



CAPTIVES FREE

M E N ' S W O R K B O O K

Captives Free Guide — *for Men* —

**Guiding Your Journey
to *Sexual Integrity***

Dr. Mark Laaser

captivesfree.com
(register here for an online Captives Free Group)

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Captives Free Guide for Men

by Dr. Mark Laaser

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Table of Contents

Foreword	5
Introduction	7
How to Use the Captives Free Guide	9
The Seven Principles	12
Meeting Guide	15
Group Meeting Format	16
First Assignments	21
Principle 1, Assignment 1 - Confronting Reality: Admitting Our True Condition	21
Principle 2, Assignment 1 - Finding the Solution: Exploring Our Reluctance	27
Principle 3, Assignment 1 - Telling the Truth: Admitting Our Darkness	33
Principle 4, Assignment 1 - Growing in Transformation: Accepting Accountability	45
Principle 5, Assignment 1 - Demonstrating Real Changes: Assessing the Damage	63
Principle 6, Assignment 1 - Living in Fellowship: Practicing the Program	67
Principle 7, Assignment 1 - Finding a Purpose: Telling Your Story	71
Second Assignments	75
Principle 1, Assignment 2 - Confronting Reality: Understanding Our Cycle	75
Principle 2, Assignment 2 - Finding the Solution: Surrendering Control	83
Principle 3, Assignment 2 - Outlining Our Darkness	87
Principle 4, Assignment 2 - Growing in Transformation: Assessing Our Character	91
Principle 5, Assignment 2 - Demonstrating Real Changes: Planning Amends	97
Principle 6, Assignment 2 - Living in Fellowship: Changing Our Cycle	101
Principle 7, Assignment 2 - Finding a Purpose: Sharing Your Pain	105
Third Assignments	109
Principle 1, Assignment 3 - Identifying Our Roots and Desires	109
Principle 2, Assignment 3 - Placing Hope in God	123
Principle 3, Assignment 3 - Confessing Our Darkness	125
Principle 4, Assignment 3 - Cultivating Our Character	129
Principle 5, Assignment 3 - Living Amends	133
Principle 6, Assignment 3 - Growing in Spirituality	137
Principle 7, Assignment 3 - Discovering Your Vision	141

Tying It All Together: The Nehemiah Principles	149
Nehemiah Principles of Transformation (List of 18 Principles)	150
One Accountability Begins With Humility	151
Two Accountability Depends On Honest Confession	151
Three Accountability Involves Asking For Help	152
Four The Journey Of Healing Is Never Traveled Alone	152
Five Accountability Assumes That The Enemy Wants To Defeat Us	152
Six Rebuilding May Simply Be A Matter Of Just Getting Started	153
Seven Accountability Requires Getting The Garbage Out	153
Eight Accountability Means Building Close To Home	154
Nine Accountability Means Preparing Ahead Of Time	154
Ten Accountability Means Guarding The Weakest Places	155
Eleven Accountability Is Always In A Group	156
Twelve Our Motive For Transformation Should Be Selfless	157
Thirteen Accountability Means Building As Well As Defending	158
Fourteen Accountability Means Putting Positive Things In Your Life	158
Fifteen Accountability Is An On-Going Lifelong Process	159
Sixteen When Tempted Remain Committed To Transformation	160
Seventeen Transformation Targets You For Rumors And Personal Attacks	161
Eighteen Transformation Results In Willingness To Sacrifice	162
Tying It All Together	163
Definitions	164
Appendices	177
Appendix 1 Captives Free Readings	
Appendix 2 Captives Free Recovery Highway – Road Map	
Appendix 3 Captives Free Recovery Highway – Merge Exercise	
Appendix 4 Feelings Check Process	
Captives Free Information	197

Foreword

This is the third update of our workbook for men seeking freedom from captivity to sexual addiction, and is dedicated to the memory of the late Dr. Mark Laaser, who passed away in 2019. Dr. Laaser was an internationally known author and speaker in the area of sexual addiction for over thirty years, and a true pioneer in the field of Christian addiction recovery knowledge and understanding. The original “L.I.F.E. Recovery Guide for Men” was the first in a series of workbooks dedicated to freeing God’s people from the bondage of sexual addiction and equipping them to walk in His unconditional love. Captives Free is very grateful to have had Dr. Laaser as the author of the original Recovery Guide for Men, and as the principal editor for the entire original series of our workbooks.

In addition to this new *Captives Free Guide for Men*, Captives Free Guides for Women, Spouses, and Couples are also available, as well as a resource for other addictive behaviors. The original of each of those guides was written by a known and respected expert in this area of ministry, and each of the new Captives Free Guides remains very true to the original text of Dr. Laaser and the other authors.

Sexual dysfunction has become a common cancer within today’s culture, and the church is certainly not exempt. The number of people struggling with sexual brokenness has sky-rocketed due to two main factors: the prevalence and availability of pornography, and a sexually saturated media. Unhealthy and unscriptural sexual behaviors such as pornography, compulsive masturbation, and adultery remain just as prevalent within the Christian community as they are in the society at large. Among believers, there are men and women - including key leaders - who, because of painful experiences and sinful choices, compulsively use sex and unholy relationships as an escape or “medication” to help them cope with life. Many of these same people desperately long to be free from their captivity and intensely desire to live in sexual integrity. They want to experience what that freedom would mean in their lives.

The Captives Free program offers Christ-centered and relationally oriented groups that incorporate spiritual discipline, small group accountability, and ongoing prayer and support for those struggling with sexual brokenness. We’ll be making all those benefits available through an increasing number of “online” groups too, for those located in areas where a church-based Captives Free Group is not available. Captives Free Groups are support groups, not therapy groups. While there is much within each of the Captives Free Guides and the recommended recovery materials to help those who struggle identify and deal with the wounds from the past, we also encourage individual therapy to address root issues that often lead to sexual addiction. A trained counselor to guide the healing of core wounds is vital to fully achieving freedom from these issues.

We believe a person struggling with addiction needs to focus not on the behavior as much as the issues driving the behavior. Behavior is driven by the need to medicate the wounds and core issues, so recovery must go deeper than merely behavioral change. The importance of counseling is to further explore those core issues that the Captives Free program has helped identify, so as not to just get sober but to get well and experience actual transformation.

Choosing a counselor to be part of the recovery journey is an important and personal decision. Seek a counselor that understands how to work with traumas and core issues, to get to the root causes of the problems that have been driving the behavior. Ask for referrals and check credentials; ask about experience in addiction recovery; consider religious affiliation and beliefs if important to you.

Within this Captives Free Guide, we have included material on neurochemistry, the brain and the limbic system, in addition to information on family systems, traumas and core wounds. Taken together these subjects highlight many of the causes and effects of your addiction, which stem from the very fall of man in the Garden of Eden. It is our prayer that as you travel your healing journey, you are brought back to the authority of God's Word, and the moral absolutes contained in His Word as presented in the Bible.

The ongoing support so critical to the process of transformation comes from the networking of lives through Captives Free Groups. These groups involve real relationships - open, transparent, and accountable connections with fellow strugglers. Captives Free Groups value confidentiality and maintain an absolute commitment to provide a safe atmosphere for complete honesty and complete acceptance, where members are embraced in an attitude of love and understanding from others sharing common struggles. All of these work together to "guide" the group members toward Christ-centered sexuality, with the conviction that our true sexual identity is found in the freedom and grace that only Jesus can offer.

Introduction

(adapted from Dr. Laaser's original Introduction)

Welcome to the journey toward freedom from captivity to sexual addiction. We pray that this workbook will richly bless your life. Producing it has been a labor of love and is the result of the wisdom and generosity of many people.

Any of you familiar with the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous will recognize that the Seven Principles follow the wisdom of those steps. Many Christians, however, have been reluctant to use them because they are not specific enough about our need to be in a totally dependent relationship with Christ. In addition, we incorporate the concept of Core Issue, or Trauma Based recovery, with focus on the issues driving the behavior, in lieu of the typical secular and Christian 12 step programs with their focus on behavioral skills and disciplines. And we condensed the steps into seven principles and elaborated them in a language that is consistent with our faith.

This workbook will also introduce a new way of looking at what has for years been called **“recovery.”** This is the journey of freedom from old behaviors. We don’t seek to recover old ways. But we *do* seek to recover in that we *want* to get well. The freedom that we seek, in fact, is a matter of **“transformation.”** It is a journey that involves changing our lives. And, it is achieved through God’s transforming power and love. Many of you familiar with the language of the recovery movement will notice that there are some ways that words change when we start thinking of the healing journey as transforming.

The design of this workbook and others in the series is that material can be studied in seven-week cycles corresponding to the Seven Principles. If you look at the outline, you will see that each principle has been divided into three main “studies” or assignments. Each assignment goes increasingly deeper into the transforming journey of healing from sexual addiction. Intentionally, every person in a Captives Free Group can be working on the same principle in the same week. Some may be in the early days of their journey; others may have been working for weeks, or months even years. The material is designed to meet individual needs at varying times, while still focusing the group on one of the Seven Principles. Hopefully, working on this workbook will be like reading the Bible. Every time you do it, new thoughts and inspiration will come to you. If that is true, you will truly be able to use this material on an ongoing and indefinite basis.

We hope that you find this workbook to be a place where your journey of healing and transformation begins. Please know that we are praying for you, and for you to know God in a more powerful way, as Christ completes the good work He began in your life.

How to Use This Captives Free Guide

Hopefully, you have this workbook because someone at a Captives Free Group recommended it, or you visited our website and now want to move forward. You've made a decision to do something about your sexual addiction and have found a Captives Free Group, which means you'll have the strength of the fellowship of other men to help you get started. Lean on them and learn how to listen. Realize that your own best thinking got you here. Open yourself to learning a different way. Quiet your mind. Remind Satan that he's lost the battle with you and should just shut up and leave you alone. You don't want to listen to him, because you're recognizing he's the father of lies. Make a firm commitment **not** to listen to him again.

Your Private Journal

The first thing you'll need to do is get a journal. It could be as simple as a spiral bound notebook, or it could be a fancy journal you can find at bookstores and office supply stores. It may even be a three-ring binder so that you can add as many pages as you need. Whatever its form, your personal journal should be something you feel completely comfortable writing in. Captives Free made a decision not to put a great deal of space in this workbook for you to write in so that you can refer to this material over and over again. You may copy some of the pages and give them to others. The plan is for you to do most of the writing assignments in your journal instead of in this workbook, but sometimes you'll notice short-answer space is provided for convenience. Each assignment contains some discussion about the Principle being presented and the thought processes necessary to complete the particular writing assignment(s) within that Principle. The actual assignment instructions are clearly marked within the discussion content to be sure it's evident what you should record in your journal.

Be certain to put your name on your journal. It will become your **sacred** document, and no one else should see it unless you decide to share it. Do you remember how some old diaries had locks on them to protect the contents? Get that idea in your mind. This is your journal for you to record your answers and thoughts with complete honesty. We don't want anyone else reading it uninvited.

Your journal is a written document. It may be a notebook or reside on a computer or other device. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Use the method that works best for you. The important thing is for it to be "user friendly" for you so you will want to use the journal.

We've observed over the years that others may want to look at your journal. Your wife will probably be one of them. Don't be hard on her for wanting to see what you've written. She's petrified and hurt. She wants to know the truth. She's angry with you and feels she has the right to read your journal.

But: **It's a healthy boundary to keep private the contents of this diary about your life.** Don't be afraid to set this boundary. (Another important suggestion is to keep your journal out of plain sight, so that others aren't unnecessarily tempted to invade your privacy.) *The writing that you do in your journal is between you and God.* Pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to help you be honest and thorough, and to guard your writings from unauthorized eyes.

You may at times want to show what you've written to your wife, to others, to your sponsor, group members, pastor, or therapist. That choice is acceptable if you decide it's for *your* benefit. But please know that's *your* decision, OK? Refuse to be pressured into sharing your journal, especially by your spouse. And since your spouse will likely be curious about what's written in your journal, I recommend keeping your journal in a safe place. It may be hard for her to resist the temptation to read it if it's lying around. Some men keep their journal in a locked briefcase to prevent unwelcome reading. Others who keep their journal on their computer encrypt their journal files. Free encryption software is available online.

Organization of Captives Free Guide Material

Each of the Seven Principles is divided into three assignments. Every time a Captives Free Group meets it will focus on one of these Principles as the theme of that meeting. Each Captives Free Group, though, will be attended by members who are at different stages in their healing journey. Some of the men may have years of sobriety, while others may be coming to their first meeting. **Captives Free Groups should always be open to new members who are coming for the first time.** No one can predict God's timing about when a person may finally decide to seek help. Therefore, new people entering the groups can begin at the first level. **That way, every time a Captives Free Group focuses on a Principle, each man in the group should be working one of the three assignments within that Principle.**

Each assignment is designed to take you deeper in the work of a Principle. Assignment One consistently is somewhat basic — it's the core and the foundation of that Principle. Each Assignment Two asks you to work on the next core elements. Finally, Assignment Three takes you into deeper understandings of a Principle. The flow is that you'll work on the assignments in succession, so that you'll work on all seven of the first assignments first, then all seven of the **second** assignments, and finally all seven of the **third** assignments. This schedule means that after completing Principle One, Assignment One, you'll move on to Principle **Two**, Assignment One. When you've completed Principle Seven, Assignment One, you'll then go back to Principle One to work on Assignment **Two**, and so forth.

This Captives Free Guide is presented in the sequence depicted on the next page, and discussed further in the paragraphs that follow.

Introducing Newcomers to Assignments

INTRODUCTORY OR GRIEVING WORK:



PRINCIPLE WORK - CONTINUOUS CYCLE:



For the purpose of clarifying the introduction of newcomers to Captives Free Guide assignments, Dr. Laaser made the following statement:

“We’ve always suggested that all participants be on the same principle yet they can be on different assignments.”

