

PRINCIPLE ONE

*We admit that we have absolutely no control of our lives.
Sexual sin has become unmanageable.*

Confronting Reality: I'm Shackled in My Own Prison

Congratulations! Despite long years of deceit, lies, denial, minimization, fears, shame, and manipulation, you have picked up this L.I.F.E. Guide or have come to a L.I.F.E. Group meeting. You have been wanting to, thinking that perhaps you should, pondering if it was the right thing. You have resisted, found excuses, wondered who would find out, and worried about the consequences of getting honest. You've thought that no one would really understand. You've either believed that you have done the worst things possible – things no one else has ever done; or you've thought your stuff is not so bad - that you really don't need to come to a meeting and admit you need help. Hear these words:

Welcome.

You're in the right place.

We're glad you're here.

Imagine what it must have been like for the Prodigal Son. He just wanted to be home. He didn't think he deserved to return to his earlier status as a son because his sins were so great. He hoped merely to be like one of his father's hired servants. Maybe you're like that: You're just glad to be alive and able to get to a meeting. You'd like to simply be quiet and belong. The Prodigal Son's father, however, rushed out to meet him and prepared a great feast. That is what it is like with God. We want to be "imitators of God, just like little children." It may feel like you're a little boy who has just come on the bus or into the lunchroom or onto the playground and you're expecting to be rejected or at least ignored. Instead, we rush over to greet you! We've been where you've been. We understand your pain and your fears. We're glad you've come. We can't prepare a great feast, but we can go to coffee later.

Your first assignment is just to get honest. We know that the greatest enemy of sexual purity is silence. We also know how carefully you've guarded your sexual secrets. It's hard to imagine letting them out. There are demons in your mind telling you, "No! You can't talk about that. Someone will go running and screaming out of the room!" We encourage you to confront those demons. Those voices have kept you shackled in your pain for too long. We know, because we're on a similar journey of learning to live in freedom every day. We want you to tell us how bad it got and what it was like to feel powerless over your life. Chances are that others in your group have done some of the same things.

There is nothing - certainly no sexual sin - that separates you from the love of God. No matter what you've thought or what you've done, it's time to come home to the heavenly Father who loves you and is longing for your freedom.

The assignment that you are about to undertake will take great courage. It will be a risk and a challenge. Don't turn back now. Keep putting one foot in front of the other and head for home. The freedom you'll experience is worth all it will take to get there.

Assignment One - Admitting Our True Condition

Unhealthy sexual behaviors have been variously divided into categories and groups of categories. In his first book, Dr. Patrick Carnes grouped such behaviors as shown in the chart below. As you look at these, note the behaviors that you have struggled with and to what degree, even if you were only involved with a particular behavior once. Try to remember how many times you have done each of these. You may have to estimate. No one remembers, for example, how many times they have masturbated. State how often this most recently took place (once a day or more, once a week, and so on). If you need further explanation of the categories, try reading Dr. Carnes' book, Out of the Shadows. My book, Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction, also divides sexual behaviors in this way and defines each one.

Basic or Building Block Behaviors

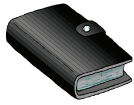
	Began	How Often
Fantasy	_____	_____
Masturbation	_____	_____
Pornography (<i>magazines, videos, Internet, TV, books, movies, music</i>)	_____	_____
Prostitution (<i>on the street, over the phone, in massage parlors, escort services, on the Internet</i>)	_____	_____
Affairs (<i>long-term and emotional involvement, short-term and non-emotional, one night stands, sexual or non-sexual</i>)	_____	_____
Anonymous Sex (<i>the name of the sexual partner is not known</i>)	_____	_____

Paraphillic or Level Two Behaviors

	Began	How Often
Voyeurism (<i>undressing someone with your eyes can be included</i>)	_____	_____
Exhibitionism (<i>wearing provocative clothing counts</i>)	_____	_____
Indecent Liberties or Frateurism (<i>hugging someone and getting sexually excited is included, as well as any form of touch performed for a sexual feeling. This is true even if the other person isn't aware of it</i>)	_____	_____
Phone Sex/Cyber Sex	_____	_____
Bestiality	_____	_____
Sado-Masochistic (S&M) or Pain Exchange	_____	_____

