local bakeries or grocery stores to inquire about donating day-old desserts.

background checks when offering childcare. This will ensure the safety and care of the children who attend.

- o Although childcare is not a requirement, it is highly recommended. Oftentimes, families with children will not (or cannot) attend if childcare is not available.
- Greeters – It is very important to have smiling greeters at all entry points in order to make a positive first impression for all newcomers. Greeters can bring a smile to those who may have struggled to get to the meeting in the first place.
- Ushers – Ushers help facilitate the service in several ways. They can direct and seat newcomers, and they take the offering. In addition, if there is a handout at the end of the Gathering, they can assist in this capacity as well.
- **Forever Free** Bulletin – Every week a bulletin is handed out to participants. It contains the following:
  - o Share Group room numbers
  - o Twelve Steps and corresponding Bible verses
  - o Church or **Forever Free** announcements
  - o Special event inserts
  - o Teaching outline
  - o Information on additional recovery meetings









# Chapter 6

## Facilitation of the Primary Meeting Night

For the last five months, your team has been planning, training, and getting ready to start one of the most effective and consequential ministries you may have ever launched. You are now ready to launch **Forever Free** in your community!

In this section, step-by-step instructions are provided to facilitate pre-service fellowship, the main service (*Gathering*), the *Groups*, the *Newcomer's Reception*, and *Freedom Cafe*. Copious details of format and facilitation will ensure the successful implementation of every aspect and element of **Forever Free** Night.

### Pre-Service Meal Ideas

Serving a simple meal is optimal. Because of food costs, we recommend charging a small fee for the meal. Some churches choose to offer a free meal. Families with children and those who are just getting off work will appreciate the convenience of dinner before the service starts. The key here is simplicity and budget friendly meals. There is no need to get extravagant. Here are some ideas:

- Spaghetti  
Sides: Dinner roll, salad
- Hamburgers  
Sides: Chips, potato salad, baked beans
- Hot Dogs/Chili Dogs  
Sides: Chips or French Fries, macaroni salad
- Fried or Baked Chicken  
Sides: Mashed potatoes, steamed vegetables, dinner roll
- Meatloaf  
Sides: Mac n Cheese, Green Beans
- Pulled Pork Sandwich  
Sides: Chips, baked beans
- Tacos  
Sides: Refried beans, rice, chips & salsa

If the budget won't allow for a full meal every week, consider having a meal once per month. Another option is to only offer donuts, desserts, or snacks. As mentioned earlier, some grocery stores, bakeries, and donut shops will give their day-old treats as a donation.

## *The Gathering*

After pre-service fellowship, it is time to come together as a group for worship and teaching. Men and women attend together during this service. Because **Forever Free** is a Christ-centered program, all teaching is rooted and grounded in scripture. Gathering in corporate worship sets the tone for the night and puts attendees in the right frame of mind to hear the teaching or testimony. There may be people in attendance who have never attended a church service or heard the gospel preached. **Forever Free** serves as a bridge to those who are unchurched and those who have strayed from their faith. It is critical to provide a welcoming and warm atmosphere that gives attendees an opportunity to experience the power and the presence of Jesus Christ.

## **Forever Free Curriculum and Teaching/Testimony Schedule**

### *Sample Schedule (January)*

| Week | Step | Teaching/Testimony                                   |
|------|------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | 1    | Lesson: Blinders                                     |
| 2    | 1    | Testimony: John R.                                   |
| 3    | 1    | Lesson: Stuck                                        |
| 4    | 1    | Freedom Night – Sobriety celebration, baptisms, etc. |

Whatever month you start the program, you start with the Step 1 lessons. The first month is Step 1, month two is Step 2, and so on.

## **Gathering Meeting Format**

- 6:15 p.m. Doors open and greeters in place
- 6:30 p.m. Worship
- 6:45 p.m. Prayer and welcome
- 6:48 p.m. Announcements and offering
- 6:55 p.m. Lesson or Testimony
- 7:20 p.m. Worship/Surrender/Prayer
- 7:35 p.m. Serenity prayer & dismissal to Share Groups

## **Worship**

Worship is a critical element of the **Forever Free** experience. Pick songs that are upbeat and congregational in nature. In other words, they should be easy to sing and remember. Catchy, simple Christian songs are far more effective than slow, introspective worship songs. Far too often, slow methodical song sets are played, and the entire evening feels slow and somber. Slow songs work best as offertories or in the middle of a message. New songs can be introduced in offertories as well. There is a time and setting for everything. It's important to keep attendees engaged in order that they will be ready to receive what God has in store for them.

