



*The Recovery-Minded Church:  
Loving and Ministering to People  
with Addiction*

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**Jonathan Benz** (MS, Palm Beach Atlantic University) is a clinician, public speaker, ordained minister and certified addictions professional who serves as the program director of the Three Strands Christian addiction treatment program at The Recovery Place in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. As a leadership consultant to various agencies in the US and UK, he specializes in teaching team leadership, task efficiency, crisis management and conflict resolution to people in the midst of life transitions.

## The Distant Country of Addiction

Few things better encapsulate the parable of the prodigal son and the general condition of human lostness to which it speaks than the blight of addiction today. In his book *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Catholic author Henri Nouwen writes:

“‘Addiction’ might be the best word to explain the lostness that so deeply permeates society. Our addictions make us cling to what the world proclaims as the keys to self-fulfillment: accumulation of wealth and power; attainment of status and admiration; lavish consumption of food and drink, and sexual gratification without distinguishing between lust and love. These addictions create expectations that can’t but fail to satisfy our deepest needs. As long as we live within the world’s delusions, our addictions condemn us to futile quests in ‘the distant country,’ leaving us to face an endless series of disillusionments while our sense of self remains unfulfilled. In these days of increasing addictions, we have wandered far away from our Father’s home. The addicted life can aptly be designated a life lived in ‘a distant country.’ It is from there that our cry for deliverance rises up.”

If addiction is that distant country in which many addicts find themselves, then what might “home” be? What if home was *your* church—or if addicts showed up on Sunday morning thinking it was? Would you be ready to receive addicts in your pews? Are you equipped for the task of loving addicts into recovery and throughout that journey? Do you have the necessary tools to help your congregation become a prodigal community that, like the God it worships, will be extravagant in loving children God seeks to restore?

Addiction recovery is more than a referral to the closest AA group. It is a one-of-a-kind opportunity for a whole community of wayward children to be transformed by the grace of a wildly-in-love-with-you God.

I have designed this book as a toolkit to help you encourage, plan for and celebrate the homecomings of recovering addicts, which in this country means finding ways to be in relational outreach to an estimated 30 percent of the population who struggle with some form of addiction. Here is how this staggering estimate was calculated:

- At least 6 percent of Americans struggle with some form of sexual addiction.
- Approximately 10 percent have drug or alcohol addictions.
- Around 7.5 percent exhibit some form of an eating disorder.
- Some 6 percent are compulsive shoppers.
- At least 1 percent are pathological gamblers.

Add these numbers together, and you’re in the whereabouts of 30 percent. The estimate is conservative, because many of those struggling with addiction will never report their struggles out of fear or shame, or they will become casualties of their addiction before they can get the help they need.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO SCHEDULE AN INTERVIEW CONTACT:

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# BOOK EXCERPT

**Kristina Robb-Dover** (M.Div., Princeton Theological Seminary) is a writer and minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and has served in various church and chaplaincy settings. She is the author of *Grace Sticks: The Bumper Sticker Gospel for Restless Souls*. As a featured columnist with the online magazine *Beliefnet*, Robb-Dover posts regularly at her blog "Fellowship of Saints and Sinners," and her work has appeared in various publications, including *Touchstone*, *The Christian Century*, *Theology Today* and the *Washington Post*. She resides in Atlanta, Georgia.

Social scientist, therapist and founder of *The Daring Way*, Brené Brown, whose TED talks on shame and the power of vulnerability have reached millions of online viewers, describes our plight this way: "We are the most in-debt, obese, addicted and medicated adult cohort in US history."

So the distant country of addiction is vast and maybe not so distant as your church may be inclined to think: it may be as close as your own nose.

— Taken from the Introduction



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*"This is a resource every church  
needs because no church is  
exempt from responsibility  
toward people with addiction.  
This very practical book will help  
churches take their rightful places  
as centers for support,  
unconditional love and  
redemption."*

— Amy Simpson, author of  
*Troubled Minds*

## How the Church Can, and Should, Respond to People with Addiction

### Why do churches need more resources and a different mindset for people with addiction?

**Jonathan Benz:** As a Christian addiction specialist, I've witnessed firsthand what the church and recovering addicts can learn from one another about what it means to be *Christian*; yet, as my survey of one hundred church leaders confirmed, there remains a strong need among church leaders for more tools for loving, understanding and ministering to people with addiction. For example, one-third of Americans struggle with some form of addiction, and one in five will die from addiction and risky substance abuse; but beyond a referral or hosting an AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] group, many church leaders and their congregations don't have the tools to reach those who are struggling. This book meets the need for a theological, clinical and pastoral response that equips church leaders to love and minister to people with addiction, and I make the case that the church needs the DNA of addiction recovery as much as people with addiction do.

### Describe how *The Recovery-Minded Church* helps congregations and leaders.

**Benz:** *The Recovery-Minded Church* has answers to congregations' biggest questions about addiction and recovery, with engaging real-life stories, the latest insights from medical science and a biblical framework for loving addicts into recovery. What makes this book distinctive is that it begins with the questions congregations are asking and then answers them from the perspective of a Christian addiction recovery clinician.

### What do you want leaders to realize as they read *The Recovery-Minded Church*?

**Benz:** I want readers to understand that:

- Addiction is an epidemic in American society to which the church can and must respond.
- The church and people with addiction have much to teach one another about the sanctifying grace of God.
- Recovery-minded churches are defined by the quality of their relationships with people with addiction, rather than their programs.
- There are some very accessible ways in which church leaders can become recovery-minded communities.