

L.I.F.E. Guide for General Addiction

Introduction

SPIRITUAL DOCTRINE: If God can heal disease then He can heal me!

As a Christian, you may be wondering why you should submit yourself to a “man-made” recovery program. Why not, instead, spend your time praying for an instantaneous deliverance brought about by an outpouring of God's power? After all, the Bible speaks of the POWER of the Holy Spirit that works within you, the Bible says that God did not give you a spirit of fear but of POWER, the Bible says that the same POWER that raised Jesus from the dead resides inside you...so why the need for a PROCESS?

Well, this is a very fair question with a very simple answer. The truth is, nearly every addict that comes to our ministry has been praying intensely and often for God to deliver them from their addiction. This is a good thing to do and therefore it is something we encourage. God DOES pour out His power to bring healing to addicts. His power to heal addictions, however, does not strike once like a lightning bolt; it flows continually like a river. It is a power that can only be experienced through simple, authentic Christian fellowship. It requires the conduits of transparency, confession, debriefing, and relearning - all of which can only be experienced through community. So it's not a question of power vs. process; it's an embracing of God's power *through* process.

God often heals cancer and other physical ailments instantaneously because doing so does not compromise the overall health of our physical body. In the case of addiction, however, an instantaneous healing *would* compromise our overall emotional and mental health. Such an experience would teach us that our deepest emotional conflicts (which are at the core of our addictive condition) can be healed in isolation and this is not possible. This would be a lesson that is counter-productive to God's design for us, as He has created us for intimacy – with Himself, with His Son Jesus and with each other. We were wounded in relationship; therefore God has chosen to bring healing through relationship. Of course He could bring instant relief of the craving, but years of experience and biblical evidence indicates that He has chosen to bring wholeness through our active participation in a transparent Christian community. If in this transparent environment we address core wounds that have hindered our spiritual maturity we will remove the tendency to switch addictions altogether. We will talk more about this later. Meanwhile, welcome to a L.I.F.E. time of recovery!

FAMILY SYSTEMS: This looks familiar...

If there is one thing you need to understand about addiction it's this: Coping or self-medicating doesn't need an invitation...it only needs an opportunity.

At one time, you were an innocent, unsuspecting child. You, most likely, weren't guided through the experiences in your life that opened the door for a need to escape. Your family, much like any other, may have been unreliable and unskilled themselves to bear the challenge of making it through the day's circumstances. Maybe the best model you saw was how to simply survive. Perhaps you learned at an early age that life cannot be trusted to turn out well so you made your way through the turmoil by using any opportunity to cope and escape the reality. Yet this was your home, your family, your relationships and extended family. In fact, there is an entire psychological discipline about this. It was originally formulated by Dr. Murray Bowen and is called **family systems theory**. As Dr. Bowen explains,

A family is a system in which each member has a role to play and rules to respect. Members of the system are expected to respond to each other in a certain way according to their role, which is determined by relationship agreements. Within the boundaries of the system, patterns develop as certain family member's behavior is caused by and causes other family member's behaviors in predictable ways.

In short, Dr. Bowen believed that you, as a person, cannot be understood (or understand yourself) apart from your family system. This is true because of the following widely recognized principle: early influences operate to shape future behavior. And the majority of your early influences came to you through your family system. Unfortunately, the chaos and injury some of us experienced within our family systems set us up to be vulnerable to compulsive and addictive behavior as adults. Some family systems can even go so far as *modeling* this type of behavior for us! You can see scriptural reference in Exodus 20 for this type of generational curse. Is it any wonder that our addictive condition looks familiar?

FRAGMENTATION: I think I'm going mad...

Your dependency can certainly be driving you to **fragmentation**. According to Christopher J. Charleton, M.A., LCSW, a licensed clinical therapist and president of InterAct Counseling PLLC, a state-of-the-art Christian treatment facility in Rochester, NY, fragmentation is a result of disintegration, which is in direct contrast to God's design of integration. That sounds a bit confusing to me, so think of it this way: you were created in the image of the Triune God; God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is a perfect example of integration; each aspect of the trinity is in union with the others, glorifying and reflecting each other's true value in relationship. Similarly, as someone created in God's image you were also designed to be integrated in relationships, thereby illuminating the true value of yourself and others.