Offending Behavior

	Began	How Often
Incest	_____	_____
Molestation	_____	_____
Rape	_____	_____
Authority Rape (<i>using the power of role, status, age, or authority to gain sexual access</i>)	_____	_____

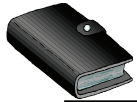


Journaling Exercise: Your Sexual History

Plot a timeline of your life. One easy way is to draw a vertical line down the left side of a page (about an inch from the left of the paper), with your age marked to the left of the line at different intervals (beginning with your earliest years and continuing to your present age). This timeline, then, could be several pages long depending on the amount of history you have to record. In the space to the right of each age, record your sexual and relationship behaviors. The following questions can provide a beginning point, but add anything else relevant that comes to mind. One result of preparing this history is that you'll probably see how your sexual addiction developed over time.

1. What is your earliest memory of being sexual? How old were you? What happened? Was there anyone else involved?
2. Note the times when the frequency of certain sexual behaviors increased and when new form of sexual acting out occurred.
3. Addicts act out when they are tired, lonely, angry, anxious, sad, afraid, or bored. Often these emotions work in combinations. Can you recognize times when these feelings prompted your acting out? If so, indicate on your timeline when this was true.
4. Every addict has made various promises and attempts to stop. List some of the times and actions you have taken to stop your sexual or relationship behaviors. Make sure to list your most recent efforts.

One of the clearest signs of an addiction is when we continue in a behavior even though we experience negative consequences. It's obvious to those around us that we're paying a high price for our behavior, yet we keep doing the same thing. What consequences have you experienced due to your sexual acting out? The next exercise guides you in plotting the results of your sexual and relational behavior.



Journaling Exercise: Your Consequences

Make a list of your consequences and note when they occurred on your timeline. (Consider using a different color pen for your consequences.) Perhaps it will help you remember if you think of various categories:

Physical – Have you conceived a child when you didn't intend to? If so, what choice did you make about that pregnancy? Have you contracted any STDs? Or AIDs? Have you been sick in any way that is the result of the stress of your addiction? Do you experience any sexual dysfunctions (erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation)?

Financial – How much money have you spent? (Count the money you spent on pornography or other forms of buying sex or funding an affair.)

Social – Have you been divorced or lost a relationship? Is anyone really angry with you? Have you had to move from a certain place? Leave a team, club, or activity because of your sexual behavior? Has your sexual behavior caused problems with your parents or siblings? What about with your wife or children?

Vocational – Has your acting out affected your productivity at work? If so, has it cost you a promotion or some other career advancement? Have you lost a job or lost time at work? Are you underemployed or not able to work in the career of your choice?

Legal – Have you ever been arrested, spent time in jail, or been sued?

Some of you may turn to other resources to work through this material. Assignment One parallels the work of the Faithful and True Workbook, Unit 7: Lessons 1-3, and Unit 8: Lesson 1. You may also find similar inventories in other workbooks listed on the websites listed on the Resources page (page 162). For this assignment you would include any work that you have done around Step One.

I applaud your courage in completing these writing exercises! You've done a tremendous amount of work. Don't worry if you realize you've left out some things. Outlining the truth about your experiences is an ongoing process as you continue this journey. You've made a great start.

However, writing all of this information in your journal is a step toward being honest, but it is not the final step. The next crucial move is to share this information with others. I know that thought may be terrifying. But how long have you kept this information to yourself? Has it helped you to carry this burden alone? What lies have you told to cover up this story? It *is* a story, isn't it? It is a part of who you are. It does not define you, but it does belong to you. For years you have been thinking, "If people knew this part of my story, they would hate me and leave me. They would not want to be around me."

Your feelings of fear have kept you hostage. They have been your oppressor. Your solitude of spirit has been the result. Silence has been your companion, and lies have guarded your silence. Loneliness has become all too familiar. You have had two lives: the one that others know, and the one that only you know. The public one may have many friends, but the silent one has none. Your silent self pervades your existence and overwhelms all else in the darkness of your loneliness. It is time for your two selves to unite.

The only way to emerge from the darkness is to break the silence. That is what your L.I.F.E. Group is for. They are the brothers who will stand with you. They won't go running and screaming out of the room. They've probably done many of the same things you have. They will understand. Confront your fears. Be of good courage. Share the story. During a L.I.F.E. Group meeting you will have the chance to tell your story to some safe people. (You may want to practice first with one or two members of the group.) You may not tell all of it the first time, but eventually you will. And you will find tremendous relief in releasing the secrets.