## **Prayer**

Prayer is direct communication with our Creator. At **Forever Free**, prayer is a focal point of every service and group. The opening prayer invites the presence of God, and the Serenity Prayer reminds participants of their need for peace and serenity that can only be found through Him.

It is also important to offer prayer in key moments of the message, during times of worship, or after an altar call. Prayer is a key component of the **Forever Free** recovery experience.

## **Announcements**

One of the most important announcements that must be made every week is to welcome newcomers. People who are new feel uneasy and unsure of their surroundings. A friendly welcome helps ease the anxiety of the new experience at **Forever Free**. In addition, invite Newcomers to the Newcomer Reception after groups. Upcoming events and an invitation to church should also be a part of the announcements.

## **Offering**

We encourage every **Forever Free** group to endeavor to be self-supporting. An offering is taken to offset childcare costs, pay for weekly expenses such as coffee, food, or snacks, sobriety tokens, and any other expenses. Costs are part of every ministry, and they can be offset or completely covered by taking a weekly offering.

## **Teaching, Testimony, & Freedom Night**

The heart of the Gathering is the 25 minutes set aside for teaching, a live testimony, and celebration. There are typically two weeks of teaching per month, one testimony, and a night of celebration called Freedom Night.



## **Worship & Surrender**

Inviting participants to the altar to surrender a hurt, addiction, or compulsive behavior is the *key element* of the weekly corporate gathering. **Forever Free** Surrender tokens (chips) are given at the altar. Simply place them across the stage or have prayer partners handing them out to those who come forward. This is also the perfect time to offer the greatest gift attendees at **Forever Free** can ever receive: Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. At our flagship location, First NLR, we allow room for the Holy Spirit to move in and through this time of prayer, worship, and reflection. Don't feel the need to hurry through this time. If people are being touched by God, linger in the presence of the Lord. This is the reason the service time is 60 - 70 minutes in length; to allow the Spirit of God to move in the hearts of those at the altar. The time spent in worship and surrender is the most impactful time of the Gathering!

## ***Share Groups***

After the Gathering large group concludes, participants make their way to Share Groups. It is important to give attendees a few minutes to visit the restroom and find their groups. Some attendees may want to leave and only attend the Gathering. While we never want to "guilt" them into staying for Share Groups, a gentle reminder of the importance of connecting with other attendees will often encourage them to attend. Share Groups are where relationships are developed, recovery mentors are found, and hurts as well as victories are shared.

## **Share Group Format**

- |             |                                                   |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| ● 7:45 p.m. | Opening Prayer and welcome                        |
| ● 7:47 p.m. | Introductions                                     |
| ● 7:50 p.m. | Group expectations                                |
| ● 7:53 p.m. | Leader's focus question from lesson               |
| ● 7:58 p.m. | Group sharing begins                              |
| ● 8:28 p.m. | Wrap-up and closing prayer                        |
| ● 8:30 p.m. | Invitation to Newcomer Reception and Freedom Café |

## **Opening Prayer & Welcome**

Prayer is an invitation for the Lord's presence and healing power and sets the tone for the group. A warm welcome also helps to ease the tension for the newcomer.

## **Group Expectations**

These Group Expectations facilitate the development of trust in the group and enable us to share our thoughts and feelings with each other.

If you choose to attend and participate in our Groups, you are choosing to keep these Group Expectations. If you do not honor these Group Expectations, you are choosing to suspend or end your attendance in our Groups.

1. You have an **expectation of our time**, and we **expect you to be in place when we start**. We will start and end on time. In addition, during sharing, each participant is permitted to share 3 – 5 minutes.
  2. You have an **expectation to privacy and confidentiality**, and we **expect you to keep other's information private**. Please do not share other people's stories. Remember, who you see and what you hear, stays here.
  3. You have an **expectation to be heard** and we **expect you to listen to others**. When sharing, focus on yourself. Do not deflect or blame. Instead, use statements that are "I" centered.
  4. You have an **expectation of respect**, and we **expect you to give respect to others**. Don't interrupt. When someone is sharing, they have the floor. Please use respectful language and avoid profanity or crude language. We are a Christ-centered group.
- Leader then states the following: "Do we all agree to follow these expectations?"  
Group says in unison: "We do!"