As suggested by Dr. Laaser, the main group continually cycles through Principles 1-7 emphasizing all levels of assignments relevant to the participants that are present. Because newcomers are asked to complete introductory work before beginning the Captives Free Guide assignments, the following approach illustrates our recommendation to introduce participants to the workbook assignments. Please read the following:

Orientation Guide - Introductory Work:

Unless there are other attendees in the Introductory Group, the newcomer works independently on those assignments while attending the main Principle group, which then allows for the discussion of their homework in small group. After completion of Introductory work, the newcomer then joins the Principle work in the main group.

Principle Work (Main Group):

Although the newcomer attends the main Principle group without interruption, due to the foundation building aspect of the Captives Free Guide assignments and the continuous cycle of the Principles in the main group, the newcomer should take this opportunity to observe the group and wait to begin the material when the group cycles back to Principle 1.

The Seven Principles

As indicated previously, the Captives Free Guide contains seven Principles, and each Principle contains three assignments, for a total of 21 assignments, as shown here.

1. 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

1. Admitting our true condition
2. Understanding our cycle
3. Identifying our roots and desires

2. We believe in God, accept the grace offered through His Son, Jesus Christ, and surrender our lives and our wills to Him on a daily basis.

Finding the solution: I have only one option

1. Exploring our reluctance
2. Surrendering Control
3. Placing Hope in God

3. We make a list of our sins and weaknesses and confess those to a person of spiritual authority.

Telling the truth: I must leave the darkness

1. Admitting our darkness
2. Outlining our darkness
3. Confessing our darkness

4. We seek accountability and to build our character as children of God.

Growing in transformation: I mature in character

1. Accepting responsibility
2. Assessing our character
3. Cultivating our character

5. We explore the damage we have done, accept responsibility, and make amends for our wrongs.

Demonstrating real change: I accept responsibility

1. Assessing the damage
2. Planning amends
3. Living amends

6. In fellowship with others we develop honest, intimate relationships, where we celebrate our progress and continue to address our weaknesses.

Living in fellowship: I cannot succeed alone

1. Practicing the program
2. Changing your cycle
3. Growing in spirituality

7. As we live in sexual integrity, we carry the message of Christ's healing to those who still struggle, and we pursue a vision of God's purpose for our lives.

Finding a purpose: I have a vision

1. Telling your story
2. Sharing your pain
3. Discovering your vision

Your work in the Guide begins with Principle One, Assignment One (P1-A1). Many of the assignments will have more than one writing exercise. We encourage you to complete each before moving on to the next. Principle Two, Assignment One (P2-A1) would be your next assignment after you finish P1-A1. The continued workflow, then, would be to complete all remaining Assignment Ones (A1s) for the rest of the Principles in the Guide. If your group follows the recommended pace, it will discuss a different Principle and assignment each week, moving through the Guide in a 21-week cycle.

Suppose, for example, that you're working on Principle One, Assignment One. You start on this lesson the first time your Group is addressing that Principle. The next week you move to Principle Two, Assignment One. You may not be completely finished with Principle One, Assignment One, and that's fine. You can come back to it later. At this point, you just keep going through the Captives Free Recovery Guide and move on to Principle Two so that you'll be on task with the others in your group.

When the group cycles back to Principle One after seven weeks, you take up where you left off in Assignment One. Following this slower format might take you a year to work through the entire workbook for the first time. That's fine. Others of you may want to march right through and get all the work of an assignment done in one week, which means you'll go through the entire workbook during the first 21 weeks. Everyone is different. Recovery isn't a race or a competition; it's a transforming process that works at its own pace and becomes a way of life.

Your personal Captives Free Guide is a growing, changing document. You may work through it a number of times in the course of your healing journey. In fact, we hope you will. The inventory you complete in Principle Four, for example, will expand as you grow in your journey of self-awareness and honesty. It will be more complete when you have several years of sobriety, as compared to when you're just starting out in recovery.

Your Captives Free Group will concentrate on the Seven Principles of transformation. Our hope is that all the exercises in this Guide will challenge you. Some of them may overwhelm you. There's a tremendous amount of work outlined in these pages. At times you may be tempted to skip some exercises or skimp on writing your answers. We pray you'll persevere and complete each assignment. ***A key point to remember is that rigorous and thorough***

work is the best way to start healing. As Alcoholics Anonymous says, “Half measures availed us nothing.”

You may discover you fill more than one journal as you go through this material. Good for you! Journaling is one of the best emotional and spiritual tools available and working in this Guide may be your start of this wonderful spiritual discipline. Consider the great writers who have written journals throughout their lives. As you read and study Scripture for the rest of your life, writing your thoughts and feelings may become like a friend that helps you grow continually.

As you’ll notice, there are other suggested readings along the way, which are intended to be helpful in your work here. We certainly don’t claim that this effort is “exhaustive”. It’s the most complete workbook we’re aware of, but it’s only one book. More and more, various ministries are publishing similar materials. A workbook is a tool that is designed for your benefit. If there are other materials that help with your transformation process, that’s great. Use them to support your journey to freedom and healing.

Please don’t hesitate to contact someone at Captives Free if you find you don’t understand an assignment. You can also ask another “brother” who has been working a recovery program for some time to help you. Your local group should give you a list of phone numbers for group members. As you progress, you’ll become more comfortable with the practice of asking for help.

Most of all, we pray that the God of all peace and understanding will keep your heart and mind focused on Christ Jesus throughout this journey.

Captives Free Group Meeting Guide

Identity of Groups

Because this series of workbooks is sponsored by Captives Free, most of the support groups which use this material will call their groups “Captives Free Groups.” There may be other groups that use this material. Some of those groups may choose to identify themselves by another name, but we encourage groups to become a Captives Free Group in order to help support this work across the country and around the world. What your group calls itself isn’t as important as *how* you conduct your meeting. All groups calling themselves “Captives Free” and certainly all groups using this material, should follow these meeting guidelines and leadership principles. For the remainder of this chapter, we’ll refer to groups as “Captives Free Groups.”

Christian therapists could use the material in these Captives Free Guides in individual counseling, or to conduct a therapy group. However, an important principle is that Captives Free doesn’t encourage individuals to use this material alone, without being part of a group. As you’ll see, this work is intended to be done in fellowship, not in isolation. That intention doesn’t mean, of course, that you won’t do the specific exercises of most of the assignments alone. They’re meant, though, to be processed with others in some form of accountability.

Group Format

Every Captives Free Group should follow a standard format. Experience indicates that meetings that don’t use a standard format can easily become free-for-alls. They’re vulnerable to the moods and distractions of the moment. They’re also vulnerable to the more dominant personalities in the group. (Many times those who seek to dominate are the least healthy ones in the group.) All groups need strong leaders, and a few individuals in every group will provide that. It’s not fair to them, though, if only one or two always have to lead the group. If the safety guidelines and the meeting format listed below are followed, most of the issues about leadership and dominating individuals are eliminated.

Captives Free recommends the following outline. Each group or leader may modify the outline to best suit the group’s unique needs, but *groups should modify with care*, because once the format is established, a group should stick to it consistently.

Consider duplicating the Meeting Format and the various Readings in Appendix 1, and laminating them or placing them in sheet protectors for ease of use during meetings.

Captives Free Group Meeting Format

(Notes: The material below has been structured to apply to either online or in-person group meetings. The words in bold type and within quotation marks are suggested statements only, and are not mandatory. Feel free to make adjustments as necessary to meet your group's unique needs.

Italics provide instructions or information not intended to be read aloud.)

1. Opening Introduction and Prayer

Opening statement by the group leader:

"My name is _____, and I am healing from sexual addiction. This is the (state the time of the meeting, e.g. the Monday night) Captives Free Group, and I welcome each man here. I commend you on your commitment to be sexually and relationally pure before God. This meeting is only for those seeking their own personal recovery."

Opening prayer: The leader prays or the group joins in saying a prayer of their choosing, such as the Serenity Prayer or the Lord's Prayer.

2. Welcome New Members

Captive Free Groups are always open to new members or attendees who are seeking help. The leader says:

"Is anyone attending a meeting for your first time? (Pause for show of hands.) We welcome newcomers and we're glad you've come. At your first meeting you aren't expected to talk, but we'll be honored if you do. There may be opportunities for you to share either in this larger group session or after we break up into smaller groups. But most importantly, this is a time for you as a newcomer to listen and start feeling safe."

"We believe an important practice for everyone on the journey of transformation is to use accountability partners to help work this program. If you'd like a temporary accountability partner for the next week(s), or if you have any questions about our Captives Free Group and how it functions, talk with me after the meeting."

3. Group Introductions

Leader says:

"I invite everyone to introduce himself as your turn comes. Please state your first name, and if comfortable, state your primary forms of acting out and your length of sexual sobriety. If you're a newcomer, please feel free to simply state your name and that you are a newcomer. I'll begin..."

Each man introduces himself as the leader did.

4. Readings

Standard readings, which are printed in Appendix 1 to this Captives Free Guide are shared at every meeting, as indicated below. The leader should select readers and assign the readings before the meeting starts, if possible.

The leader says, “Now is the time for our standard readings. These readings give orientation to our group, reminding us of why we’re here, and of the path to healing and transformation into Christ-likeness. I’ve asked _____ (name) to read the _____ (name of reading).”

Those who’ve agreed to read, share the material below:

Mission Statement (p. 180) (or a part of the Mission Statement) - and/or -
 The Seven Principles (p. 181) - and/or -
 The Seven “Cs” (p. 182) - and/or -
 The Hope of Freedom (p. 183) - and/or -
 Group Covenant (p. 184) - and/or -
 Safety Guidelines (p. 179) (always read if newcomers are present)

5. Offering

The leader says:

“In addition to whatever fees you may have paid or resources you may have purchased, Captives Free asks that you prayerfully consider a meaningful regular contribution as an investment in your own healing. After all, you funded your addiction; should you do any less for your healing? Please go to the Donate link on captivesfree.com to make a donation, and thereby help ensure that others will have access to the help that we’ve found. Alcoholics Anonymous would not have grown into the source of help to alcoholics worldwide without such regular contributions from its members.”

6. General Discussion

The leader leads the group in brief discussion of items of general interest to the group, such as changes in meeting times and places, changes in procedures for conducting the meetings, special but related events outside of the group, or announcements pertaining to the group’s well-being.

Note that any decisions needed should be made with the consensus of group members and must be consistent with the principals of Captives Free

7. Celebration of Sobriety

Members are encouraged to report their success and celebrate milestones of recovery. The Captives Free Group recognizes significant periods of sobriety such as one week, one month, three months, six months, and one year or multiples of years.

The leader asks a group member to lead this celebration, and says:

“We believe it’s affirming to recognize those men who are finding the joy of being free for significant periods of time. Is there anyone here who’s celebrating a newfound one week of sobriety? One month? Three months? Six months? A year? Or multiples of years?”

(Obviously, pause between each question to allow response. If a man identifies himself, lead the group in applauding. Those celebrating a year or multiple years of sobriety can be invited to make a few brief comments.)

If the leader chooses, he may email a certificate or some other form of recognition to those being recognized.

When all have been honored, the leader says:

“Congratulations on the milestones you’ve achieved and the recognition you’ve received. We give God the glory!”

8. Presentation of Lesson Material

By prior arrangement, someone will have been asked to either make a presentation or lead a discussion on the Principle/Assignment being considered at this meeting.

For **online groups**, this lesson material should be presented in two segments interspersed with small breakout group discussions as indicated, with the actual presentation periods limited to approximately 15 minutes each.

Before the presentation begins, the leader says:

“ (Name of member) will now lead us in discussing Principle (number) , which is (read text of the Principle). You have each been assigned to a breakout room, and the presentation will be conducted in a couple of segments, each followed by a few minutes of small group discussion of the material being presented. A “Join” dialog box will be displayed at those times. Click the “Join” button, and you will be joined with several other men in one of those smaller breakout room groups.”

The lesson material is then presented for a period of about 15 minutes. During the lesson, the presenter may indicate that certain points are to be “Taken to your small group”. These may be items from the homework for the assignment, and there may also be reflective questions provided on-screen during the lesson for discussion in the small groups. After this period of presentation ends, the members will be instructed to “Join” their small groups.

The small groups then meet for approximately 10 minutes. These groups may be self-led or leaders may have been appointed for them. In either case, they will discuss the points raised during the presentation, and the screen with discussion points may be visible to them as well. If the technology being used permits, the presenter may be asked to “drop in” to a small group to clarify points or answer questions; and the presenter may have the ability to observe the groups unannounced. A countdown clock may be available to help all the groups finish at about the same time and rejoin the main group.

A second presentation period should then follow, essentially as described above to finish up the lesson material, followed by another small group breakout period of approximately 10 to 15 minutes. In addition to any additional discussion of the points raised during the presentation periods, this time should include sharing by each member of how their recovery is going, to include things as:

- Sharing accountability for “Addictive Behaviors” and “Healthy Choices”
- Getting current (share what’s going on in your life)
- Sharing each person’s work on an assignment from the Principle
- Prayer requests

For in-person groups, the above format may be followed or the lesson may be presented in a single session of 20 to 30 minutes, followed by a single meeting of the small groups of up to 20 minutes. In either case, and depending on the size of the total group, everyone counts off in such a way that small groups are created, including any designated small group leaders.

The leader says, “Now we’ll divide into (___#___) small groups. We’ll count off by (2s, 3s, however many is appropriate) and I’ll start..... One...” Everyone counts off.

The leader says, “The small groups will meet as follows: All the “1s” in Room _____, the “2s” in Room _____,” etc.

9. Closing Comments, Reading, Prayer

The groups may choose to be dismissed by the small group leader, or may reconvene as the large group. If the choice is to reconvene, the leader will say, “Everyone please be back here for our group closing at (time).”

