HELPING GROUPS HEAL
To Cheryl, my wife, who has always been by my side.
—Jan Paul Hook

To TM, AK, and AB: Our friendship and group meetings helped keep me oriented toward grace.
—Joshua N. Hook

To Hal Stevens, my training director at Clemson University. He embodied the principles of grace that are the heart of this book.
—Don E. Davis
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Writing this book was definitely a group effort, and I (Jan) have a huge amount of gratitude to everyone who helped me along the way. First, I want to thank my son Josh for his help throughout this process. He was the one who first encouraged me to write this book.

I also want to thank the participants in all the groups I have led over the years. From the very beginning, they have led the way, showing me how to best lead and help them. I want to thank my colleague Steven Hines, who is also one of my closest friends. We have led groups together for over twenty-five years. So much of my learning about helping groups heal has come from leading groups together with him.

I also want to thank the people who have gone before me and have been so integral in helping me to develop my thinking about the process of healing. Of course, the entire concept of healing as a function of truth and grace comes from Jesus in the Bible. I am grateful to psychologist Henry Cloud and his book Changes That Heal, in which he wrote about healing being a function of truth, grace, and time. I am thankful for Linda Weise, one of my colleagues at Willow Creek Community Church, who first put out the idea of healing being a cyclical process. From the idea of The Healing Cycle, I developed a training model for the leaders
of the support groups at Willow Creek. I want to thank Linda for her insight, and all the leaders of the small groups that I had the pleasure to train. Their support, encouragement and feedback have been invaluable.

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Finally, I want to thank my wife, Cheryl. She has always had my back.
As a counselor, I (Jan) engage with people almost every day about their deepest experiences of pain and struggle. We live in a broken world, filled with disappointment, problems, and difficulties. This is a predictable part of life. Jesus promised, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33a). So this “promise” likely rings true for you. I know I have had my share of trouble in life.

I love it that the verse doesn’t stop there. After noting the inevitable reality of suffering, Jesus gives us reason for hope: “But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33b). The story does not stop with brokenness and pain. Your story—and those of others you serve—doesn’t have to stop there.

The overcoming life of Jesus gives us hope for healing, growth, and new life. His life and ministry demonstrate that his life is stronger than anything in this world. Sickness is terrible; Jesus healed. Physical needs are daunting; Jesus fed. Demonic possession is terrifying; Jesus set people free. Death catches up with each of us eventually; Jesus resurrected Lazarus. Clearly, this does not mean that all your troubles will go away. It did not mean that for Jesus. He was brutally killed, but then God raised him from the dead. “Take heart! I have overcome the world” is the message that echoes in fallen creation after the life of Christ.
Counselors and helpers have an opportunity to participate in this ministry of overcoming each time we interact with the people placed under our care. In my experience, of all the things that contribute to healing and growth, the most important is relationship. Brokenness occurs in relationship; healing also happens in relationship. That’s the reason why I love small groups so much. The relationships between the small group leader and the group members are powerful, but the group members also experience the healing power of relationships with the other group members.

My goal in writing this book is to help group leaders be more effective in leading their small groups. Leading small groups is difficult. Some basic foundational skills can go a long way in setting up a small group that helps its members to experience life to the fullest. I have been leading small groups for the past thirty years, including several different types of small groups (e.g., therapy groups, support groups, and Bible studies). My hope for this book is that for whatever type of small group you lead, you can learn and develop skills that improve your ability to help your group members in their own process of healing and growth. Thanks for taking this journey with me.

—Jan Paul Hook