*(Please take note of this word of caution: **Don't be graphic in describing your sexual behaviors, especially not when sharing with your group.** You don't want to trigger other group members if you can avoid it. You also don't want to educate group members about other forms of sexual acting out.)*

Congratulations! You are beginning the journey of transformation into L.I.F.E. - living in freedom everyday.

Next Assignment: Principle Two, Assignment One, page 45

PRINCIPLE ONE

Assignment One - Admitting Our True Condition

***We admit that we have absolutely no control of our lives.
The sin of our addiction has become unmanageable.***

Confronting Reality: I'm Shackled in My Own Prison

Congratulations! Despite long years of deceit, lies, denial, minimization, fears, shame, and manipulation, you have picked up this L.I.F.E. Guide or have come to a L.I.F.E. Recovery Group meeting. You have wanted to, thinking that perhaps you should, pondering if it was the right thing to do. You have resisted, found excuses, wondered who would find out, and worried about the consequences of getting honest. You've thought that no one would really understand. You've either believed that you have done the worst things possible – things no one else has ever done; or you've thought your stuff is not so bad - that you really don't need to come to a meeting and admit to others that you need help. Hear these words:

**Welcome.
You're in the right place.
We're glad you're here.**

That phrase, “the sin of my addiction,” may stir some discomfort, if not down-right fear, for some. Addictive behavior is harmful to our physical body, mind, and spirit. During the time of “active addiction,” we are living in rebellion to the will and plan of God, our Creator. In the Bible these acts of rebellion are called ‘sin’ and are revealed in our attitudes and behaviors that are against what God desires for us and from us. He created us to be His image incarnate, but rebellion entered into the Garden of Eden when our ancestors, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God by eating from the forbidden tree. Recognize that this act would not have taken place without there first being the attitude of rebellion against God and the decision made for the self to be in control; “to have it my way.”

There are stories in the Bible called “parables:” earthly stories with a “moral” and a spiritual meaning. Imagine what it was like for the Prodigal Son. He was much like us in that he wanted to be in control of his own life. So he asked for, and received, his inheritance to underwrite his move to the city to start life on his own. Off he goes to the big city and engages in (what the Bible calls) “riotous living.” He lived it up until the great economic depression (the Bible calls it a famine) came along, and the next thing he knew he had used up his resources. And there was no one to help him. (Isn't that just like “friends;” while you have plenty they are with you, but where are they when you are in need?) So he took a job (as we call it) ‘slopping the hogs.’ (Ironic isn't it; he's not “living high off the hog” now, is he?) This was an insult to a Jewish boy. He did not even have sustenance as good as the hogs. He decided that since the servants of his father

were living better than he, he would go home and hire on as a servant to his father. He has suffered abandonment, rejection, humiliation, failure, depression, and who knows what else, and now he will add embarrassment as he goes crawling home to his father begging for a job.

Does any of this look like or sound like your experience? It is at this point that many turn to addictions, suicide, or insanity to cope with the pain of their predicament. What choices have you made? Some turn to partying, but the parties lead to other behaviors that lead to further problems. Sooner or later, the party is over, then what? The Prodigal Son just wanted to be home. He didn't think he deserved to return to his earlier status as a son because his sins were so great. He hoped merely to be (like) one of his father's hired servants. Maybe you're like that; you're just glad to be alive and able to get to a meeting. You'd like to simply be quiet and belong.

The Prodigal Son's father, however, rushed out to meet him (and don't miss this fine point: The Bible says that while he {the son} was yet *a long way off* {get those words} his father saw him {the father was looking and longing for his 'lost son'} and was filled with compassion. The father *ran* in view of the village, and threw his arms around his neck and kissed him to accept him fully and prepared a great feast. That is our picture of God's response to us. He is expectantly watching for your return.

There is great rejoicing when we come to or come back to our Heavenly Father. We in L.I.F.E. Recovery want to be imitators of God, "just like little children." It may feel like you're a little boy, or girl, who has just come on the bus or into the lunchroom or onto the playground, and you may be expecting to be rejected or at least ignored. Instead, someone rushes over to greet you! All of us have been where you've been. We understand your pain and your fears. We're glad you've come. God prepares hospitality like a feast. We can't prepare a literal great feast, but we can go to coffee later.