Closing Comments:

The leader or breakout group leader(s) say(s):

“I thank everyone for coming and remind you the next meeting is (time). We have schedules of other area Captives Free meetings, as well as phone lists of group members willing to receive calls. If anyone has any unfinished individual business, you’re encouraged to talk with your sponsor or accountability group this week. Please remember that individual anonymity provides the safety for us to risk exposing our secrets to others and to God’s transforming light. Who you saw here and what was said here, stays here.”

Reading:

The leader or breakout group leader(s) say(s), “I’ve asked (name) to conclude our meeting by reading ‘The Hope of Freedom from Addiction’ on page 183.” (Appointed person reads material.)

Prayer:

Captives Free Groups end each meeting with prayer, again usually the Lord’s Prayer or Serenity Prayer, at the leader’s discretion. Many groups like to stand and hold hands together as they pray. The leader should then adjourn the formal meeting on schedule, but invite interested men to remain for prayer or fellowship among themselves.

Suggested Time Guidelines for Meeting

*The timeline for a standard meeting of sixty to seventy-five minutes
and looks something like this:*

Welcome & opening prayer, welcome to new members and introductions	3-5 minutes
Sharing readings	2-5 minutes
Donation and general discussion	2-5 minutes
Celebration of Sobriety	2-5 minutes
Principle presentation and small group discussion	50 minutes
Main group or breakout room leaders, closing and prayer	1-5 minutes
<i>TOTAL MEETING TIME</i>	<i>60-75 minutes</i>

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 Captives Free Guide or have come to a Captives Free 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 (Luke 25:11-31). 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." (1 Corinthians 11:1). 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*. Dr. Laaser's, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*, also divides sexual behaviors in this way and defines each one.

Level One or Building Block Behaviors. Began; How Often

Have you fantasized about sex? _____

Have you masturbated? _____

Have you used pornography? (magazines, videos, internet, TV, books, movies, music, social media)

Have you engaged a prostitute? (on the street, over the phone, in massage parlors, escort services, on the Internet, through social media) _____

Have you had affairs? (long-term and emotional involvement, short-term and non-emotional, one night stands, sexual or non-sexual) _____

Have you had anonymous sex? (the name of the sexual partner is not known)

Level Two or Paraphillic Behaviors.	Began;	How Often
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Have you been a voyeur? (undressing someone with your eyes can be included)

Have you been an exhibitionist? (wearing provocative clothing counts)

Have you taken indecent liberties? (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.) _____

Have you had phone or cyber sex? _____

Have you performed bestiality? _____

Have you participated in Sado-Masochistic (S&M) or Pain Exchange?

Level Three or Offending Behaviors.	Began;	How Often
-------------------------------------	--------	-----------

Have you committed incest? _____

Have you molested another? _____

Have you raped anyone? _____

Have you Authority Raped anyone? (using the power of role, status, age, or authority to gain sexual access) _____

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 forms 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?

We 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.

Although writing all of this information in your journal is a step toward being honest, it is not the final step. The next crucial move is to share this information with others. We 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 dominates 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 Captives Free 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 Captives Free 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 living free from the captivity to sexual addiction.

PRINCIPLE TWO

We believe in God, accept the grace offered through His Son, Jesus Christ, and surrender our lives and our wills to Him on a daily basis.

Finding the Solution: I Have Only One Option

In the book of John, chapter 5, there is a great story of one of Jesus' healing miracles. As the account records, outside of Jerusalem is a pool called Bethesda, which was known as a place of healing. Occasionally an angel would come down to stir the water, and whoever got into the pool first was healed. One paralyzed man had been lying there for 38 years.

When Jesus came on the scene and saw this paralyzed, despairing man, the Great Physician asked an unusual question. Now think for a moment. If you were the one who encountered this paralyzed man, what would you say? Perhaps you would say something like, "That must be tough," or "How can I help you get into the pool?" You might be wondering about this man's condition.

Instead of one of those expected responses, Jesus asks a different question: "*Do you want to get well?*" To us, that sounds rather stupid. Why wouldn't a man who has been lying by a healing pool for 38 years want to get well?

But Jesus is the master psychologist. He knows what to ask to probe into the heart of our paralysis:

"Do you want to get well?"

Assignment One – Exploring Our Reluctance

"Do you want to get well?"

It's a crucial question for recovering men today. Let's be honest. The Principles we're teaching you in this Captives Free Guide aren't rocket science. The exercises and tasks aren't the least bit difficult to understand. Achieving sobriety and experiencing the freedom that goes with it is a pretty simple concept. So why is it so difficult to do?

Answering that question requires that you examine your heart. Sure, a part of you wants to be free of your sin. In some ways you want to live in fidelity and purity. At least you'd like to be released from your shame. But do you *really* want to get well?

Journaling Exercise: *Do You Want to Get Well?*

Write any reasons you can think of why you shouldn't give up your addiction. Don't be pious and say you don't have any. What factors have kept you from embracing recovery? What excuses have you made about how hard it is to find help?

James, the brother of Christ, says that we can be guilty of being “double-minded.” He writes, “Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8). There is a part of you that has wanted to get well, and a part of you that has not. Sex has been your most important need, and, as such, it's been an important “friend.” It's been what you thought about in your loneliest and most stressful times. You wonder who and how you will be without your addiction. Your sexual fantasies brought you “comfort,” or so you thought. It's hard to think about being without them.

Understand that you may have to grieve the loss of your addiction in order to get well.

Yes, your addictive thoughts and behavior are sinful. That's true. But it's also true that you'll probably go through a grieving process as you take the journey of healing. It's a normal part of recovery. It's even necessary as you wrestle with surrender. God understands.

Luke 14:25-33 talks about “*counting the cost*.” That's an important exercise if you intend to be transformed. It's vital that you examine the depths of your heart – the reluctance as well as the willingness.

Editor's Note

We've added a discussion of “Grieving” at the end of these exercises to bring additional perspective to the concept of loss of your addiction. Most addicts experience a major sense of loss as they embark on the journey of recovery. Feel free to review that information at any time during the following exercises.

Journaling Exercise: Counting the Cost

1. Make a list of what it will cost you to get well. Which behaviors will you have to give up? (Review your work in Assignment One of Principle One if you need to.) Which friends must you avoid because they encourage your sinfulness instead of your purity? Will you have to change jobs or clubs or activities or residences? How you dress or where you go for recreation? The way you interact with the opposite (or same) sex? What on-going consequences are you going to have to face with acting out more? Be specific in counting the cost.

2. Next, examine your feelings. Write the emotions you experience when you think about what it would be like to be free from your sexual sin. Sure, you probably feel some gladness, but probe deeper. You may also feel some fear or sadness, or even anger. After all, your addiction has been your friend for a long time. Confess to God all your feelings, the “bad” ones as well as the “acceptable” ones. Admit honestly to Him the parts of your spirit that may resist surrendering your addiction and your control over your life.

3. Write a goodbye letter to your addicted self. This task may be difficult and challenging. Our addictive nature has been dependable and predictable in providing us our way to escape feelings. For many of us, this addict has been with us for a long time. Saying goodbye forever may become emotional. In many ways, the lines that defined our true selves or our God-given identity, and that of our addictive side, have become tragically blurred. When you are finished, read the letter out loud to yourself. Read it to your sponsor and maybe your group.

Perhaps you're feeling ashamed or even hopeless after examining your acting out behaviors, the consequences you've experienced, and the part of your spirit that doesn't want to give up your addiction. You've remembered your earlier attempts to achieve sexual purity, and you wonder how this time can be different. What's going to make this effort succeed?

Your work in Assignment One of the first Principle highlighted your powerlessness over the sexual sin in your life, and you now see the depth of your bondage. Maybe you're more afraid than you've ever been. It's beginning to dawn on you that God, also, is aware of your sins. He knows the depravity of your thoughts and actions. How could there possibly be any hope for one like you?

This central question brings us to the heart of Principle Two. It is, indeed, a heart question, as you seek to repair (or perhaps to create for the first time) your relationship with God. Can you trust Him with your heart? Can you believe in the grace of His Son to be sufficient to cover all your sins? You're convinced your sin matters to God, but does your pain matter, too?

Despite our claim to be a Christian, when we're totally honest, most of us don't fully trust God. Many of us hardly trust Him. Some of us don't trust Him at all. You know you *believe* in God. That's not the question. The problem isn't belief; it's *faith*. **Do you trust that God will be enough?** That's the core question of Principle Two.

You may feel ashamed of this lack of faith in God. It may be one of your hidden secrets, along with the ones you admitted in your work of Principle One. You don't understand how you can distrust God, because you've been involved with religious things most (or all) of your life.

The answer probably lies in the explanation of spiritual abuse. Briefly, spiritual abuse occurs when someone uses the Bible more as a weapon than as a guide. It's when others attempt to motivate you into right actions by fear or shame, instead of by encouraging you into a loving relationship with God. Spiritual abuse also happens when you experience any other kind of abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual) at the hands of someone who is a spiritual figure in your life. That means that if you were abused by a pastor, youth leader, or someone in a similar role, you're automatically a victim of spiritual abuse. You may want to review the section in *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction* for a reminder of what it means to have been spiritually abused.

Like other forms of abuse, spiritual abuse distorts our view of God. We naturally form our view of God according to our experiences with our earthly parents, especially our fathers. If your dad was physically or sexually abusive, how can you believe God wants the best for you? If a spiritual authority figure was harsh and judgmental, how can you understand grace? How can you trust God to meet your needs and to love you unconditionally if you haven't known safe people who loved you, no matter what you did?

Journaling Exercise: Examining Your View of God

Write a description of your view of God. What is God like in your mind? What are some words that describe Him? (If you'd prefer, draw a picture of how you see God.) Remember, the way you write or how well you draw doesn't matter. Don't worry about grammar or artistic ability. What's important is that you clearly identify what you really believe about God.

Most people who struggle with their sexual behavior feel terribly alone. You're isolated and desperately lonely. You feel alienated from God and others. Yes, the secret of your sexual sin keeps you from real intimacy with others, but the issue likely goes far beyond your problem with addiction. Your history of feeling isolated and alone probably dates back long before you started acting out. It probably began in your family. It comes from the core wounds of abandonment.

A thorough explanation of what it means to have been abandoned is found in primary sources like *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*. We also give a brief description in this

Captives Free Guide in Assignment Three of Principle One. Review some of these materials if necessary.

For our purpose here, remember that we're abandoned when some of our fundamental needs for physical, emotional, sexual, or spiritual nurture aren't met by our caregivers. As I outlined about spiritual abuse in the last section, if a key spiritual figure in your life wasn't available in some way (physically or emotionally), then you've suffered spiritual abandonment. Again, that experience will color your view of God. You'll have difficulty believing God is really concerned about you.

Journaling Exercise: Healing Your View of God

- 1. List the people you feel abandoned you in some critical way. Describe the abandonment.*
- 2. Find five Scriptures that describe God's care and concern for you. Write down the references. Read them daily for the next week.*

The Grieving Process

"Fresh Hot Donuts!" Seeing the sign light up in the window of the local donuts shop is all that is needed for your mouth to water and for you to begin to crave the warm sugary treats. Those donuts did not appear magically out of thin air. No, there was a process that had to take place. The process began with the delivery of the materials, combining them to make dough, placing them in the fryer, turning them over, taking them out, and sprinkling them with sugar. Only when that process is done can you follow your process of entering the shop and buying the donuts and open the package. And only then can you enjoy one of life's simple pleasures.

Similarly, as you deal with your addiction you will be, or already are, going through a process of dealing with a loss. You may be thinking that what you lost you wanted to lose. The addiction that has plagued you throughout your life is something you have worked hard to "lose." But think about it for a moment. Why did you become addicted to sexual immorality? Did it give you comfort? On some level was it a companion that helped you through rough times. Whatever it is; masturbation, affairs, viewing pornography, it was a "friend." Now you are giving up that **"false friend"** and it is natural to go through a process of grieving that loss.

Just like when you make or buy donuts, your addictive behavior follows a process. Each step will bring you to the next. The process begins with denial. Likely you lived for a very long time in this wilderness. You did not think what you were doing was that bad or you thought you were not really hurting anyone. You used excuse after excuse to justify your actions even though you knew what you were doing was wrong. You refused to face reality. Those

donuts may satisfy the craving at the moment too, but they're not the healthiest choice. As you gain some sobriety from your addiction, you become angry. You may push away those who are close to you. You want someone to blame. Your anger may have many directions such as your family, God, your friends, even yourself. By striking out you are avoiding addressing the pain you have.

Next, you try to cope by bargaining. You don't want to give this *friend* up, so you try to have the best of both worlds. You may say to yourself that you will limit your addiction activities, or you will balance those activities by "doing the right thing" like going to recovery groups. You are looking at the stark possibility of losing a lifelong *friend* forever and you are trying to find a way to keep it. As you bargain you are trying to avoid the pain. You are attempting to make the outcome of the process more palatable.

Once you realize the bargaining isn't going to work you become depressed. This may very well be an entirely new experience for you. After all you have had your *friend* with you most of your life to help you through difficult times. Now you are coping without that *friend* to medicate the pain. You feel alone and disheartened. You become discouraged. Understanding the depression should give you hope. By experiencing it you are moving toward the final step in this process, acceptance.

Only when you accept your loss can you finally say goodbye to it. Acceptance is not giving up. Rather, it is an understanding you have a new reality that does not depend on your old friend. It is when you accept God's love and His plan for your life. Acceptance is not necessarily the end of the process. Dealing with loss is not a "one and done" process. As you deal with one loss you are likely to discover you have other losses and the process continues as your recovery and healing continues.

For more in-depth information to help you process your loss, check out our Grieving Guide which is available through the Captives Free website.

PRINCIPLE THREE

We make a list of our sins and weaknesses and confess those to a person of spiritual authority.

Telling the Truth: I Must Leave the Darkness

Your earlier work in Principle One called for you to admit to yourself and your Captives Free Group the truth about your sexual sin. In Principle Two you affirmed that God is trustworthy and faithful to transform your life if you surrender to Him. Principle Three confronts your sinful nature and eventually prompts you to confess your sins to others.

