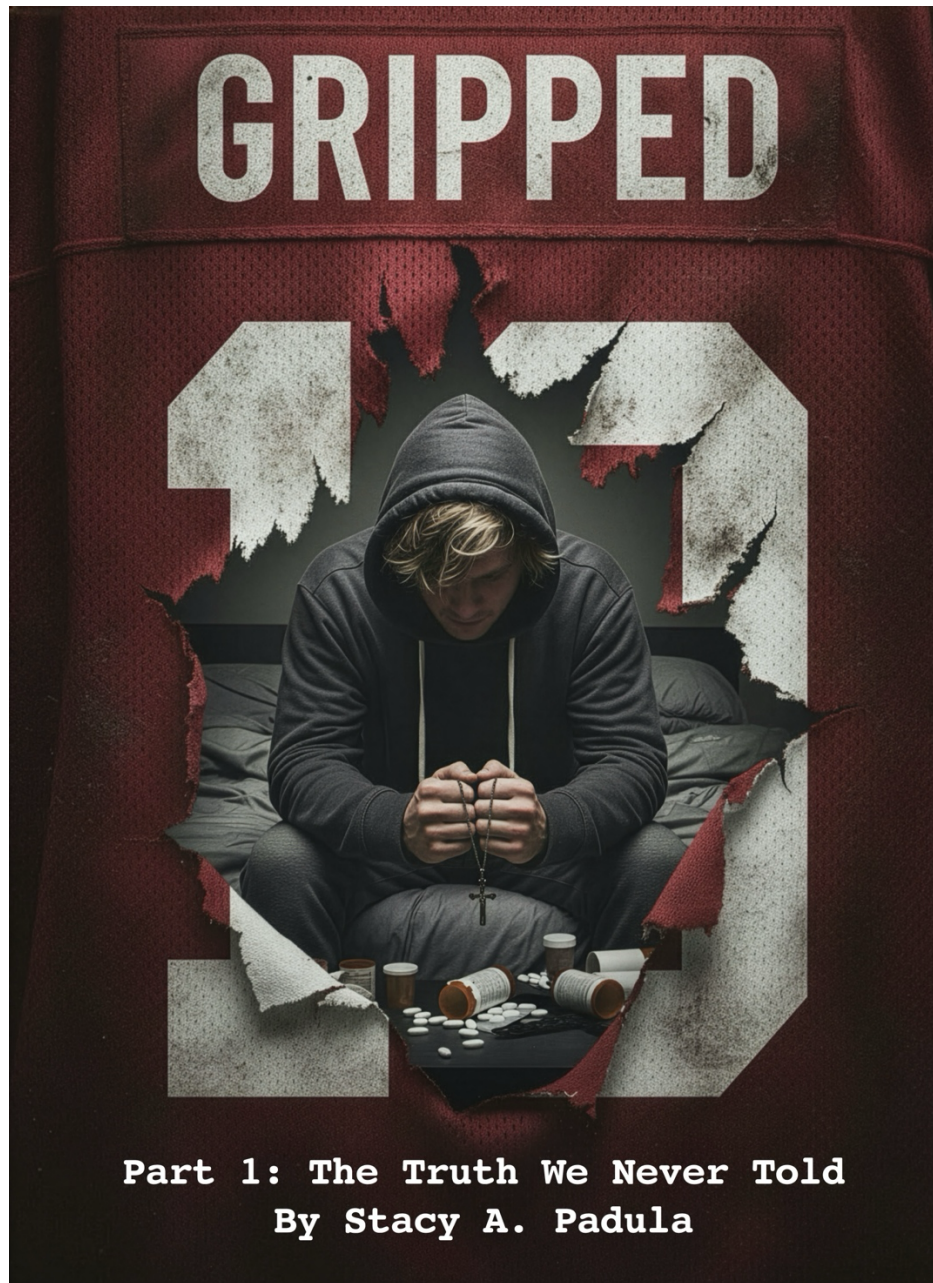


Study Guide for
Gripped Part 1: The Truth We Never Told
for Christian Youth Groups



Ages 13–18 | 4–6 Week Format

This guide is designed for youth pastors, small-group leaders, and mentors who want to use the novel as a starting point for honest conversations about faith, identity, pressure, sin, consequences, grace, and hope. The book is realistic and unflinching. It does not preach, but it creates space for deep spiritual discussion when paired with Scripture and guided leadership.

