



RECOVERING FROM
**RELIGIOUS
ABUSE**

Sample Chapters

Day 1 / Introductory Week

Week 1 / Sunday

11 STEPS TO SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

JACK WATTS
Foreword by ROBERT S. MCGEE

YOU HAVE TO WANT IT

In the United States, there are recovery groups for alcoholics, drug addicts, sex addicts, overeaters, overspenders, and numerous other subgroups with unique recovery needs. All are needed, but there is another group which also requires help: those who have been abused by organized religion—primarily by religious leaders in positions of trust.

With these abused people in mind, *Recovering from Religious Abuse* has been developed. Helping people like you to recover is my purpose—my only purpose.

Each of the following ninety-one readings, which lead you through the “11 Steps to Spiritual Freedom,” have been developed to help those who have suffered—or continue to suffer—from religious exploitation. There are millions of you—people who have been used, abused, and discarded—dismissed contemptuously by those you trusted completely, suffering shame and low self-esteem in the process.

Most of you are bitter and resentful. You may even be hostile. If you are, that’s okay. We accept you right where you are—without reservation or condemnation. Having been wronged in the past, you may have discarded your belief in God, or perhaps you’ve put Him on the back burner.

It's easy to understand how this could happen, but it's also self-defeating behavior. God is a part of the solution, not a part of the problem. It's like saying, "I'll get even with You; I'll hurt me." Obviously, this isn't a good idea, but it's what millions have done.

☞ If it's what you've been doing, you don't have to continue. You can make a change. There's a way out that works, and *Recovering from Religious Abuse* can help you find your way back to wholeness—back to emotional and spiritual wellness. That's why we're here. We want to help you recover. We want to help you become the best person you can possibly be. We want to show you how to free yourself from bitterness, resentment, shame, and other debilitating emotions, all of which lead to an unfulfilled life.

If you're angry with God, it's not surprising. Most abused people are—whether they are willing to admit it or not. It's not unexpected; it's predictable. But remember, Christ also was abused by religious leaders—just like you have been. He was accused falsely; then He was slandered, beaten, and murdered. Obviously, He understands how you feel—precisely how you feel. When you think about it, He never had much use for self-righteous religious leaders either, did He?

Just because you've been wronged, however, doesn't mean it's acceptable to sit on the sidelines and wallow in self-pity, nurturing a self-indulgent belief that life has mistreated you. That's not taking good care of yourself. A life of resentment or smoldering, camouflaged bitterness is a wasted existence. We're here to help you change that—if it's something you want. Your willingness to change is the key. No one else can have that desire for you. Not even God can do that. You have to make the effort to help yourself. You have to want it.

If you will make even the slightest attempt to open your heart—to be willing to change—recovery can begin. If you start moving toward God, you will find Him to be everything you ever

dreamed Him to be. After all, it's God who heals broken hearts. He can heal yours. Will you make the effort?

Day 2 / Introductory Week

Week 1 / Monday

STILL LIVING IN DENIAL?

Read: If you've made the decision to compartmentalize Christianity—to keep God at arm's length—you have essentially thrown out the baby with the bath, neutralizing God's power in

your life. When you discarded Christianity, or at least most of it, you probably were surprised that so few negative consequences followed—at least not at first. You walked away, and God just allowed you to leave. He didn't chase after you—even though it broke His heart to see you go.

God never chases after anyone and always honors an individual's decision to stay or wander away. “Free will” is not a doctrine; it's reality—your reality. When you chose to shelve Christianity, perhaps throwing stones as you abandoned it, God honored your right to do so. There's something noble about that. God respected your decision and treated you like an adult— even when your behavior may have been foolish and childish.

Leaving was not the end of the story, however. It was probably just the beginning. You may think you're done with God, but He's not done with you—not by a long shot. Because His spirit lives in you, He has a huge stake in your future—in who you become. For a while, you probably enjoyed being finished with Christianity, but life has a way of coming full circle. Like the prodigal son, pursuing materialism and vice is not as rewarding as you thought it would be, is it?

 Has God orchestrated your circumstances to make your life less than meaningful, or is it worse than that? Are you miserable or just

bored? Are you tired of suffering the consequences of poor behavior—of being half dead while still being alive?

Do you own enough of your soul to admit the reality of your situation, or do you still live in a state of denial, telling yourself you're okay—you're fine the way you are? Are you finished running, or do you need to wander for a while longer?