Working on Principle Three will be painful, just as it was painful to complete the exercises of Principle One. This kind of pain, actually, can be very helpful in the journey of transformation. Hurting reminds us of how far we are from God. The sting in our heart teaches us to turn to Him. Experiencing consequences forces us to let go of control. A tender conscience motivates us to refrain from causing more harm. Don't be afraid of the pain of these assignments, but instead, walk through it to the place of living in freedom every day.

This third Principle challenges you to understand your dark side - your sinful nature. We are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God, according to Paul. We are inheritors of original sin: *the sin of pride*. Your addicted self – your sinful self – has pridefully (fearfully) tried to hide the truth about your life. You've believed that you are bad and worthless and that others wouldn't love you if they really knew you, especially if they knew about your sexual sins. You've feared that if people knew your secrets, they would hate you and leave you. These descriptions illustrate a principle known as "intimacy disorder," which we'll discuss more toward the end of this first assignment of Principle Three.

Assignment One – Admitting Our Darkness

Lies: Our Way of Managing Our Fear

The result of your fear about your sins being discovered is that you've become a chronic liar. You've sought to manipulate the opinion of others, because you've feared being caught and facing the consequences. Perhaps you've arrogantly thought you could get away with your lies. Principle Three calls for you to courageously acknowledge the truth about your life.

Remember that we seek to admit our sinfulness not to increase our shame, but to learn to depend more on God.

We hope you've already begun to tell the truth in your Captives Free Group. We pray you've found it a safe place to share your reality and your pain. We trust you're getting some practice in exposing your darkness to the light. Allow God to illuminate the way as you work on these exercises.

Assignment One explores how you have lied to yourself and to others. Alcoholics Anonymous has many great slogans about recovery, two of which are applicable to our problem with lying. AA talks about an addict's "stinking thinking," and asserts "Your own best thinking is what got you here." Clinicians might say that we have "distorted cognitive thinking." Schools of counseling, both secular and Christian, sometimes approach our healing through attempting to change our thoughts. As Christians, we want to take every thought captive to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), including the stinking thinking of all the lies we have believed.

The first part of understanding the lies we've told to others is to understand the lies we have told *ourselves*. Lying is part of our original sin nature. When the serpent tempted Eve, he told the first lie, which was that she could eat the fruit of the forbidden tree and that she wouldn't die. Lying to ourselves often imitates that initial falsehood: We believe we can get away with something and that we won't get hurt by our sin.

Have you told yourself these kinds of lies? That your sexual sins wouldn't hurt anyone else or even yourself? That you were different, the rules didn't apply to you, and that you could escape the consequences? This stinking thinking is a lot like eating too much food and believing we won't get fat, drinking too much alcohol and thinking we won't harm our bodies, or avoiding healthy habits and assuming we won't get sick.

Did you ever convince yourself that you wouldn't get caught? Did you think you were being careful and discreet? What precautions have you taken to hide your secrets? What manipulations have you done to avoid exposure?

Did you assure yourself that your sins weren't so bad? Have you justified a "lesser" sexual sin because it prevented you from doing a more serious one? Did you believe that you had the power to quit acting out if you really wanted to? Did you tell yourself that your sins weren't all that deadly? For example, have you ever thought that as long as your sins were never discovered, no one would get hurt?

Journaling Exercise: Your Lying

- *What lies have you told yourself about your sins concerning your sexual and relational behavior?*
- *Think back over your life. Do you remember the first lie you ever told to cover up sinful behavior? How old were you? Who did you lie to? Did you get away with it?*
- *Think next about the first lie you told specifically to cover up a sexual sin. Again, how old were you? Describe the situation and your lies about it. Did you get caught?*
- *If you can, trace the history of your deceitful behavior since that time. Make a list in your journal of all the major lies you've told.*
- *What was your most recent lie? When? Who did you tell it to? Are you still keeping it a secret?*

Intimacy Disorder: Our Fear of Being Known

When we experience intimacy disorder, it is hardest to tell the truth to those whom we love the most. Another way of describing this phenomenon is that the person we are most afraid of losing will be the *hardest* one to let in on the truth.

You may be experiencing this dynamic in your group. It may have been relatively easy to come into your Captives Free meeting and get honest. After all, the other men there are in the same boat. They, too, are sexual sinners whose lives are (or were) out of control. You're reasonably certain you won't be judged too harshly, because the other group members have acted out in similar ways. Besides, the stakes aren't that high with your group. So what if they do think you're pretty awful? They're bound by a pledge of confidentiality and anonymity. They can't tell anyone else your secrets, and you can simply not return to the group. What have you lost?

You're finding it much more difficult; however, to tell the truth to somebody you really love. You may believe it's impossible to get totally honest with the most important people in your life. Your fear of being rejected if you're intimately known is keeping you in bondage and shame.

Journaling Exercise: Your Fear

Write specific names of those people whom you are the most afraid of finding out the truth about your secrets, particularly your sexual sins. Obviously, if you are married, your wife will probably be the first and most important person on this list. Next to each name, write the outcome that you most fear.

Name

What You Are Most Afraid Of

How much have you been worrying about how others will react when they learn about your behaviors? Now, ask yourself if you're willing to go through life worrying about these kinds of consequences. Part of your process of transformation will be to build a character of honesty. You will no longer be comfortable living with your lies and deceptions. You'll long for integrity. Start thinking about the courage it will take to get honest with the people whom you love the most.

One of the great principles of becoming faithful and true is accepting the risk involved in telling the truth.

Journaling Exercise: Courage

Write a prayer asking for courage to tell the truth, even when you're afraid of the result. Ask God to help you trust Him with the outcome of this act of surrender.

Taking this kind of risk is one practical way we surrender our life to Christ. We clearly see that we can't control our own life. When we accept that God is in charge of our future, then what risks are we able to take? Other people's reactions, including our wives', are in the hands of God. Can you also surrender this outcome to Christ and dare to disclose the truth?

Editor's Note

So far in this Assignment, we've been digging through the dirt and debris of your addictive life in the effort to get honest with yourself and others and to prayerfully seek the courage to tell the truth. It's only natural at this point that you feel bad about your behaviors, and wonder if there's any hope for you. Now seems a good time to introduce the fact that there are physiological, actually neurochemical, factors involved in being addicted to sex. The following presents some introductory information on the subject.

Limbic System or The Survival Brain

Understanding how our brains work can provide you with some understanding of how you got to a point of sexual addiction. That greater understanding can help you develop strategies that lead to recovery. Healing the brain from past traumas (core wounds) can allow an addict greater control when resolving issues.

There are two parts of our brains, the neocortex and the limbic system. The neocortex, the frontal thinking brain, receives and stores information for making decisions. The limbic system, the survival brain, controls all the automatic systems of the body, and the survival responses such as your fight or flight mechanism. The limbic brain has no sense of time, and memories of long-ago events can seem as fresh as just a moment ago.

When events are fed into your brain, they are evaluated as either safe or dangerous. This evaluation is made based on past experiences that are stored in the limbic brain. With no sense of time, trauma that occurred in early childhood can have great bearing on your sense of danger in the present. This trauma can be a core wound that may trigger as powerful a response in you today as it did when it first occurred.

Core wounds are unresolved traumas that are generally inflicted during childhood, and can lead to destructive behaviors. The pain caused by a core wound is often medicated by some form of addictive behavior or substance to numb or lessen the pain. As you heal your brain from these past traumas you gain greater control in dealing with current issues.

The limbic brain is all about survival and will react to anything it perceives as dangerous. This reaction can show up as anxiety, fear, or depression. The limbic brain will review processes that had dealt with these emotions successfully in the past and attempt to recreate that process. In this way your addictions become entrenched in our behaviors.

Your brain functions through chemistry. For example, fear creates a flush of adrenaline, endorphins cause a sense of well-being. Compulsive behaviors such as using external stimulants or depressants, like drugs or alcohol, or the internal stimulants or depressants

of sexual acting out create the chemistry in your brain to deal with our core wounds. Your limbic brain learns that using this internal behavior can lessen the pain of a core wound. And those lessons of how to avoid core wound pain are re-enforced each time they are used, until that becomes the only way you can imagine dealing with the pain.

The good news is this condition is not permanent. There is no hard wire that is in place in your brain that forces you to continue with your destructive behaviors. You can renew your brain. You can retrain your limbic brain to react differently when you feel you are in danger. You can seek to understand your core wounds, and how you have medicated them in the past, and seek new healthy ways to address them going forward. These paths in your brain that have been beaten down by constant use can be abandoned, and new paths can be forged.

The MERGE exercise can help you identify when you are in danger of going off your chosen track of recovery. For more information to help you better understand the limbic system etc. refer to page 37.

Editor's Note:

The following pages describe the Recovery Highway and present the **MERGE** exercise, which can help you to address the influence of the neurochemical issues discussed above, but also alert you to the dangers that can interfere with your progress.

Recovery Highway

If you've ever taught anyone how to drive, you probably realized that at first they did not have control of the vehicle. They were weaving from one side of the road to the other, reacting to everything they did. In fact, they were overreacting, overcompensating, and you both had a very rough ride. When another car approached you and they saw it, they actually began to steer their car towards it! At that point you probably grabbed the wheel and took control of the car. Race car drivers know this tendency very well; that we can easily wind up driving to where we are looking. If we look just over the hood, we will try to drive to that spot on the pavement. If we look at an approaching car, or at the wall on the edge of the track, we will steer towards that car or the wall. Driving instructors tell us to look well down the road, to keep our vision high because our vehicles will go where we look.

As we learn how to live life in recovery, we are the same as a new driver. We look just over the hood and have a very bumpy ride bouncing from one side of the lane to the other and hitting every pot hole we see. When we look up and focus well down the road, we can see where we want to go, and our steering becomes smooth.

The recovery highway is a tool to allow visual representation of your recovery plan. It will help you to concisely place activities and thoughts regarding your recovery. There are four parts to the highway: Destination, Roadway, Exit Ramp, and Bottom of the Ramp.

Destination: Sobriety, recovery, freedom, God's purpose.

Roadway: Positive self-care, vision that leads you to your destination.

Exit Ramp: Rituals, triggers, vulnerabilities that sidetrack you from your destination.

Bottom of the Ramp: Behaviors including lying, adultery, masturbation, pornography.

Use the following diagrams to list the following:

Where you want to go: Do you want to become sober and stop acting out? Do you want a stronger personal relationship with God? Do you want to restore your marriage? Do you want to prepare yourself for a lifetime of joy with the person God has planned for you, even if that person has yet to be revealed to you? This is your destination; God's ultimate purpose for your life.

How you plan to get there: These are healthy disciplines that take you along the recovery highway to your goal of sobriety.

- Having and attending an accountability group on a regular basis is critical.
- Participating in counseling both individual and relational (for those who are married or engaged).
- Practicing spiritual discipline including prayer, Bible study, doing devotions, corporate worship with other believers (church service attendance), developing a personal relationship with God that includes having personal conversations with God.
- Paying attention to your physical health including regular exercise, good nutrition, personal hygiene, and appropriate doctor visits.
- Focusing on your contribution to your community including your work and your vocations.
- Accepting financial responsibility.
- Taking care of your environment including our home, workplace, even your car.
- Healthy recreation is also important. This is doing things that are fun such as hobbies, sports, time spent with your spouse and friends. You should also include your search for your passion and purpose in your life. This is your recovery highway to your destination.

NOTE: If you're married and were to get in the car with your wife and begin driving without telling her where you were going, she would soon begin to question you. She would want to know—after all she's on this trip too. She has likely been on previous "trips" with you and did not like where you went. This is why it's important to share your Recovery Highway with her. She is your partner in these travels—she deserves to know.

What can take you off course, the exit ramp: You should include things that take you off the recovery highway such as your rituals, thoughts, triggers, and vulnerabilities. Be specific.

You may list here places, people, technologies, or actions that you need to restrict, remove or rethink.

Where you do NOT want to go, the bottom of your exit ramp: These are behaviors you agreed to stop. Basically, not doing these things is your definition of sobriety. These should include, but are not limited to, lying, adultery, masturbation, and pornography.

Use the following drawings to place your destination and how you plan to arrive there. Fill in your exit ramp with the things you know you should avoid that will take you to the bottom of your exit ramp. State your "No Go Zone." Be clear and give specifics.

———— The MERGE Exercise ————

A Recovery Highway Self Check for RELAPSE prevention.

The MERGE Exercise is an adaptation of the FASTER Scale developed by a Christian Counselor named Michael Dye of the Genesis Process, and can point out the subconscious and emotional things in your life that indicate movement back toward addictive behavior; i.e. RELAPSE.

Imagine you are speeding along your Recovery Highway. As with most highways, there are billboard advertisements telling you what is at the next exit. This isn't your exit; you are nowhere near your destination. Yet, the billboards are enticing you to stop. Maybe you let up on the gas pedal and start thinking of exiting your recovery highway. But you don't just make a right turn to exit. Rather, you begin to MERGE over to the right. But in order to MERGE you will be taking specific actions. Not all may be present all the time, but the presence of these may tell you that you are headed to an exit ramp.

M

Making decisions about your recovery. You begin to rearrange your priorities. You move your eyes from sobriety and begin looking at the exit.

- Keeping secrets, changes in goals, isolating
- Bored, less time/energy for God, meetings, or church
- Avoiding support and accountability, hiding money
- Superficial conversations, sarcasm
- Flirting, obsessed with relationships
- Breaking promises/commitments, neglecting family
- Preoccupation with material things, television, or entertainment
- Procrastination, over confidence

E

Energy from emotions. You draw energy from your emotions.