### **Leader's Focus Question**

There is always a Leader's Focus Question presented in the Gathering that focuses on the teaching topic. The leader of the share group introduces the topic and then shares his or her thoughts on the topic. It is important for the leader to share with honesty and vulnerability. This creates a safe, healing atmosphere. \*Note: If a participant chooses to share on something other than the focus question, please allow it. Groups are all about healing, not legalism!

### **Wrap-up & Closing Prayer**

Thank everyone for attending group and sharing with openness and honesty, then pray. \*Note: Do not allow groups to go over the allotted time. Childcare workers and volunteers must be honored by groups ending promptly.

### **Invitation to Newcomer's Reception & Freedom Café**

Remind all participants to pick up their children from childcare and then ask newcomers to visit the Newcomer's Reception. Invite everyone to go have a dessert or snack from

the Freedom Café. Remember, fellowship leads to relationship, and relationship leads to accountability! Healthy relationships are the key to a healthy recovery.

### *Newcomer Reception*

After groups, it's important to get new attendees acclimated to the program. One of the most effective ways to do this is the Newcomer Reception. This short gathering is not intended to last any longer than 15-20 minutes. Most new people will only stay long enough to fill out the information form and visit for a couple minutes. The goal is to connect with people who are new to **Forever Free** and answer any questions they might have. It is advised to offer a small gift such as a giftbag filled with candy, an information card about **Forever Free**, and a keychain, stress ball, or coffee mug.

Here is a simple format to follow:

- Have greeters at the door to welcome and seat each person.
- At the table, have newcomers fill out a simple follow-up form (See appendix).
- Make sure there are enough volunteers to sit with new people. This creates an inviting environment.
- Ministry leader(s) should make sure they visit every new person, welcoming them and asking if they have any questions.
- When they leave, give them the giftbag.
- Make sure you send a card thanking them for attending **Forever Free**. This increases the likelihood of their returning!

### *Freedom Café*

Freedom Café is where participants from Share Groups can connect. Often, accountability partners and mentors are connected during this important time of fellowship. Relationships with healthy people in recovery are invaluable so that participants can replace other, unhealthy relationships with healthy ones. Because people spend time with like-minded people, it is imperative to create a relational environment at Freedom Café where these new, healthy relationships can be developed. Alone we can fall, but together, we can find freedom!

- Serve coffee, and dessert. Nothing fosters connection better than coffee and something sweet!
- Make sure you create a welcoming environment by having enough tables and seating for people to connect with one another.
- Allow 30 minutes or less for attendees to connect.



**12**

**STEPS**



# Twelve Steps of Forever Free

1. We admit we are powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors, that our lives have become unmanageable.

*Romans 7:18 And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't (NLT).*

2. We come to believe that a power greater than ourselves can and will restore us to sanity.

*1 Peter 5:10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you (ESV).*

3. We make the decision to turn our lives and our wills over to the only Higher Power, Jesus Christ.

*Romans 10:9 If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (NLT).*

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

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

5. We confess our sins and shortcomings to God, to ourselves, and another human being as an act of repentance.

*James 5:16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed (NLT).*

6. We are entirely ready to have God remove our defects of character.

*Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me (ESV).*

7. We humbly ask God to remove our character defects.

*1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (ESV).*



8. We make a list of every person we have harmed and those who have harmed us and become willing to make amends and forgive them all.

*Romans 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all (ESV).*

9. We make direct amends and offer forgiveness to such people whenever possible, except when to do so will cause harm to them or others.

*Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God (ESV).*

10. We continue to take personal inventory. When we are wrong, we promptly admit it and make amends.

*1 Timothy 1:19 Cling to your faith in Christ and keep your conscience clear (NLT).*

11. We seek through prayer and meditation to develop an abiding relationship with Jesus, praying only for His will for us, and the power to carry that out.

*John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (ESV).*

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

*Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you (NLT).*