When you come to the end of yourself—when you've bottomed out—there's no place to go but home, home to your heavenly Father. At the end of your anger and your rebelliousness,

there is nothing but sorrow and pain—a life unfulfilled and wasted. You're not where you belong, and you know it.

Come home—not to meaningless religion or more abusiveness—but to a deep, fulfilling relationship with God Himself. He's waiting; it's time.

And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20 NASB).

Pray: Father, I'm tired of feeling empty. Please lead me back to You. I want to come home, but I'm not sure how to get there. It's time; help me come back to where I belong.

Write: Spend time today considering what it would mean for you to "come home." Take time to journal about this concept.

Reflect

But when he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!

I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'"

So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

And the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”

But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.” And they began to celebrate.

—Luke 15:17–24 NASB

Day 3 / Introductory Week

Week 1 / Tuesday

YOU'VE HAD DARK TIMES

Read: Each of the readings in this book is authentic—without sugar coating. That’s a promise. Because we’ve heard so many “war stories,” the material is based on what’s real—not what’s imagined. Regardless of your particular situation, others have similar experiences and have recovered to lead fruitful lives—lives of value.

God loves you just the way you are—despite your circumstances, despite your state of mind. He doesn’t see you as others see you or as you see yourself. His insight into you is penetrating and accurate. He knows you’ve experienced dark times and have made self-defeating choices, but He loves you exactly the way you are—even though you may not love yourself. You can count on it. It’s true, and it’s not going to change.

Your life still has incredible value. If you choose to experience God’s accepting, forgiving touch once again, you’ll want to take your

rightful place as a “favored” child—a child with promise. Having been derailed will no longer thwart your future, a future which can be full of hope and promise. Like Israel after the Holocaust, you will learn to say with confidence, “never again” to spiritual abuse.

That’s our goal for you: to help you heal and become the mature man or woman God destined you to be—emotionally sound and resilient. Your entire outlook on life will change, as will your attitude. Steadfast confidence will replace despair and the defeated life you’ve been living for so long.

☞ Aren’t you tired of being cynical and pessimistic? It’s so fatiguing. Besides, God doesn’t need more cynics; He already has more than He can use.

Isn’t it time to make some changes? Wouldn’t it be nice to be filled with love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness once again? But this time, you could add wisdom to the list. Your life can be one of calm, strong sanity. This is not a “name it, claim it” approach to life. Recovery requires real work, real faith, real commitment, and time. If you work for it, however, you will be amazed by the progress you make, and so will others. That’s the promise recovery brings—a new life, a better life.

And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6 NLT).

Pray: God, lead me as I pursue this path of recovery. Strengthen me as I begin this journey. Write: Prepare yourself for the days ahead. Start journaling about this new beginning. Ask God for help—moment by moment—and surround yourself with people who will be supportive and encouraging in this process. Talk to one or two friends who will be supportive, and tell them you are beginning Recovering from Religious Abuse.

Reflect

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Romans 8:38–39 NASB

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Why I Wrote

There is Nothing Like Recovering from Religious Abuse

I wrote *Recovering from Religious Abuse* because, until now, there has been nothing that addresses the problem, while also offering a solution for those victimized by it. Using an 11-step program, wounded Christians—those who have been used, abused, and discarded by self-righteous religious leaders—can reconnect with God in a healing, transforming way.

After being victimized, most wounded people lead half-lives, consumed with anger, bitterness, shame, and pain. They question whether the best years of their lives have already passed, hoping they haven't but suspecting that they have. They are prone to depression and acting-out behavior, which includes over eating, over spending, alcoholism, drug addiction, pornography, promiscuity, and family dysfunction.

Recovering from Religious Abuse explains how the dynamics of religious abuse works but, more importantly, it details a method for the abused person to identify what has happened, while providing a way to achieve full recovery. The key is for the abused person to recognize that God still loves them just as much as ever and that they can once again experience love, joy, peace, patience, and serenity—not just occasionally but routinely.

If this has been your experience and you want to reconnect with God in a positive, meaningful way, you can. In a very short time—just ninety-one days—you can become stronger than you ever imagined possible, divesting yourself of the crippling chains that have imprisoned you since your abusive experience.