- Anxiety, worry, being fearful, replaying old negative thoughts
- Using profanity, perfectionism, resentful

- Judging other's motives, mind reading, co-dependent rescuing
- Making goals and lists you cannot complete
- Fantasy, problems sleeping, creating drama
- Gossiping, trouble concentrating
- Use of over-the-counter medication for pain, sleep or weight control

R**Running from depression. You are avoiding the truth.**

- Super busy, workaholic, cannot relax, driving too fast, not slowing down
- Feeling driven, cannot turn off thoughts, making excuses for having to "do it all"
- Repetitive negative thoughts, hard to listen to others
- Skipping meals, binge eating, too much caffeine
- Overspending, excessive exercising, obsessive video gaming
- Cannot identify feelings or needs, dramatic mood swings
- Lust, nervousness, avoiding support, hard to be alone or with others

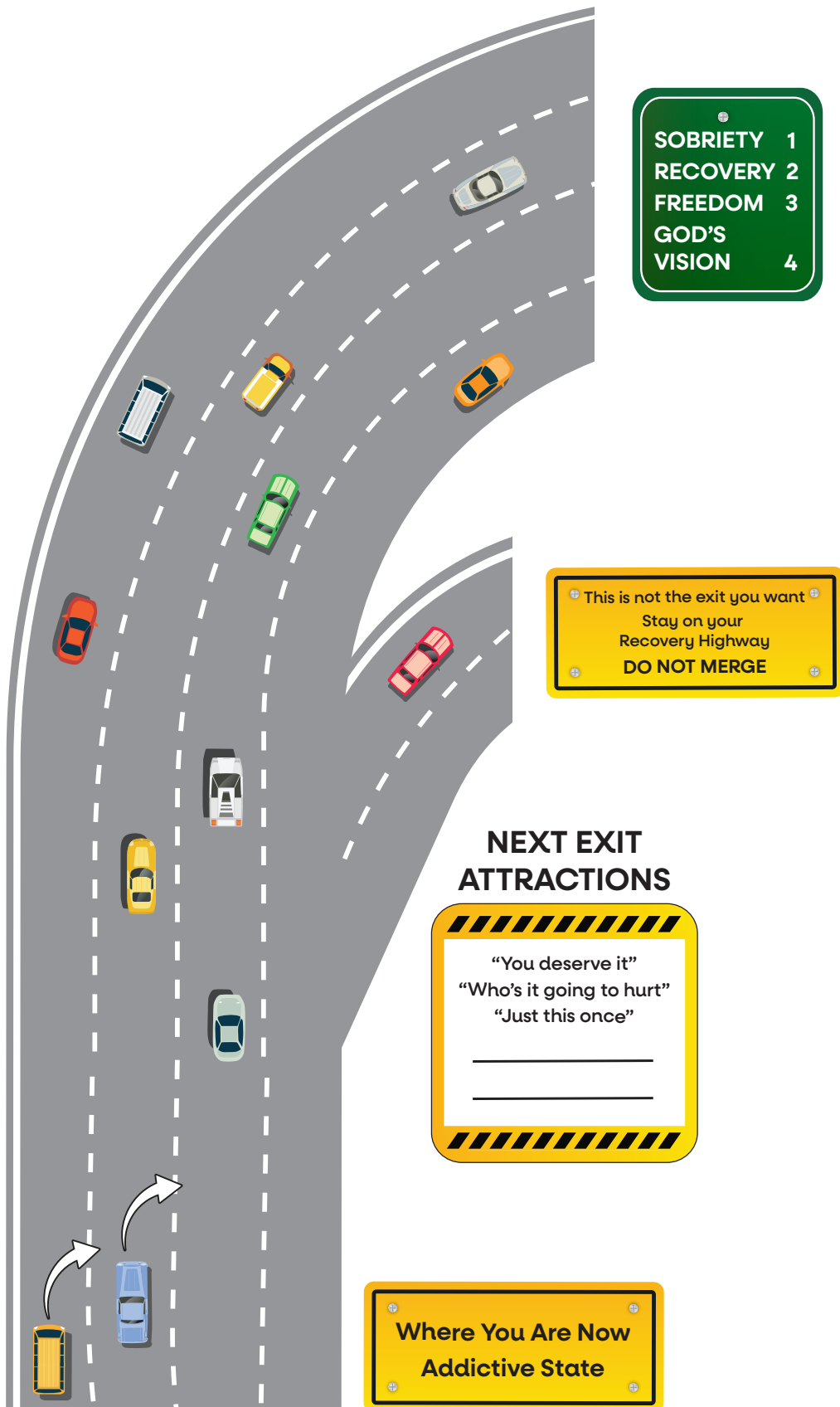
G**Gaining control with anger or aggression. You are trying to change the conversation.**

- Procrastination bringing crises with money, work, or relationships
- Sarcasm, feeling superior, linear or "all or nothing" thinking, obsessive thoughts
- Low tolerance for criticism, defensive, overreacting, road rage, resentments
- Self-pity, isolating, feeling alone, no one understands, intimidation, aggressiveness
- Blaming others or having to be right, unable to forgive
- Belief people are avoiding you, irrational arguments
- Problems with health; digestion, headaches, aches, pains

E**Exhausted. You are running out of gas.**

- Panicked, confused, hopeless, forgetful, unable to cope, overwhelmed, helpless
- Sleep problems, too much or too little, loss of appetite
- Uncontrolled expression of emotions, self-abuse, suicidal thoughts
- Unable to think clearly, tired, numb, irritable, pessimistic
- Wanting to run away, missing work, feeling others are angry with you
- No goals, always in the response mode, not returning phone calls or text messages
- Craving old coping behaviors such as drugs or alcohol
- Seeking old unhealthy people or places, either in reality or virtually

MERGE EXERCISE

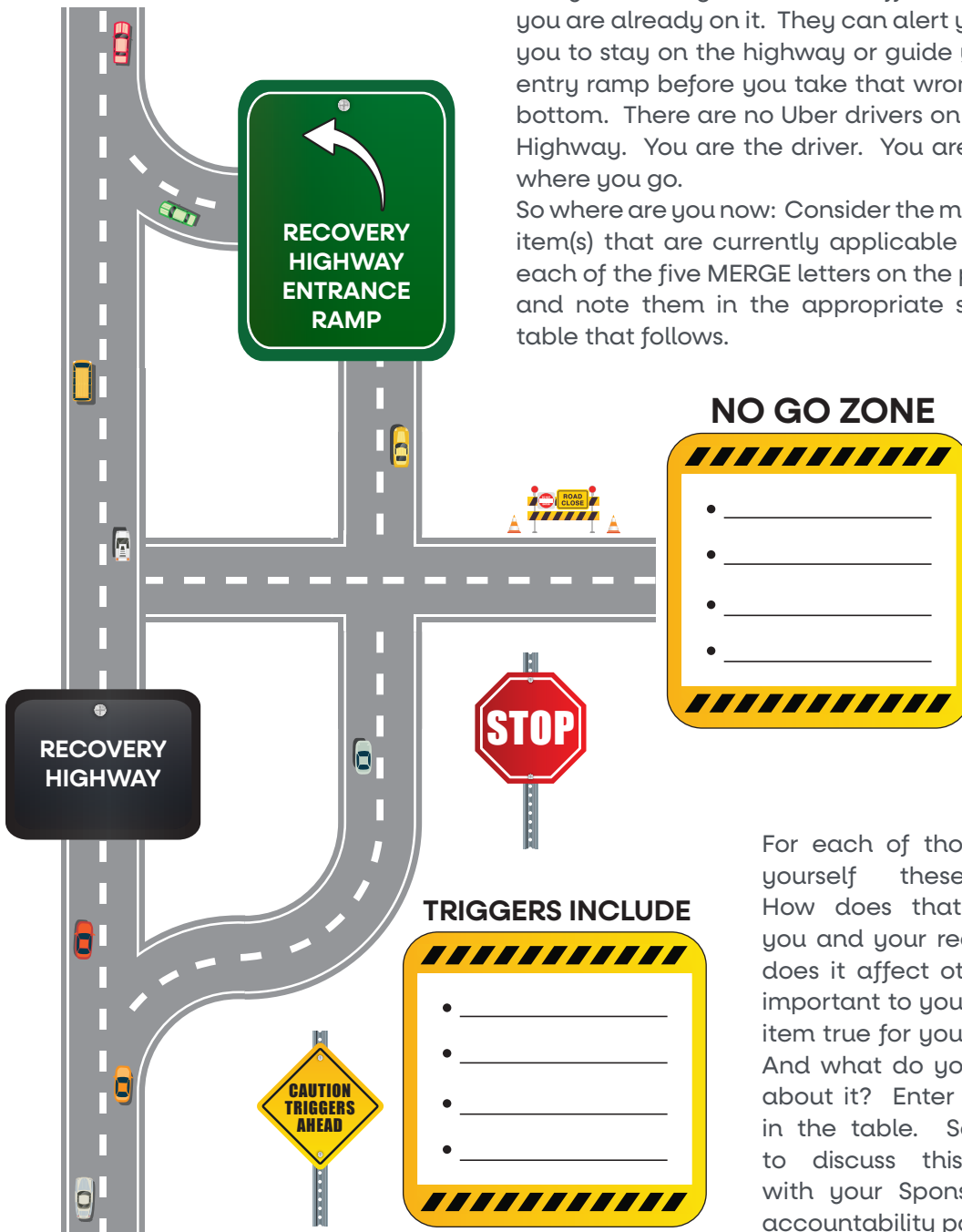


RECOVERY HIGHWAY

Once you have merged over, you see the exit ramp and enter it. This is where you are extremely vulnerable, your triggers begin to fire, and your rituals begin. At this point, you can follow the ramp to the bottom, which is RELAPSE. There you are going to the places you swore you would never again enter. You're giving up and giving in to your addiction. But it's not too late, you can still look for the re-entry ramp. You can use the boundaries and drills, such as making phone calls, that you have in place and veer back onto your recovery highway to continue in the direction of your destination. Your fellow group members are

also traveling the highway with you. Sort of like a group of "bikers" traveling together, they can often see you veering towards an off ramp or see that you are already on it. They can alert you and guide you to stay on the highway or guide you to the re-entry ramp before you take that wrong turn at the bottom. There are no Uber drivers on the Recovery Highway. You are the driver. You are in control of where you go.

So where are you now: Consider the most significant item(s) that are currently applicable to you under each of the five MERGE letters on the previous page and note them in the appropriate spaces in the table that follows.



For each of those items, ask yourself these questions: How does that item affect you and your recovery? How does it affect others that are important to you? Why is that item true for you at this point? And what do you need to do about it? Enter your answers in the table. Set up a time to discuss this assessment with your Sponsor and your accountability partners.

Letter	Description	Item(s)	Answer(s)
M	Making decisions about your recovery		
E	Energy from emotions		
R	Running from depression		
G	Gaining control with anger or aggression		
E	Exhausted		

PRINCIPLE FOUR

We seek accountability and to build our character as children of God.

Growing in Transformation: I Mature in Character

Principle Four is about accountability and about character. In the early days of learning about accountability you may have many mistaken notions of what it means. As addicts, most of us resist the idea of being accountable. We don't like being told what to do. We bristle at the thought of having to check in with someone. When an accountability partner gives or withholds his permission for us to do certain things, we protest that we're being treated like a child. We question why we should submit to another person or allow someone else to control us so tightly.

(Now, be honest: Isn't your reaction fairly similar to that just described?)

This mindset is what makes most addicts resistant to the idea of accountability. It also represents many of the misconceptions about what it means to be accountable to someone about your recovery.

Assignment One - Accepting Accountability

Let's examine first your need for accountability. You may still believe you can recover on your own. (Or maybe by now you're convinced of the benefit of being in a Captives Free Group, but that's as far as you want to go.) We feel compelled to speak the truth to you in love: Remember it's your own "best thinking" that got you in this mess, right? You thought you could figure it out on your own, that you could avoid the consequences, or that the rules didn't apply to you. These may have been some of the lies you told yourself. (Look back to the work you did in Assignment One of Principle Three.)

Here's what God says: *"Fools think they need no advice, but the wise listen to others"* (Proverbs 12:15, New Living Bible). A beginning step in accepting accountability is to recognize our "foolish" status regarding our sexual sins and our ability to change on our own. The wise person listens to the advice of godly men who are further down the road in their journey of living with sexual integrity.

One helpful resource in changing your attitude is the book of Nehemiah, which gives a wonderful description of accountability. A section called "Tying it all Together" at the back of this Captives Free Guide details the teachings from Nehemiah, and we suggest you read

it as you work on Principle Four. The book covers a broad spectrum of principles that apply to the process of transformation, but it also contains a blueprint for accountability. The first principle outlined from Nehemiah is especially applicable here: *Accountability begins with humility*. Admit your pride and your powerlessness to achieve lasting change on your own and take another huge step of surrender. Become teachable.

Next, challenge your negative mindset about accountability. We encourage you to view the concept as a vital tool of recovery, instead of some kind of negative force hovering over you. Like boundaries, accountability provides guidance and protection for your journey. An accountability partner is someone who watches your back, who stays with you on the wall (refer to Nehemiah for an explanation of that phrase), and who walks beside you to steady you if you begin to fall.

This kind of primary accountability partner is called a **sponsor**, which is a term borrowed from the Twelve Step program of AA. This person is the one main guide who directs your progress through the program.

It's important to point out that a primary mistake made by recovering men is to have only one accountability partner. You may have tried that approach, and it hasn't fully worked. As an addict, you're too smart and too skillful at deceit to let only one person truly know you. It will take more than that one man to keep you honest and directed in the early days of your recovery. That's why it's so critical that you participate in your Captives Free Group and allow a *number* of men to know your heart.

But, as AA says, "First things first." In this initial assignment of Principle Four, you have one main job: To find a **sponsor**. Following are some descriptions of a sponsor to help you better understand what I mean.

Sponsors

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

2 Timothy 2:2 NIV

These roles of a sponsor should be helpful in your recovery:

_____ A sponsor is someone who will hold you **Accountable**. With this person you will be able to share all of your past sexual sins, your acting out behaviors, your rituals, and your fantasies. Your sponsor will help you develop a plan for staying sober. If he ever sees you coming close to doing any of your rituals or acting out behaviors, he will directly confront you about them in love.