1. Leader Preparation Notes

Core Themes Through a Christian Lens

- How “good kids” drift from conviction into compromise
- The progressive nature of sin and self-deception
- Shame versus godly sorrow
- The difference between worldly friends and true community
- Family brokenness and the call to intercede
- Grace that meets people in their lowest places
- The long process of repentance and restoration

Important Content Warnings for Leaders & Parents

The novel contains detailed depictions of prescription drug abuse, other substances, underage drinking/parties, anxiety and depression, family conflict, and references to romantic/physical relationships. It is intentionally raw. Send a short note to parents before starting the study so they can decide if their student is ready. Offer an alternative small-group option if needed.

Recommended Format

- 4–6 weekly sessions (60–90 minutes)
- Students read assigned chapters before each meeting
- Open with prayer and a short Scripture reading
- Mix discussion, personal reflection, and group prayer
- Close with a practical application challenge

Leader Posture

Create a safe space. Students should never feel pressured to share personal struggles. Focus on the characters first, then invite personal application only if students choose. Emphasize that the goal is truth and grace, not judgment.

2. Session Outline (Suggested 5-Week Structure)

Session 1: The Beginning of the Grip

Reading: Prologue + Chapters 1–8 (Marc’s discovery of Taylor’s condition, early family response, Cathy’s present-day world)

Key Focus: How addiction and destructive patterns often begin quietly—through injury, pressure, unmet expectations, or the desire to numb pain.

Scripture

- Proverbs 14:12 – “There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.”
- 1 Corinthians 10:12 – “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”

Discussion Questions

1. What early warning signs did Taylor’s family miss? Why are warning signs often easy to overlook?
2. How does shame keep Taylor from asking for help?
3. Marc is determined to save his brother. What is healthy about his response? What might be incomplete?
4. Where do you see the difference between loving someone and trying to control their choices?

Reflection & Prayer

Invite students to quietly consider: “Is there any area of my life where I am beginning to justify something I know is not good for me?” Close in prayer for courage to be honest with God and trusted people.

Application Challenge

This week, notice one pressure or expectation that feels heavy. Bring it to God in prayer instead of handling it alone.

Session 2: Friendship, Influence, and the Slow Drift

Reading: Chapters focusing on Cathy’s middle-school years, parties at Chris’s house, early relationships, and the beginning of compromise (roughly Chapters 14–25)

Key Focus: How peer influence, loneliness, and the desire to belong can slowly pull someone away from their convictions.

Scripture

- 1 Corinthians 15:33 – “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’”
- Proverbs 13:20 – “Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.”
- James 1:14–15 – Desire → sin → death process

Discussion Questions

1. How did Cathy’s loneliness and twin dynamics make her vulnerable?
2. What role did older teens play in normalizing risk for younger ones?
3. Where do you see the difference between being a light in a dark place and slowly absorbing the darkness?
4. Jason and others later feel deep regret for their influence. What does true repentance look like when we have hurt others?

Reflection & Prayer

Ask: “Who influences me most right now? Am I more shaped by them, or am I shaping them toward Christ?”

Pray for wisdom in friendships.

Application Challenge

Reach out to one friend this week with encouragement or a simple check-in that points toward life rather than just hanging out.

Session 3: Secrets, Shame, and the Cost of Hiding

Reading: Chapters involving deepening secrets, Taylor’s dealing, family fracture, and characters hiding struggles (mid-to-late book)

Key Focus: How secrecy multiplies damage, and how confession and light are the beginning of freedom.