Many of our stories are very much like that of the Prodigal Son, and yet each will be very different in detail according to the experiences of our life's journey. Our results will depend on our choice to either face or hide from our past, present, and *expected* future consequences of our dependencies. For some, the pain of our past is more than we are equipped to manage successfully, so we hide from the pain of life we experience in the present. Trauma is a term we apply to painful experiences that overwhelm our physical, mental/emotional, and spiritual resources. *Acute* trauma is brief, less than four weeks, and we are able to regain our physical, mental/emotional, and spiritual 'footing' and return to a healthy life-style within a brief period of time. When the traumatic event, or events, persists beyond four weeks, we begin our search for relief from sources outside of ourselves, resorting to illicit drugs, alcohol, gambling, relationships, sex, work, or some other activity in which we can "lose ourselves" and "avoid the pain of living."

Eventually we find ourselves trapped in routine behaviors that are no longer working for us. It is for such a person that L.I.F.E. Recovery was given its vision and mission; to develop resources that help you find peace, and assist you with regaining "your footing" so as to return "home" to healthy living; physically, mentally and emotionally, and, most of all, spiritually ("What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his own soul?" Matthew 16:26).

In a book entitled, *Ghosts from the Nursery*, the authors present extensive insight into the effects of early trauma experiences (physical, emotional, environmental) upon early development (the first 33 months – gestation to age 2) that have lifelong consequences, and to which we react (note that word as compared to "respond") without conscious awareness. Another purpose for the first

assignment exercise is to *begin* processing the awareness of our root issues, family systems or family of origin work, to answer the question, “Why do I do the things I do?”

This impact on our present behaviors makes it necessary to take a deep look at your history and answer the question, “How did I get here?” If you were taking a long road trip and found yourself “lost,” wouldn’t it be prudent to first identify where you are and where you want to go, as well as how you got lost so you could plan an effective and efficient correction to your travel plans? We need to apply the same principle in planning our journey to healthier living.

We have to come to terms with the pain in our lives. We admit the pain to ourselves first, then admit our pain to God and then admit our pain to others. Sharing your pain with others is possibly the most difficult of all, but it is in safe relationships where we begin to heal and learn to speak the truth that our lives have become unmanageable.

Your first assignment is simply to get honest with yourself. We know that the greatest enemy of our being open and honest is silence; you have been deceived to think that silence has been your friend in the sense that your silence has enabled you to continue in your addiction to the behavioral choices that you have continually made to ease the pain of life. We also know how carefully you’ve guarded the secrets of your dependencies, habits, or behaviors. It’s hard to imagine letting your secrets out. These were your comfort, safety, retreat and reward. There are thoughts in your mind telling you, “No! You can’t talk about that. Someone will go running and screaming out of the room!” Or “You did what?” and turn away from you. We encourage you to confront those demons: those voices that have kept you shackled in your pain for too long.

We know your fears of shame and rejection because we are on a similar journey of learning to live in freedom every day. We want you to tell us how bad your pain and acting out got and what it was like to feel powerless over your life. Chances are that others in your group have done some of the same things, had some of the same feelings. There is nothing, certainly no behavior or habit, that separates you from the love of God. (See Romans 8:35) No matter what you’ve thought or what you’ve done, it’s time to come home to the heavenly Father who loves you and is longing for your freedom; He is waiting for you. (John 8:36: “If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” Romans 8:2: “. . .the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free. . .”)

The assignment that you are about to undertake will take great courage. It will seem to be a risk and a challenge. Don’t turn back now. Keep putting one foot in front of the other and head for home. The freedom you will experience in being in real community is worth all it will take to get there. (“Being confident of this very thing, that He Who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:6) Trust in Him to rush out to meet you and guide you when the going gets tough. He will provide for you, strengthen you, and welcome you home! He will work through your L.I.F.E. Recovery

Group when and if you let Him. You need the group, and the group needs you. It is in the safety of a L.I.F.E. Recovery Group that you can find your voice and learn to speak truth without fear. Welcome, you’re home!