_____ A sponsor is someone who will give you **Encouragement**. As you slowly make progress a sponsor will celebrate your success. He'll be your biggest cheerleader.

_____ A sponsor is someone you can talk to and who will **Listen**. Whenever you feel tempted, lonely, hurt, frightened, sad, or angry, you can call a

sponsor to talk things over. Sometimes he will meet with you during such emergencies until the crisis passes.

_____ A sponsor is someone with whom you can **Pray**. The two of you can seek the Lord's guidance together. You may also share Bible study.

_____ A sponsor is a **Model**. Ideally, he should be someone who has had at least one year of sobriety from his addictions. His success should serve as an inspiration to you.

_____ A sponsor is a **Guide**. He'll teach you tools to use in recovery and show you the right path to be successful. He'll go over your Captives Free Guide assignments as you do them. He can direct your reading outside of the group and may have ideas about therapy or spiritual direction. He is the general of your army.

These descriptions are clearly positive, aren't they? They're appealing, rather than threatening. I think we all have longed for this kind of person in our lives. We can become interested in (and even welcome) an accountability relationship with this kind of sponsor!

Who, then, can serve as your sponsor? It cannot be your spouse, and it cannot be a member of the opposite sex. A sponsor should be someone you can relate to, and preferably someone who is a recovering sex addict with more sobriety than yourself. Some suggestions include:

- a relative
- a friend
- a pastor
- someone in the church
- someone in your Captives Free Group
- someone with AA or SA experience

Some groups will be so new that there won't be men with lengthy sobriety. Fortunately, sponsors don't always need to be recovering specifically from sexual addiction, which helps combat the lack of recovering men to serve as sponsors. Some Captive Free Groups may need to rely on finding sponsors in other places in addition to just within the group itself.

In many ways having a sponsor will be like having a surrogate parent. A sponsor must be tough, wise, and loving. If you were abandoned emotionally, physically, or spiritually by one of your parents, having a sponsor may seem very strange. Addicts, after all, are impaired in terms of intimate relationships. There may be times when you don't like your sponsor, and that's OK. He is like a signpost, showing you the way. There are times that we don't like the speed limit signs on the road when we are in a hurry. There will be times when you don't like what your sponsor is telling you. We love to isolate and not be responsible to or connect genuinely with anyone else. On the other hand, a sponsor may also be a wonderful presence in your life that you've never found before. In the surrogate parent role, a sponsor can help heal some of your wounds from the past.

So just exactly how do you interact with a sponsor? What specifically do you do together? Following is another checklist.

Concrete things you should do with your sponsor:

_____ Call every day. (Yes, every single day.) If you're not in the habit of talking with him every day, you won't pick up the phone to call when you're tempted to act out. Ask your sponsor to check on you if you fail to contact him daily. Perhaps you only make a brief check-in to report that you're sober today and doing OK. Other times you'll need to talk more extensively about some situation or struggle you're facing. Just be sure to make daily contact with your sponsor. Talking by phone is better than sending an email.

_____ Share how you're feeling with him. During each daily phone call or email, report on what you're feeling. Identify whether you're feeling glad, sad, mad, afraid, lonely, hurt, guilty, or ashamed. (You may be feeling one or all or some combination.) It's not your sponsor's job to fix your feelings, but it's good for you to get them out.

_____ State any lustful thoughts or temptations you've felt during the day. Remember, bringing the secrets into the light removes their power. As AA says, "We're as sick as our secrets."

_____ Confess any boundary violations you've committed or slips you've had.

_____ Ask for specific accountability about an area or issue as needed. As an example, you might ask your sponsor to question you about your computer use, or if you've avoided a former acting out partner when there's a possibility you might run into her (or him, if you struggle with same sex issues). Maybe you need to ask for accountability about where you go on your lunch break. You certainly need to be accountable about missing any Captives Free Group meetings.

_____ Process any circumstances or situations that are bothering you. If you've had a fight with your wife or a friend, talk with your sponsor about what you could do differently next time. If you're frustrated with your boss, get your sponsor's input. Talk about anything that is hindering your serenity.

_____ Work through these Principles of recovery. Share your journal or notebook of the writing assignments in this Captives Free Guide. Review especially your work in Principle Three – your "searching and fearless moral inventory," as AA calls it. The best way to do this work with your sponsor is face to face, if possible.

_____ Celebrate your progress in recovery. Be accountable about your sobriety date and celebrate milestones such as one week, one month, three months, six months, and a year. Take your sponsor out to lunch or for coffee and express your gratitude for the progress you're making with God's help and his.

Summary of the Roles of Sponsor and Group Member

Useful in identifying, recruiting, and setting expectations with your sponsor:

Sponsor Responsibilities	Group Member Responsibilities
Lovingly confront when needed, including possibly enforcing boundaries and consequences for group member	Submit to authority
Encourage the member with positive affirmations	Receive encouragement
Ensure group member submits a plan for his recovery and a contract about the sponsoring relationship	Prepare a plan of recovery and sign a contract with sponsor (see example)
Listen well (don't try to fix)	Share openly and honestly
Be available to group member	Contact sponsor regularly and consistently
Pray with group member and teach him to pray more deeply	Pray on the phone and in person with sponsor
Meet physically with the member at least once a week and check the Guide assignments	Meet with the sponsor and show the Guide assignments
Call the member if he doesn't call by a set time	Call the sponsor by a set time determined by the two of you
Strongly recommend the group member enter counseling if needed	Get a counselor if financially able
Ask the group member to state feelings	State feelings (use a feelings chart if necessary)
Ask if there are any lustful thoughts or temptations	Communicate honestly about the struggles of the day
Monitor the group member's self-care in terms of rest, diet, exercise, and living a balanced life	Practice healthy self-care regarding rest, diet, exercise, and balance between family, work, and play

*A sponsor can't meet all your needs himself,
and he won't be perfect or 100% available.*

Only God can be trusted to be totally dependable.

But a sponsor is a vital touchstone of your recovery program.

Journaling Exercise: Accepting Accountability

- 1. Is there anyone in your life right now who would be a candidate for a sponsor? List the names of as many possibilities as you can think of. Pray about each one and ask for God's guidance in your selection.*
- 2. Write down the date of your next Captives Free Group meeting. At that time, approach someone about being your sponsor. If you don't know anyone, your group may assign someone who has volunteered to be a temporary sponsor until you find a more permanent one. Don't worry about the temporary status. Just proceed in calling him every day until the next meeting and then try again.*
- 3. Write down the name of your sponsor, whether he's (she's) temporary or a more permanent choice. If you haven't found one, note again the date of the next meeting and repeat the process of asking for a sponsor. If you're still not successful, broaden your search to something like an AA group, where there is usually more long-term sobriety.*
- 4. Complete the Sponsor – Group Member Contract (sample given on the following page) to formalize the commitments you and your sponsor are making.*
- 5. In your journal, keep a log of the times you've called your sponsor and the times you've met. Keep it separate from your other work so you can access it easily. Refer to this record as a measurement of how well you're doing at staying connected. Report to your Captives Free Group about your contact with your sponsor.*

The next two pages contain a "Sponsor - Group Member Contract," which you and your sponsor should complete. The contract also has some sample questions and other criteria to help both of you understand and remain accountable to these commitments.

SPONSOR – GROUP MEMBER CONTRACT

Member Name: _____

Phones: Home _____ Work _____ Cell _____

Sponsor Name: _____

Phones: Home _____ Work _____ Cell _____

Group Leader Name: _____

Phones: Home _____ Work _____ Cell _____

Calling Schedule:

Sunday _____

Monday _____

Tuesday _____

Wednesday _____

Thursday _____

Friday _____

Saturday _____

Format for Daily Contact (*Details follow for each item*):

- **Check Feelings** (share core emotions, not just thoughts)
- **Get Current** (temptations, boundary violations, bothersome thoughts or situations, etc.)
- **Be Accountable** (about healthy choices and addictive behaviors – see explanation)
- **Share Bible reading** (or some other devotional or inspirational material)
- **Pray**

Healthy Choices:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Addictive Behaviors:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Others in My Accountability Circle:

Group Member's Signature and Date

Sponsor's Signature and Date

Explanation of the Items that Make Up Daily Contact with Sponsor

Feelings Check:

There are only a few core feelings, such as *glad (or joyful)*, *sad*, *mad*, *lonely*, *hurt*, *fearful (or scared)*, *guilty*, and *ashamed*. It's also possible to feel *numb*, which would be a ninth category.

Obviously, you'll experience gradations of these feelings, like *ecstatic* at just becoming engaged or *pleased* with the weather (both are variations of glad). You can be feeling *anxious* about an upcoming test or meeting or *terrified* because you've just been diagnosed with cancer (both are nuances of fear). Bottom line, though: all our emotions fall somewhere in one (or more) of these nine broad categories.

Often we share thoughts and describe them as feelings. For example, you might say, "I feel like you're not listening to me." That's a statement of opinion, not a feeling. The feeling would be, "I feel *hurt* when you don't listen to me" or "I feel *lonely* in this relationship and *angry* when you don't stop watching TV to listen to me." See the difference?

Editor's Notes

See the Feelings Wheel on the next page for an extensive compilation of feelings related to the core feeling categories that can help you learn to accurately identify and express your feelings to both your sponsor and others. The ability to do that is a key element in addressing the core wounds that established all those triggering neurochemical paths in your limbic system that you learned about in Assignment One of Principle Three. You are encouraged to keep a copy of the Feelings Wheel handy to help you properly identify exactly what you're feeling at critical times during your daily activities.

Sponsor's Questions:

"How are you feeling now? Have you had any other strong feelings today? What were they?"

When you communicate with your sponsor, include a "feelings check." Simply state your feeling(s) in that moment. If you had a different feeling(s) that dominated the day, share that, too.

Getting Current

To get current simply means to describe your day, including both significant events and the bothersome ones. Getting current is providing a "laundry list" of what's happening in your life, especially anything that's eroding your serenity. It also includes disclosing any boundary violations you've committed.

Sponsor's Questions

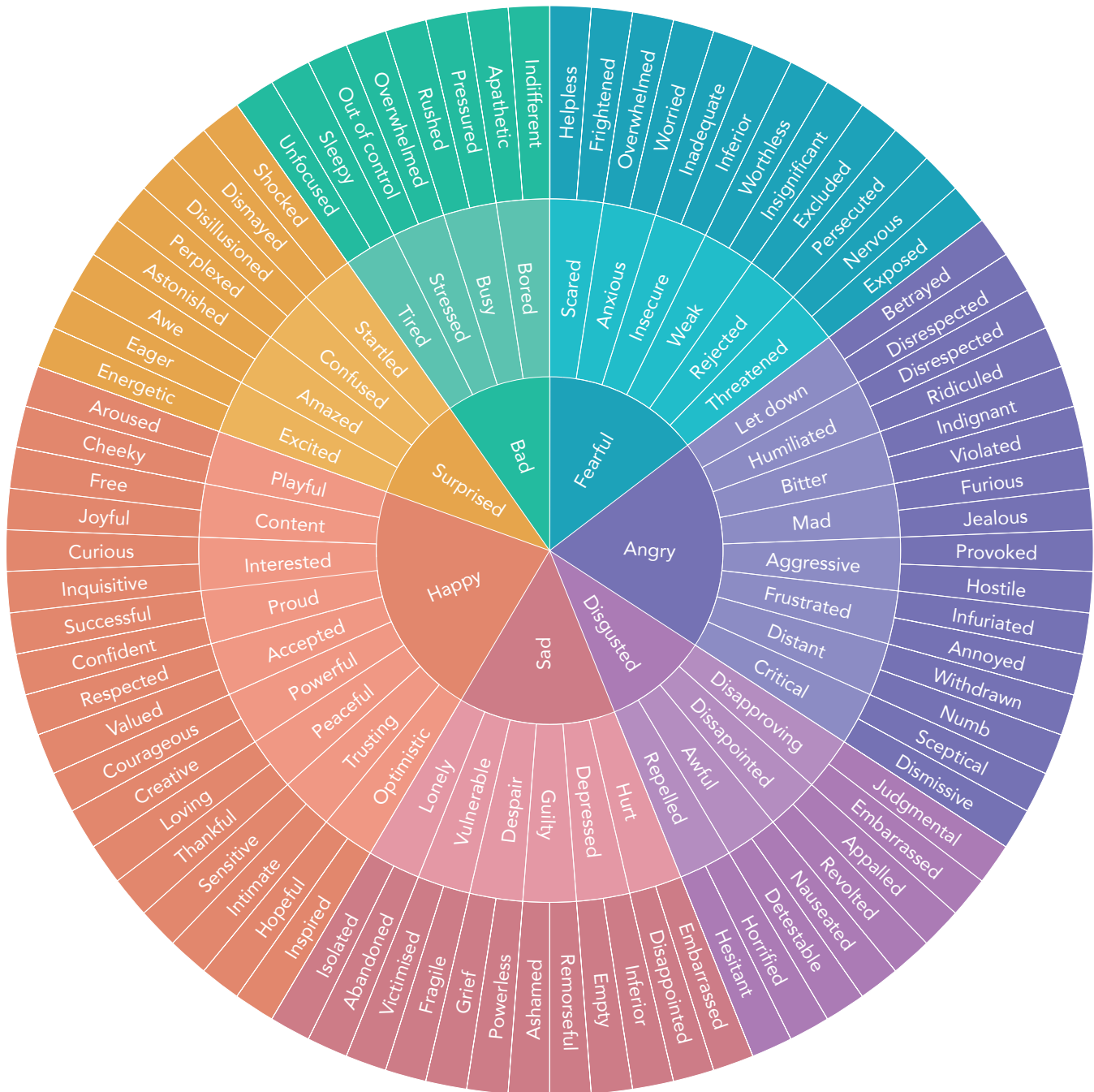
What's happening today?