—*Jack Watts*

Synopsis

Recovering from Religious Abuse

11 STEPS TO SPIRITUAL FREEDOM FOR THE RELIGIOUSLY WOUNDED

Quite often we find that a religious abuse scandal has been splashed across the headlines. From the torment Elizabeth Smart endured during her capture by religious zealot Brian David Mitchell, to the allegations about Atlanta Bishop Eddie Long, it is no secret that religious abuse exists in the United States. However, there are many people who still internalize their abuse because it is a subject that religious leaders have historically refused to acknowledge. But even if the situation hasn't made headlines, it doesn't make it any less real or significant.

As Jack Watts proclaims in his new book, *Recovering from Religious Abuse* (Howard Books, February 2011), "Even if you consider your abuse to be minor, it still needs to be addressed."

After being the victim of religious abuse himself and recognizing that millions of people have been wounded by religion, Watts has created a much needed recovery program in *Recovering from Religious Abuse*. Addressing those hurt by others in the church—psychologically, financially, or emotionally—Watts offers help for coming to terms with abuse, while also reconnecting with God in a rich, healing way—a way that restores purpose and meaning to life.

As a child and a young man, the author experienced multiple expressions of religious abuse, which led to self-destructive behaviors

that nearly ruined his life. Through programs such as AA and the support of loving Christians, he has made significant progress toward recovery. However, Watts found that the particular effects of religious abuse needed a program far beyond what he had experienced, which led him to the creation of this 11-step program leading to spiritual freedom.

In *Recovering from Religious Abuse*, Watts provides a practical 11-step recovery program separated by weeks and days to include daily readings, prayer, journaling guidance, and Scriptures for reflection—all of which guide readers through a journey of understanding, healing, and lasting recovery. Topics include:

- Progress, not perfection
- Becoming who you really are
- The negative power of self-pity
- Repairing your relationship with God
- The purpose behind the pain

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A New Life of Spiritual Freedom Awaits You

How to Benefit Most from Recovering from Religious Abuse

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Moving Forward

Endorsements

Praise for Recovering from Religious Abuse

“Those who proclaim to come ‘In the name of God’ . . . should offer a message of truth in love. But not every leader does. Some hurt rather than heal. For those who have been pained by religious abuse—and it does happen—*Recovering from Religious Abuse* offers stirring thoughts, hope and inspiration toward real ‘freedom in Christ.’”

—***Dr. Tim Clinton, President, American Association of Christian Counselors***

“There is good news for those who turn away from God because of their experience of hurt and pain at the hands of Christian leaders and others in the body of Christ. The God of the Universe, who loves and cares for us, should not be confused with those who have misrepresented Him. This practical and insightful book, *Recovering from Religious Abuse*, has been written to help you heal from the wounds that you have received. Out of the caldron of personal experience, Jack Watts shares the insights of his journey in an easy to follow, yet powerful format. Follow the 91-day plan—one day at a time—and your life will be transformed in amazing ways. I highly recommend this book to those who have been wounded, as well as to the counselors who assist them.”

—***Joseph A. Kloba, Ed.D., Provost & Chief Academic Officer, Professor of Counseling Psychology, Palm Beach Atlantic University***

“The healing journey for those wounded by trusted spiritual leaders can be daunting. Clearly Jack has walked this road and blazed a trail for those who will follow.”

—June Hunt, Founder, CEO & CSO, Hope for the Heart

“I began my journey of recovery from drug and alcohol addiction in February of 1971. I began my recovery from religious abuse in 1978. I wish I would have had this book then. I have spent many years helping people find recovery from their hurts, habits, and hang-ups. During those years I have always looked for material that addresses the issues from both a clinical and a biblical perspective. Jack Watts has done that with this book. He also negotiates the fine line between showing compassion to the victimized (honor the struggle) without allowing them to develop a victim mentality. If you have experienced this type of abuse, you are in danger of confusing God with the abuser. This recovery program will allow you to discover who God truly is in the person of Jesus Christ, without the baggage of the abuse. I heartily recommend this to fellow strugglers.”

—Dr. Daryl Pitts, D. Min., Pastor, Thomas Road Baptist Church, Adjunct Professor, Liberty University

“I’ve often heard it said that Christians are the only army that shoots its wounded. For those of you who feel like you’ve been ‘shot,’ let me recommend *Recovering from Religious Abuse*. This practical, insightful book has been written to help you heal from the wounds you’ve received. It’s a book that can help you regain your sense of purpose and be everything God ever created you to be.”

