

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.

Bob writes, "I can't break free from pornography. I found it on the Internet four years ago when I was 12. At first I just looked occasionally. Now I pretend I am asleep, and when everyone else goes to bed I get on the computer. I get little sleep because I now spend several hours each night looking at pornographic web sites. I have to make myself get out of bed in the morning and pretend that I really slept all night. I feel like I'm chained up in a prison from which there is no escape."

Congratulations! You've made the decision to come to a group, class, meeting with a youth leader, or maybe you've picked up this book desperately seeking help. You may have resisted dealing with this problem because you didn't have the tools to break free. Or you might have believed that no one would understand. Have you been making excuses and rationalizing the years of deceit and lies? Or maybe you're overcome with fear and shame. Maybe you've been caught and encouraged to seek help, or perhaps you've come to this place knowing you're enslaved to sexual sin. Is your story like Bob's? Whatever the reason, please hear these words:

Welcome.

You've come to the right place.

You're safe.

We are glad you're here.

Put yourself in the place of the Prodigal Son. Do you just want to come home to the arms of a loving father? In this story found in Luke 15 notice that the arms of the father were wide open and ready to accept him back. The father in this story has no idea why the son is returning home. He doesn't interrogate him, check out his motives, wonder if he is being honest, or check his ID. The father accepts him completely because he is his son. In this group, pain and fear are the norm. We all know the feelings of fear, shame, and rejection and simply want a place to belong. We're glad you're here.

There is no sexual sin - or anything else - that separates you from the love of God. It doesn't matter what you've done. The Father in heaven wants you to come home and experience the love and acceptance that you've longed for. He wants you to have the freedom that Jesus died for - freedom from being enslaved to sin, including sexual sin.

Nothing fuels an addiction like keeping secrets. Secrecy is the gasoline that fuels the engine of your sexual addiction. Consider again the story of Bob. All of his acting out was done under the cover of darkness. His secrecy kept the cycle of addiction alive and well. We'll learn more about the cycle of addiction in a later section of this book.

For now, we want to start getting honest with ourselves and the group. The first assignment is designed to help you get honest about your sexual history. We'll look at the reality of the situation in which you find yourself, coping with consequences, and understanding the cycle of addictive sexuality.

Assignment One - Getting Real About Sexual Truth

What constitutes unhealthy sexual behavior? There are various behaviors that can contribute to the development of addictive sexuality. Please note that we're examining these behaviors in the context of addiction as a progressive disease. That means that if these behaviors become compulsive and out of control, addictive sexuality will probably be the final result. Try and identify how many of these behaviors have been a part of your life. Also try and identify when they started and how often they take place. You might want to reflect in your journal on when these behaviors started. Ask yourself questions like; "What was going on in my life during that time?" Another question might be, "Was there a major event in my life or in my family that might have had an emotional or traumatic impact on me?" As you answer the questions on the below table you may not remember specific dates or numbers. That's ok. Do the best you can in answering the questions.

Basic or Building Block Behaviors*	Began	How Often
Fantasy	_____	_____
Compulsive Masturbation	_____	_____
Pornography (magazines, videos, Internet, TV, books, movies, music)	_____	_____
Prostitution (on the street, in massage parlors, escort services, on the Internet)	_____	_____
Phone Sex (with people you know or strangers)	_____	_____
Multiple sexual partners (being sexual with a number of people)	_____	_____
Anonymous Sex (the name of your sexual partner isn't known)	_____	_____

* The table above is adapted from Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction by Dr. Mark Laaser and Out of the Shadows by Dr. Patrick Carnes.

Understanding Your Sexual History

Sexual History

Draw a timeline of your life. One way to do this would be to write your age in the left margin of a sheet of notebook paper. Begin with your earliest memories and continue down the page until you reach your current age. This timeline could be several pages long. In the space to the right of your age record your sexual and relationship history. The following questions can help jog your memory. They're intended to help you begin the process of telling your story. You may want to include other things that aren't listed in these questions. This can help you begin to understand how the sexual addiction started and developed over time.

1. What is your earliest memory of being sexual? How old were you? What happened? Was there anyone else involved? Did you tell anybody (parent, teacher, friend, etc...)?
2. Note the times when the frequency of sexual behaviors increased and new forms of sexual acting out began.
3. Addicts often act out when they are hungry, angry, lonely, and tired. They also act out when they are fearful, anxious, sad, and bored. Can you recognize times when these feelings prompted sexual behavior? If so, indicate on your timeline when this was true.
4. Every addict has tried to control behavior on his own. He makes promises and does various things in an attempt to not act out. What are some of the things that you've tried to do in order to control your sexual behavior? Include your most recent efforts.

One of the most common qualities of an addiction is that behavior continues despite negative consequences. In other words, we keep acting out even though we know better. Some consequences are more obvious than others. Most people who struggle with addiction deny or minimize consequences for a long time before coming to grips with reality. Reality is that the addict's sexual history has negatively impacted himself and others. What are some of the consequences you've experienced in sexual acting out? The next exercise guides you in plotting the results of your sexual behavior and your actions in relationships with others.

Consequences

Make a list of your consequences and note when they occurred on your timeline. You might want to use a different color pen for your consequences.

Physical - Have you been responsible for a pregnancy that you had no intention of creating? If so, what choices did you make about that pregnancy? Have you contracted any sexually

transmitted diseases like herpes, chlamydia, genital warts (HPV)? Do you need to go to a doctor or the health department to be tested for any diseases including AIDS?

Emotional - What is your stress level like? Have you been losing sleep due to the guilt and shame that goes along with acting out sexually? Are you having difficulty concentrating in school? Have you been able to fulfill responsibilities at home?

Social - Have you been through the breakup of a dating relationship over your addiction? Are people angry with you because of things you've done to them? Have you been removed from a club or a team at school because of your sexual behavior? Is your sexual acting out causing problems in the family with your parents or siblings? Or perhaps with extended family members?

Vocational - Perhaps you work a part-time job after school. Are you using work time to be sexual? Have you lost a job due to sexual acting out on the job or with another employee?

Legal - Have you been arrested or spent time in jail? Have you or your family experienced any other legal consequences as a result of your sexual behavior?

I admire your courage in completing this written assignment. Addressing the reality of your sexual history and the consequences of that history can be frightening and intimidating. It may also make you feel somewhat overwhelmed and hopeless as you see the scope of the damage. This is only the beginning of the journey. You're off to a great start.

The next move is where this process may get harder. It's now time to share with someone else. As we said earlier in the book, the people you share with must be safe people. L.I.F.E. Groups are designed with safety guidelines, but it's up to each group to follow these principles. It may be that you share with an accountability partner, a sponsor, or a pastor. You've been carrying a burden by yourself for a long period of time. As frightening as it may be to share, once you take this step, you'll find that a burden has been lifted.

Silence has kept the lies alive in your life. Unfortunately, silence also breeds loneliness. To emerge from the darkness of sin and addiction, the silence must be broken. There is a fear that if someone knows this part of your story, you'll be abandoned and shamed. There is a fear that you'll be hated and that people won't want to be around you if they know the truth. Confront your fears and share your story. During a L.I.F.E. Group meeting, you can share your story in a safe setting.

(A word of caution: **Don't be graphic in describing your sexual behaviors to a group.** You don't want to trigger other group members if you can avoid it. You also don't want to educate other group members about other forms of sexual acting out.)

Congratulations! You're beginning the journey of transformation into L.I.F.E. - Living In Freedom Everyday.