Is anything bothering you?

Did you violate any boundaries?

What are you grateful for today?

The Feelings Wheel



Accountability:

Remember, your sponsor is your main accountability partner. He's the primary person you invite to question you about your recovery program. Your accountability report should cover your *participation* in your "healthy choices" (explained below) and your *avoidance* of your "addictive behaviors" (also explained).

Defining Addictive Behaviors

Many groups use the term "addictive behaviors" to describe conduct you need to avoid, such as these examples:

- objectifying
- viewing pornography or other stimulating material
- flirting or using sexual humor
- controlling self (in the sense of "white knuckling")
- compulsively watching TV
- compulsive shopping, cleaning, or doing any other secondary acting out behavior
- fantasizing
- masturbating
- controlling others
- compulsive eating or gambling
- compulsive exercising
- engaging in sexual sin with others

Defining Healthy Choices

In contrast, "healthy choices" describe positive actions and decisions you make daily, such as the following:

- eating well
- playing
- exercising/caring for your body
- connecting with safe people
- journaling your activities, thoughts, and feelings
- resting
- praying
- Bible reading / meditating
- practicing gratitude

Sponsor's Questions about Accountability

- *Did you engage in any medicating behaviors today?*
- *Did you objectify anyone today?*
- *Did you fantasize?*
- *Have you masturbated?*
- *Have you been on any inappropriate websites?*
- *Has there been any provocative behavior? Exhibitionism? Flirting?*
- *How much TV have you watched?*
- *Have you taken care of yourself physically? How much sleep did you get last night?*
- *Are there any specific areas where you need accountability?*
- *Have you fully disclosed everything you need to?*

Sexual Abstinence Period

These concepts about being accountable to a sponsor are tools to help you maintain sobriety. Hopefully, by this point in your progression through this Captives Free Recovery Guide, you've achieved some length of sobriety from inappropriate sexual behaviors.

Obviously, sexual sobriety begins when you stop acting out sexually. At first glance, this "sobriety" definition seems straightforward. We addicts, though, tend to justify whatever it is we want to do, and we prefer to operate within a wide margin of behaviors we choose to view as not acting out. Being committed to a program of rigorous honesty (as well as being willing to go to any lengths to get well) demands we scrutinize all our actions.

A healthy recovery program with transformation as the goal requires a total, absolute abstinence period from all sexual activity and intentional sexual thoughts. Abstinence could be for any period of time, but I recommend at least 90 days.

Neurochemical Benefits

An abstinence period serves several purposes and has a variety of benefits. First, by abstaining from sexual activity and fantasy, you'll experience a cleansing of your brain chemistry. Just like an alcoholic needs to be sober for a number of days before the alcohol is completely out of his system, the same principle applies to those recovering from sexual addiction. A sexual time-out is a form of detoxification. Remember, we addicts have a constant supply of our "drug," because even fantasies produce chemicals in the brain that cause us to feel pleasure. These chemical reactions are a natural part of life, but sex addicts have used this chemical reaction to medicate and escape their feelings. Stopping all sexual activity and sexualized thoughts allows the brain chemistry to return to normal.

Another benefit of abstinence deals with the addictive characteristic called tolerance. Tolerance means the addict requires more of the addictive agent to achieve the same result. An alcoholic, for example, develops tolerance so that he requires more alcohol to become intoxicated. In similar fashion, you may have built up a tolerance for sexual activity. You may find that you need a greater amount of sexual stimuli than you once did, which has led you into more frequent sexual activity or more dangerous sex. If you're married, this tolerance factor may also have affected your ability to experience sexual pleasure with your wife. The need for more and more may even have created an inability to experience orgasm during marital sex. Being abstinent for a period of time will help to reverse these symptoms. After an abstinence period, you may find that the joy of sex with your spouse will return. If it doesn't, you may need more specialized counseling to unearth the sexual or (more likely) the relationship difficulty.

Correction of False Core Beliefs

An additional reason all addicts need to experience a fairly lengthy period of abstinence is for the purpose of changing your core beliefs. We addicts hold the (unconscious) core belief that sex is our most important need. Based on our history of sexual abuse or on the "false intimacy" we achieved through our sexual liaisons, we concluded that sex or a relationship was the way to get our needs met. Indeed, because we all are "needy" – the result of our abandonment trauma – we discovered sex was our most important need, for it was our best

(though false) solution to the pain of our abandoned hearts. A period of abstinence exposes this core belief and gradually reverses it.

A period of abstinence will counteract another false core belief: that sex is equal to love. (Again, our trauma of abuse and abandonment created this lie.) If you're married, when you abstain from sex and still receive love from your wife, you eventually learn a new definition of love. If you're single, through abstinence you'll discover that you can find love from intimate friendships that you couldn't find in acting out sexually or through unhealthy relationships.

Suggested Boundaries for the Abstinence Period

You should observe specific boundaries during a 90-day timeout period to help you abstain from sexual activity and thought. Following are some suggestions:

No Internet use, except when necessary for work or to connect with your sponsor or support group. If the Internet has been part of your addictive behavior, disconnect and lock up the computer for 90 days. (If your wife or someone else in your household needs Internet access, she can have the key). If the Internet is necessary for your work, discuss with your sponsor ways to avoid temptation. Using a filtered server or one of the accountability reporting programs are two ideas.

- **No alcohol.** Next to sex and relationships, drinking is one of the best ways to alter your mood. Don't drink.
- **No TV.** You may choose to make an exception for news shows, history or sporting channels, or similar appropriate fare, but avoid soap operas, talk shows, sit-coms, and night-time dramas, which are full of sexual situations and unhealthy relationship examples.
- **Only G-rated movies or videos.** If you go to a family movie, arrive after the movie previews.
- **Minimize fantasizing.** Many things can prompt a fantasy, but it's prudent to avoid those triggers that you know are problematic. As an example, music elicits powerful responses for many of us. If you're one who's strongly prompted by music, only listen to music where you have control over what you hear. Review your list of acceptable music with your sponsor.
- **No reading of personal ads in newspapers or singles' publications.** Cancel any ads you've placed yourself.
- **No one-on-one conversations with women, even "innocent" ones.** You don't have to be rude, but do your best to avoid any personal exchange with women (or men if you have acted out with the same-sex).
- **No objectifying.** Keep your eyes on the road, sidewalk, or whatever is in front of you. Attend to business and "bounce" your eyes away immediately if you see someone that triggers lust. (Another way to describe this suggestion is to avoid "public voyeurism.")

- **Change the routes you normally drive.** If certain roads bring you close to places that are triggers for you (e.g., where an affair partner lives or works) then choose another way to go.
- **Establish a defensive protocol when alone at home for 2 hours or more.** Call your sponsor or an accountability partner before, during, or after extended periods of time alone in order to eliminate the “dead zones” of time when you’re not accountable. Report what you’ll be doing to stay out of trouble.
- **Connect with your wife or an intimate male friend every day.** Interact specifically each day on more than a superficial level. Share thoughts, feelings, and communicate concerns.

Withdrawal

Just as the alcoholic or drug addict goes through withdrawal when he stops using the drug of choice, the sex addict similarly experiences withdrawal symptoms when he stops acting out. Remember the neurochemical effects of compulsive sexual or relational behavior? The brain reacts when there is no longer that influx of chemicals, and that reaction may be noticeable.

Some addicts report genuine physiological symptoms of withdrawal including headaches, body pains, sleeping and eating difficulties, or gastrointestinal distress. All are stress-related reactions that may come from stopping the medication you’ve historically used. (These may also be symptoms of depression, which might be an underlying condition.)

It’s important to remember that “this, too, will pass,” as an AA slogan promises. You won’t always feel so miserable physically. (We promise that no body parts will be harmed if you stop acting out. Orgasm is, indeed, optional, not necessary for life.) When you sense that familiar craving to act out, remind yourself that it’s temporary and it will pass. Compare the craving sensations to running up a steep hill. The feelings will intensify and resisting will get harder, but if you choose not to give up and give in, you’ll soon be over the crest of the hill and the going will be much easier.

Emotional reactions are another typical part of withdrawal. During abstinence intense feelings may surface - feelings you’ve kept bottled up for years. One principle of Alcoholics Anonymous is, “You can either drink or deal with your stuff. You can’t do both.” We believe the same standard applies to the sexual addict. Our sexual and relational behavior has been our way of “dealing with our stuff,” and a sexual timeout often raises core issues that have been buried under the obvious symptoms of sexual sin. You’ll probably discover these foundational issues have little or nothing to do with sex. Instead, they probably involve your central woundedness and shame. An abstinence period allows you a chance to recognize and deal with these issues instead of medicating them through acting out.

Sexual Abstinence for the Married Man

For the married sex addict, the issue of sobriety becomes more complicated. Certainly he must abstain from any extra-marital involvements, including those that are “only” emotional affairs. **However, it’s vital for the married addict to observe the same total abstinence period as his single brothers, including a time-out from sexual activity with his wife.** Because of

neurochemistry, this abstinence period is important even if your acting out has involved “merely” pornography or masturbation.

Reasons for Marital Abstinence

In addition to the neurochemical benefit, the most obvious advantage of an abstinence contract for the married addict is to take the sexual pressure off the relationship. For many couples, marital sex has been full of conflicts, arguments, and emotional pain. Perhaps you’ve avoided sex with your wife and have preferred your acting out behaviors to connecting with her. In that case the pressure is from the absence of sex, but it’s still pressure. Even if there’s been little or no sexual activity in your marriage for a long time, you need to commit to an *intentional* period of abstinence. *There’s a vast difference in deliberately choosing to abstain from sex and in avoiding it because of your addiction.*

Almost all sexual addicts (of either gender) are unable to be “present” during sexual activity, especially with their spouses. Instead of authentically making love with your wife, you likely are lost in fantasy about some other sexual experience, either real or imagined. You pretend you’re with another partner or engaging in different sexual practices. You insist on darkening the room or you close your eyes to avoid being in the moment, because your fantasies are more pleasurable than what’s happening right now. In effect, you’re still having “addict” sex, even though the partner is your wife. *Sexual addiction is an intimacy disorder, remember?* Taking a break from marital sex gives you the chance to start over in your marriage relationship and learn to be present mentally, emotionally, and spiritually before you add sexual intimacy. Abstinence provides a chance to create *true* intimacy in your coupleship.

A bonus reason for abstinence is outlined by Paul in the following verse:

“Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

- 1 Corinthians 7:5

Abstaining from sexual activity allows a couple to devote themselves to prayer and spiritual renewal. Time spent with God reminds us that our love relationship with God is our most important relationship and deserves first place in our lives.

Wives’ Response

To achieve the desired result in terms of your marriage, abstinence must be a mutual agreement that is very specific in its intent and plan. Never begin an abstinence period without prayerful discussion with your wife. (Getting help from a counselor may also be necessary, especially if your wife hasn’t started to deal with her co-addiction.) Spouses’ reactions typically divide into two basic categories:

- **Some spouses welcome a period of sexual abstinence.** Sex has been emotionally painful for years, either because too many demands have been placed on them, or the sexual activity has been unpleasant, or because the addict wasn’t interested

in marital sex. Whatever the case, a deliberate period of no sex is a welcome relief. These couples will have to work extra hard to overcome their intimacy disorder and connect on emotional and spiritual levels.

- **Some spouses, however, fear abstinence.** These wives need the assurance of a sexual relationship. They worry that their sexually-addicted husbands will continue to act out if sex isn't present in their relationship. They may suffer from the belief that if they were more attractive or performed better, their husbands wouldn't have a problem. Obviously, as addicts, we know this belief isn't true. Our wives' looks, sexual willingness, or sexual prowess aren't related to our sexual sin. For these couples, the abstinence contract teaches them to base their marital relationship on spiritual and emotional intimacy, not sexual.

A married couple should only attempt a period of abstinence if they also have a plan for working on their relationship in other ways. *Almost always, a couple needs to be in marriage counseling.* The intimacy disorder of sexual addiction is simply too deep and distressing for most couples to heal on their own. Issues of pain, betrayal, and mistrust will be paramount. Often other long-standing relationship problems will surface as well, such as finances, parenting, household roles, etc. The wise couple will take their time and address each issue before considering a return to sexual activity, which can mask problems or create a false sense of resolution.

An addict/co-addict couple should plan specifically for their abstinence period. This blueprint might include a variety of strategies for developing healthy intimacy without relying on sex. Perhaps the couple goes to marriage counseling each week in addition to their individual Captives Free Groups. Maybe they commit to working through the *Captives Free Guide for Couples* or a similar resource to aid their healing. A wide range of marriage enrichment materials are available that could significantly bless your marriage. Take advantage of as many as possible during an abstinence period.

The following page provides a sample abstinence contract for a married couple. Note that it has a place for a witnessing couple to sign. Meet with that couple, explain your goal and your plan for working on your relationship, and pray with them before asking them to sign your contract. Use this "sponsoring" couple for support and accountability as you go through the abstinence period.

Marital Sexual Abstinence Contract

We, _____ and _____, agree that we will be sexually abstinent for _____ days beginning on _____.

We also agree that during this time we will do the following activities to increase our emotional and spiritual intimacy:

Husband's Signature

Wife's Signature

We have asked for support and prayer as we undertake this new step to increase the total intimacy in our coupleship. This covenant has been witnessed by a man and a woman who are important to our recovery and relationship:

Man's Signature

Woman's Signature

PRINCIPLE FIVE

We explore the damage we have done, accept responsibility, and make amends for our wrongs.

*Demonstrating Real Change:
I Accept Responsibility*

Principle Five marks a turning point in your journey of transformation. Here's a review of your work to this point as guided by the first four Principles:

- You admit the unmanageability of your life because of sexual sin and your inability to solve the problem on your own.
- Next, you choose to surrender totally to Christ and to seek God's will for your life on a daily basis.
- You inventory your history with complete honesty and reveal the truth through specific confession to another person.
- Then you address your flaws and inadequacies of character by entering into relationships of accountability.