The problem is, your family of origin experiences challenged your belief in God's design and skewed your perception of the value of being integrated in community. When your relationships were subsequently compromised (or even avoided altogether), disintegration occurred. Now, here's the main point: **fragmentation perceives both**

integration and disintegration to be true...and an internal war between intimacy and isolation ensues. The apostle Paul said it this way, “I don’t understand what I do. For what I want to do (intimacy) I don’t do, and the very thing I hate (isolation) I do. Now if I do what I do not want to do it is no longer I who does it, but it is sin (dependency) living in me” (additions mine). So then, this L.I.F.E. Guide you’re holding, its Principles and Journal Assignments will prove to be a huge benefit by giving you the tools to examine yourself and your experiences. After all, don’t we want to live in freedom? It’s our skewed perception that fuels the war between intimacy and isolation in the first place.

ADDICTIVE CONDITION: So one more time... What’s my problem?

It’s not alcohol. Alcohol does not create alcoholics. It’s not pornography. Pornography doesn’t create sex addicts. Neither is your addictive condition a box of Twinkies or a deck of cards or a freshly rolled joint or an eighty hour a week job.

The problem is your underlying addictive *condition* and it consists of a whole host of issues; neurochemical imbalances, arrested development, unresolved emotional wounds, fragmentation, and an incapacity for emotional wholeness and intimacy. These are the things that create addicts. The problem does not resemble a pair of dice, a sexual encounter, or a box of chocolates, although it likes to play with things like these - especially when you are in pain. Given enough pain and enough opportunity, these things then become the focus of your addictive *behavior*.

In recovery terms, your addictive behavior is simply your attempt to medicate the pain of some past trauma or relational wounding that has not been resolved, and the fact that it remains unresolved becomes the (often subconscious) excuse for continuing in your addictive behavior. It is a self-perpetuating cycle of destruction. And on top of that, Satan is always there to cooperate, using and intensifying your addictive behavior and further disabling your ability to have relationships with those you care about (or even with God Himself). Your problem, your addictive condition, is your enemy and is used by the enemy to bring devastation to your life. Nevertheless, your addictive condition, your coping method or self-medicating always masquerades as your friend.

You very likely found your method(s) of coping amidst the turmoil of your family system. Acting out was fun and even helpful at first, but as you continually fed your addictive condition through years the behavior became pretty burdensome. And so you’re here, in need of a community of people who can help you to more clearly identify what’s driving your addictive condition and help you through God’s healing power to uncover and heal those wounds, for good!

Oh...so what you are really saying is I just need to get sober.

Nope.

Huh?

Sobriety is measured in time. You will be deemed “sober” when you have not engaged in addictive behaviors for twenty-four hours, or a week, a month, etc. That’s a great start, but it is not enough.

Your addictive condition is clever, resourceful and sinister, and it will let you be sober for a while if it means it can hang around for the long haul. Even Satan, after unsuccessfully tempting Jesus in the desert, simply waited for a more opportune time. Your addictive condition will do the same.

What you need is wholeness. Sobriety is a part of the equation but by itself sobriety does not equal wholeness. Being whole means you are practicing real intimacy. It means you are self-aware and capable of modulating negative emotions through healthy means. It means you are present in the moment instead of being lost inside your head. It means you no longer hide behind “fine.” Being whole means God is having His way with you, and as a result you are being transformed inside and out. The point is, you can be sober and still be acting out of your addictive condition. But when you are whole your addictive condition is not only **not** driving - but has no opportunity to re-establish itself and get a seat within you.

Patrick Carnes, PhD, a pioneer in addiction recovery, has stated; “more than 87 percent of addicts come from disengaged families – a family environment in which family members are detached, uninvolved, or emotionally absent. *All compulsive and addictive behaviors are signs of significant intimacy disorder and the inability to get needs met in healthy ways.*” Carnes’ statement suggests the importance of being connected, involved and emotionally present in order to get your needs met in healthy ways, and since this hasn’t been modeled you have to learn how this is done. There are three critical elements that promote this growth: managing distressing emotions, support and disclosure, and cognitive processing. Each are provided in a L.I.F.E. Recovery Group setting, where you learn to express feelings relating to an injury; including anger, anxiety and sadness, and to process that pain. This learning to express your feelings and to process pain is a very fundamental part of your recovery. A separate resource, the L.I.F.E. Grieving Guide, has been created for just this purpose, and you will be encouraged to go through that work at an appropriate time in your journey.

By joining a local L.I.F.E. Recovery Group and completing the work that is found in the L.I.F.E. Guide you are holding, we believe you can achieve wholeness. Accomplishing this will require a lot of consistent effort on your part, but know this; there are thousands of men and women throughout the world who can give testimony to the fact that it was the community and self-discovery they found through L.I.F.E. Recovery that God used to set them free. You **can** Live In Freedom Everyday! Welcome to L.I.F.E.!

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.

Began

How Often

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*
- 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*

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