—Matt Barnhill, Former Vice President, Rapha Treatment Centers, Care Ministries Pastor, Riverpoint Church

“Do you remember how joyful and hopeful you were when you first believed? That seems like a long time ago, doesn't it? This is especially true for those who have been wounded within Christendom—wounded by people they once trusted. That's why *Recovering from Religious Abuse* is such an important book. By working the 11 steps, disillusioned Christians can regain their sense of joy and purpose. It's a book every Christian should have in their bookcase.”

—Orlando P Peccora, MD

“Religious abuse is far more prevalent than most of us could ever imagine. Month after month during our Healing for the Nations Intensive Retreats, we see a number of people who struggle with the issue. Jack does a great job of presenting a recovery program that enables people to experience Jesus—seeing God for who He really is—not through the distorted lens abuse so often creates. This material is honest and real and encourages that kind of relationship with God. It is refreshing to see his understanding of clinical issues combined with discipleship and pastoral care. This material isn't focused on a victim mentality but, rather, victory in Christ. It offers more than just recovery; it offers growth, healing, and new life!”

—Rujon W. Morrison, Co-Founder, *Healing for the Nations*

“Where do you turn when you've been wounded by a Christian leader? For those who have been abused—either verbally, emotionally, socially, financially, or sexually—you can turn to *Recovering from Religious Abuse*, which has been written specifically with you in mind. Jack's tough, no nonsense approach, is

precisely what you may need to put your painful past behind you and move forward successfully with your life.”

—***Jim Baird, Director, B&H Academic***

Reviews

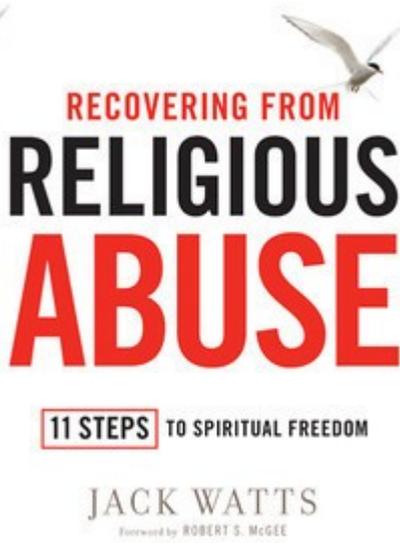
REVIEWS FROM AMAZON:

A Needed Guide for the Wounded

Religious abuse is the elephant in the room everyone tries to ignore. For those affected by it, pretending it doesn't exist only adds insult to injury. Watts has delved into a topic that we don't discuss except among our closest friends and family. For those who have become part of the "de-churched" as a result of the painful experience of abuse, he offers hope...

Religious abuse is the elephant in the room everyone tries to ignore. For those affected by it, pretending it doesn't exist only adds insult to injury. Watts has delved into a topic that we don't discuss except among our closest friends and family. For those who have become part of the "de-churched" as a result of the painful experience of abuse, he offers hope. Emotional issues are always hard for the wounded to dissect and examine with objectivity. The abused must learn to separate the abuser--and the bad experiences--from the God whom the abuser was there to represent. It isn't easy. Like carefully untangling a knotted ball of string, Watts gently guides the reader to deal with each aspect of abuse one day at a time. By leading the reader through this 11-step process, he shows that it is possible to receive God's unconditional love and acceptance again. This is a book that we all wish wasn't needed but, with a proliferation of religious abuse victims, "Recovering from Religious Abuse" is a welcomed aid to the wounded who find themselves angry, cynical and searching for guidance, restoration and healing. E. Pullen

HARDCOVER



THOSE WHO CAN...

Those who can be helped by *Recovering from Religious Abuse: 11 Steps to Spiritual Freedom* are Catholics, evangelicals, and people from other recovery programs.

“Over the years, there have been quite a few books written on abuse, but few deal with the specific topic of recovery from religious abuse. For those books that have been written, most deal with a novel or informative approach, few actually providing a resource that can actually help one recover; that is, until now! Howard Press, a label of Simon & Schuster, has just released a new book, *Recovery From Religious Abuse: 11 Steps to Spiritual Freedom* by Jack Watts.”

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