Assignment One - Admitting Our True Condition

Thus the journey begins. Every journey has a beginning. This one starts with identifying the condition we find ourselves in, developing some insight as to how we got here, affirming our wish to leave while seeing hindrances to our ability to leave, and focusing on the destination we wish to achieve. As you work your way through the list patterns will likely emerge suggesting that these behaviors have more control over you than you have over them, and your life has become un-manageable.

On the next page unhealthy behaviors have been variously divided into categories and groups of categories. As you look at these, note the behaviors that you have struggled with and to what degree, even if you were only involved with a particular behavior once. Try to remember how many times you have done each of these. You may have to estimate. No one remembers, for example, how many times they have masturbated or how many times they've spent money compulsively. State how often this most recently took place (once a day or more, once a week, and so on). Remember, not all use is abuse and not all abuse is dependency; our motivation is key to freedom. *Are we in the behavior to change our mood, relieve stress or prove our value?*

Identify methods of coping to change mood, relieve stress or prove value.

Body Image

Sports

Fitness

Plastic Surgery

Possessions

Spending

Hoarding

Stealing

Performance – Workaholism

Career

Talent

Ministry

Acts of Service

Entertainment

Gaming

Gambling

Movies

Soaps

TV

Internet

Social websites, Facebook etc.

Novels (Romance or otherwise)

Drugs (Legal or Illegal)

Alcohol

Sex

Fantasy

Romance Obsession (Emotional Affairs, Online Stalking via Facebook etc.)

Exhibitionism / Voyeurism / Frotteurism (non-consensual rubbing)

Masturbation

Affairs, Prostitution, Strip Clubs, Pornography

Bondage, Discipline and S&M

Anonymous Sex (name of the sexual partner is not known)

Cyber Sex (Phone sex, Sexting, Virtual Sex-Digital/Electronic Experience)

Gaming with Sexual or Violent Stimuli, Anime (see Gaming in Definitions)

Same Sex Attraction

Offending (Rape, Incest, Child Molestation)

Bestiality

Sexual Anorexia

Food (Bulimia, Anorexia, Bingeing, Night Eating)

Relationships

Dating

Marriage

Children

Family

Friends

Began

How Often

Journaling Exercise: Your Timeline History

The purpose of this exercise is to eventually identify core beliefs that have developed over your lifespan; these core beliefs are foundational to decision-making processes and perceptions of your life experience and the behaviors that you have engaged in when having to manage painful emotions. I would suggest the use of a loose-leaf binder so that your history can be edited as you research among family members the time frames for which you have no recall. This is merely a suggestion; use a resource that will create the greatest comfort and ease for you. Also, this is not an overnight or one-sitting experience. Pace yourself, and take your time. Let this experience 'unfold,' not 'blow up in your face.'

To begin, describe your earliest life experience. (Age, What happened? with whom?)

Identify feelings associated with this experience (both while in the experience and, in a separate paragraph or paragraphs, your current emotional state as you reflect on the experience about which you are writing).

What did you do about those feelings during this experience about which you are writing?

What do you want to do about those feelings right now?

Journal the next experience that you can recall, using the above format.

Continue building your timeline, as you are able. If this becomes overwhelming – STOP. Discuss your experience with a counselor or with a trusted friend. This is not intended to be a re-traumatizing event.

Journaling Exercise: Your Consequences

When our attempts to fix our own problems our way begin to create problems of their own, we call these additional problems **negative consequences**. But sometimes we experience positive consequences from fixing our problems our own way, too. I invite you to be honest with yourself about the benefits of some of your negative behaviors; after all, the benefits were the ‘rationale’ you used to continue in these behaviors. Ultimately, you will need to say, “Goodbye” to these old coping behaviors. This, of course, will likely add yet another painful experience to your lifetime experiences. But just like the person who has surgery to remove a cancer, we understand that things sometimes get worse before they get better.

Positive benefits of negative behaviors:

Consider the following areas of your life:

Physical	Spiritual (your relationship with God)	Legal
Emotional (feelings)	Family	Financial
Mental (thinking)	Social	Vocational

Negative consequences of negative behaviors:

Consider the following areas of your life:

Physical	Spiritual (your relationship with God)	Legal
Emotional (feelings)	Family	Financial
Mental (thinking)	Social	Vocational