Scripture

- Psalm 32:3–5 – The physical and spiritual weight of unconfessed sin
- James 5:16 – “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”
- 1 John 1:7–9 – Walking in the light

Discussion Questions

1. How did secrecy protect characters in the short term but harm them long-term?
2. What kept Taylor from being honest with his parents and brothers?
3. Cathy carries anxiety and past choices. How does hiding pain often make it heavier?
4. What is the difference between healthy privacy and destructive secrecy?

Reflection & Prayer

Provide quiet time. Invite students (if they wish) to write privately one thing they have been carrying alone and then offer it to God. Leaders should model vulnerability carefully and appropriately.

Application Challenge

Identify one trusted adult or peer with whom you could be more honest. Take one small step toward openness this week.

Session 4: Grace, Consequences, and the Long Road

Reading: Later chapters focusing on family intervention, Taylor's detox attempt, police involvement, and the ongoing impact on the friend group

Key Focus: God's grace meets us in failure, but grace does not remove all consequences. Restoration is usually a process, not a single moment.

Scripture

- Romans 5:8 – “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- Galatians 6:7–8 – Sowing and reaping
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 – New creation reality
- Luke 15 (Prodigal Son) – The father's heart

Discussion Questions

1. Mr. Dunkin extends grace to Taylor while still confronting the reality of his choices. How do justice and mercy work together?
2. Why is it often harder to receive grace than to give it?
3. The book shows that getting clean is only the beginning. What else is required for lasting change?
4. How does the gospel offer something different from simply “trying harder”?

Reflection & Prayer

Focus on the character of God as a Father who runs toward prodigals. Pray for anyone students know who is struggling, and for soft hearts toward their own need for grace.

Application Challenge

Write a short prayer of thanksgiving for a specific way God has shown you grace. Keep it private or share if you feel led.

Session 5: Living Free – Hope, Community, and Next Steps

Reading: Finish the book + review key moments of potential turning points

Key Focus: Moving from being “gripped” by destructive patterns to being held by Christ and healthy community. Practical steps for ongoing freedom.

Scripture

- John 8:36 – “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”
- Hebrews 12:1–2 – Throwing off what entangles

- Galatians 6:2 – Bear one another’s burdens
- Philippians 3:13–14 – Pressing forward

Discussion Questions

1. Which character shows the clearest signs of beginning to turn? What helps them?
2. What does healthy Christian community look like when someone is struggling?
3. How can this group be a safer place than the friend groups in the book?
4. What is one truth from this study you want to carry into the next season of life?

Group Activity Options

- Create a simple “support map”: people and practices that help you stay grounded in faith.
- Write a short letter (not to be sent) from one character to another offering truth and grace.
- Group prayer for specific needs (students share only what they choose).

Closing Challenge

Commit to one ongoing practice: regular Scripture reading, accountability with a trusted person, or serving someone else as a way to stay outward focused.

3. Additional Leader Tools

Icebreaker / Check-in Ideas

- “One word for how you’re walking into group today.”
- Highs and lows of the week (keep brief).

Prayer Practices

- Sentence prayers
- Silent prayer followed by shared short prayers
- Praying Scripture over the group

Follow-Up Care

If a student discloses personal substance use, self-harm, or family crisis, follow your church’s safeguarding policy immediately. Do not carry the burden alone. Connect them with pastoral care or professional help as needed.

Optional Extension

- Invite a guest who has walked through addiction recovery and faith restoration (carefully vetted).

- Watch a short testimony video and discuss.
 - Move into *Gripped Part 2* or a related Bible study on identity and freedom if the group is ready.
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4. Final Encouragement for Leaders

Gripped is valuable because it refuses to pretend that Christian teens are immune to the same pressures and temptations as everyone else. Used well, it can open doors for students to talk about real struggles in the light of the gospel rather than in secret.

Your role is not to have every answer. It is to create a space where truth is spoken, grace is offered, and students know they are not alone.

May the Lord use these conversations to help young people choose life, walk in the light, and experience the freedom that only Christ can give.