These first four Principles are vital in forming the foundation for genuine, lasting change. You examine the depth of your sinful nature and your need for God. You take the huge steps of telling the truth and asking for help.

The journey this far, though, is also largely self-focused. These examinations and confessions and submission to accountability require great introspection. You're looking inward and exploring your own life, behavior, mind, and heart.

Principle Five expands your investigation. It challenges you to look outside of yourself and consider the ways your sexual sin has impacted others. You admit that you're not isolated in your sin and that it has repercussions for others. People in your life are affected by your addiction. Your actions have caused pain for many, probably more than you'd like to think. In a variety of ways, your behavior and character flaws have harmed others. The process of Principle Five begins with a thorough assessment of the damage caused by your sexual sin, its consequences, and your character flaws. Like Nehemiah, you venture outside yourself to survey the damage that exists in your environment. You observe the fallout of your life. You catalog the pain you've caused for others. You look unflinchingly at the harm you've brought about.

Assignment One: Assessing the Damage

It may be helpful to think about categories of harm. Examples include physical harm, emotional harm, spiritual harm, and financial harm. You might come up with additional ways your sin has hurt others. Prayerfully ask God to show you the truth about your actions and their results.

Remember the reason for exploring the damage: *It's not to increase your despair or add to your shame.* Be assured of this declaration of God's love for you, no matter what you've done:

"[The LORD] does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

- Psalm 103:10-12

The purpose of Principle Five is to grow in maturity as you move away from any denial, blame, or self-pity and learn to accept responsibility for your actions. As you consider the many ways you've harmed others, you gain a deeper understanding of how your sins have hurt the heart of God. The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-20) provides a perfect example of a sinner who was willing to take full responsibility for his behavior. He understood, too, how his sin had hurt his heavenly Father as well as his earthly one.

Before you begin the journaling assignments, read his story in the Gospel of Luke.

NOTE: Consider this assignment a first step in identifying those you've harmed. It's not something you can compile one time and be finished. As you grow in your transformation process, you'll identify others you should add to the list. Don't be discouraged if this assignment seems overwhelming or never-ending. It's actually a sign of progress when you become aware of the broader or deeper layers of pain you have caused.

Journaling Exercise: Assessing the Damage

1. Identify Categories of people you have harmed. Examples would include your current family (spouse and/or children), those in your family of origin, friends, coworkers, etc. Be sure to include those who've been indirectly harmed because of your addiction, such as spouses or children of acting out partners, or others who have looked up to you and been discouraged by your sexual sin.

2. List specifically all those you have damaged. Write each name. Review the categories of people in your life as a guide to help you remember each person. Start with those closest to you, like your spouse and your children.

3. Describe the nature of the damage next to each person's name. Again, be specific. Following are some concrete examples:

- Broke marriage vows you made to your wife
- Missed important events with your children because of your acting out
- Spent money on sexual sin
- Performed poorly at work
- Gave sexually transmitted diseases to others
- Withheld intimacy from others (or was incapable of intimacy because of woundedness and sexual sin)
- Acted hypocritically by violating your professed Christian standards.

4. After the description of the injury you've caused each one, list your character problem that fueled the behavior, like your pride, selfishness, impatience, stubbornness, etc. (If you're not sure about the character defect, postpone this part of the assignment until you've completed Assignment Two of Principle Four, which deals with problems of character.)

Be sure to be gentle with yourself as you complete these lists. Talk about the process in your Captives Free Group. Ask your brothers in recovery to remind you of your worth as a person created in the image of God. Your heavenly Father sent His Son to pay the penalty for the damage of your sin.

PRINCIPLE SIX

In fellowship with others we develop honest, intimate relationships, where we celebrate our progress and continue to address our weaknesses.

Living in Fellowship: I Cannot Succeed Alone

Congratulations on getting this far in your journey to maintain sexual integrity. It's taken courage, perseverance, and commitment. In many ways it may have been harder than you anticipated. You've experienced many feelings that may be new to you. You've had to humble yourself in admitting the full truth about your history, your thoughts, and your offenses. But with God's help, you've done it. You've told your story of sexual sin. You've decided you want to get well and have surrendered your life to Christ. You've accepted accountability from a sponsor and perhaps have begun working with a counselor. You're willing to make amends to those you have harmed. We pray you're beginning to have a deeper sense of God's power and presence in your life.

Principle Six guides you into a way of living that involves genuine connection with others, instead of the isolation you've probably known. The foundation for this work comes from one of our core teaching principles:

Fellowship is equal to freedom from lust.

It's probably hard for you to believe this promise. You may have been alone for years as you've hidden your sexual secrets from others. You've never known the joy of a supportive community. Your shame kept you from connecting with others, while it continued to fuel your lust and sexual sin. (You also probably can't imagine a life free from fantasy and lust, which have felt like your constant companions for as long as you can remember.) Principle Six offers a path out of your isolation, which, in turn, is the road to sexual integrity.

Hopefully, you're already enjoying some of the benefits of fellowship through your Captives Free Group. You're bonding with other Christian men who've faced similar struggles and seek to live in sexual freedom and purity. You're beginning to experience both the grace of God and the grace of other Christians who will love you despite your mistakes.

Assignment One - Practicing the Program

Assignment One of Principle Six covers the basics of cementing this new way of life into daily practice. In this first lesson you'll actually be focusing on the *last* idea of the Principle itself: "We celebrate our progress and continue to address our weaknesses." We'll outline some specific, behavioral ways of walking the talk of transformation. **This assignment deals**

with the nuts and bolts of what the Twelve Steps community calls “practicing the program.” Developing true fellowship with others must be built on this foundation.

Hopefully, you’ve become convinced that recovery doesn’t just happen. Unless you actually do things differently, your behavior and attitudes won’t change. Two slogans from Twelve Step language describe this reality: *“If nothing changes, nothing changes”* and *“If you keep doing what you’ve always done, you’ll keep getting what you’ve always gotten.”*

Assignment One details a variety of specific ways to do things differently. We’ve already mentioned them as part of different discussions from other Principles, but it’s important to outline them clearly here. Think of this list as a “paint by numbers” plan of recovery. By this point you consistently should be:

- Caring for yourself physically (adequate exercise, rest, healthy diet, etc.)
- Attending Captives Free Group meetings
- Calling someone from your group every day
- Reading this workbook and some other helpful literature
- Enforcing healthy boundaries around your rituals and acting out behaviors
- Practicing honesty with yourself and others
- Taking responsibility for your actions
- Addressing your unhealthy attitudes and character defects
- Accepting accountability from your sponsor
- Participating in therapy if necessary
- Asking God’s help for your journey each day

Obviously, you won’t be doing each of these things perfectly every day, but this list is a blueprint of goals for your daily life. How are you doing?

The next two pages contain worksheets you can use as a daily inventory to measure your progress. We suggest you make copies of these two pages and put them in your notebook or journal. Each day, evaluate yourself in the five areas described and record your “Inventory Score” as indicated on the chart.

Writing Exercise: Daily Inventory

Complete the Daily Inventory on the following pages and record your score on the chart. Continue this practice each day for the next six weeks. Observe the pattern of your scores. Remember, the higher the score, the better. (Think about bowling instead of golf.) Look at each of the five categories as well as your total score. Are your numbers increasing or decreasing over the days and weeks? If your scores don’t show progress, you may be in danger of reverting to old behaviors and attitudes. If that’s the case, perhaps you need to revisit the earlier Principles. Share your measurements with your sponsor and Captives Free Group each week.

Daily Inventory of Healthy Living

Evaluate yourself daily in these five core areas using the scale shown below. The items listed are just suggestions; add others that might be appropriate for you. Give yourself an overall score for each area. Record those five scores on the Daily Inventory Chart.

0 **1** **2** **3** **4** **5**
Doing poorly *Doing somewhere in-between* *Doing very well*

PHYSICAL AREA	BEHAVIORAL AREA
Nutritious eating	Sobriety
Adequate rest	Attending Meetings
Exercise	Calling sponsor/recovering friend
Attending to medical needs	Healthy work habits
Recreation	Financially responsible
Self-care (grooming)	Hobby
Caring for possessions (living space, car)	Not switching to other addictions
Dieting (if needed)	Giving healthy compliments
RELATIONAL AREA	PERSONAL AREA
Connecting intimately with someone safe	Serene, instead of depressed or anxious
Considerate with spouse	Receiving counseling
Available to children	Healing from core wounds
Participating in supportive community	Aware of feelings and needs
Helping others struggling with sexual sin	Reading recovery literature
Maintaining honest relationships	Able to express feelings and needs
SPIRITUAL AREA	DAILY SCORE
Prayer	Physical Area
Bible study	Behavioral Area
Personal devotional time	Relational Area
Corporate worship	Personal Area
Deepening spirituality	Spiritual Area
Church involvement	
Overall score in each area should be between 0 and 5	

Daily Inventory Chart: Weekly

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	TOTAL
Physical								
Behavioral								
Relational								
Personal								
Spiritual								
Total daily score will be between 0-25. Total weekly score will be between 0-175								

Daily Inventory Chart: Six Weeks

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Sunday						
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						
Weekly Total						

PRINCIPLE SEVEN

As we live in sexual integrity, we carry the message of Christ's healing to those who still struggle, and we pursue a vision of God's purpose for our lives.

Finding a Purpose: I Have a Vision

When Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Life* was first published in 2002, it quickly became a best seller. In its first two years almost 19 million copies were sold. People hunger for the answer to the book's sub-title, "What On Earth Am I Here For?" We are likely to ask, "Why on earth did I do everything I did?" "What was God's purpose for my life?" or "How did I get so off track from God's purpose?" There are no easy answers to these questions, but understand this:

You cannot undo what is done.

— AND —

You must go forward from here.

As you work through our last principle, you will learn how to go forward and use what you are doing now to carry the message of Christ's healing to those who still suffer.

In the first assignment you will prepare your story, which will become your testimony. You will begin sharing your testimony in the second assignment, first with your trusted Captives Free Group; then, as you become stronger, with others. When you work on the third assignment, you will be developing your vision, your "mission statement" for how you want to conduct your life.

Assignment One - Telling Your Story

The first time you attempt this assignment, you should have at least six weeks of sobriety. If you haven't been able to manage this length of time without acting out, go back to Principle One and Principle Four and work on them again. Here's a review of several things you need to think about if you're struggling to maintain solid sobriety:

1. Are you willing? Do you really want to get well? Is there still a part of you that's resisting the hard work that you need to do?
2. Have you really surrendered your life to Christ? If you haven't, get with a pastor or some other spiritual figure and talk about what's holding you back.

3. Have you confessed your sins totally? Have you really made a complete list of all your sinful sexual behaviors?
4. Have you truly put into place a comprehensive accountability group? Are you connecting with someone in the group on a daily basis?

Go over your answers with your Captives Free Group or with several men who have long-term sobriety. Get some advice as to what AA calls the “next right thing.”

This assignment is straightforward, but it will take some time. To tell your story may sound like a simple assignment, but it's far from easy. Assignment One prepares you to tell your story in the most effective way. You've probably heard a variety of testimonies in your life, like at church or at a meeting. Have you realized the best ones are relatively short? It's a greater skill to be succinct, which requires really thinking about what you're trying to say. You've also surely read a number of articles throughout your life. Are you aware the typical magazine article is in the neighborhood of only 500-1000 words? It also takes great skill to write briefly and to summarize your themes clearly and concisely.

For your work here, decide how you feel most comfortable relating your story to others. There are two ways to share your story, and the one you pick depends on your gifts and abilities. Do you like talking or speaking, or do you like writing? Which method is most comfortable for you?

More important than the method you use is what you include in telling your story. The tradition in AA is to share your “experience, strength, and hope” by sharing three things: **“what it was like; what happened; and what it's like now.”** This simple outline is a great way to organize your story. Following are some suggestions about how to flesh out your account. You should include several aspects in each main division.

1) What It Was Like

a. **Your sexual history.** You can include any elements of trauma that you experienced, but try to keep this portion brief and generally descriptive, not detailed. You're trying to take responsibility for your own actions and not to blame others for the sexual sins you've done. Be specific about your acting out history, but don't be detailed or graphic. You obviously can summarize some behaviors by describing categories of acting out, like using pornography or masturbating compulsively or having affairs. (Don't mention the names of any affair partners.) Be specific about things like how much time and money you spent on your behaviors.

b. **Your efforts to stop.** Describe your various attempts to stop acting out and make an assessment of why these efforts didn't work. Relate your emotional state during the frustrating times of not being able to find sobriety. Be honest about any level of spiritual or emotional immaturity that played a part in your failure to achieve sobriety.

c. **Your consequences.** Outline the major consequences you experienced due to your addiction.

2) What Happened

- a. **Your “bottom.”** When did you hit what AA calls your “bottom”? What happened that finally got your attention?
- b. **Your surrender.** Detail the day you really made a decision to surrender your life of sin and addiction. Go over any emotions and actions that were a part of this decision.
- c. **Your journey.** What has the journey of healing been like? What have been some of the significant moments?

3) What It's Like Now

- a. **Your current life.** Describe how your life is different today than when you were acting out. What's changed? What improvements do you see? What have you learned about God, yourself, and the fellowship of Christ and others?
- b. **Your gratitude.** Share your gratitude for God's grace, His transforming power, and what He's done and is doing in your life. Mention specifically the gifts you've found in recovery.

Journaling Exercise: Telling Your Story

Prepare either a ten-minute talk or a 500-1000 word article relating the story of your sexual sin/addiction and journey of recovery. You can use any form of writing (long hand or computer) to write your story. You can prepare notes or an outline as if you were giving a talk, or you can ask a safe friend to listen as you go over it.

When you've finished this preparation, report to your Captives Free Group that you're ready to share your story.

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

Editor's Note

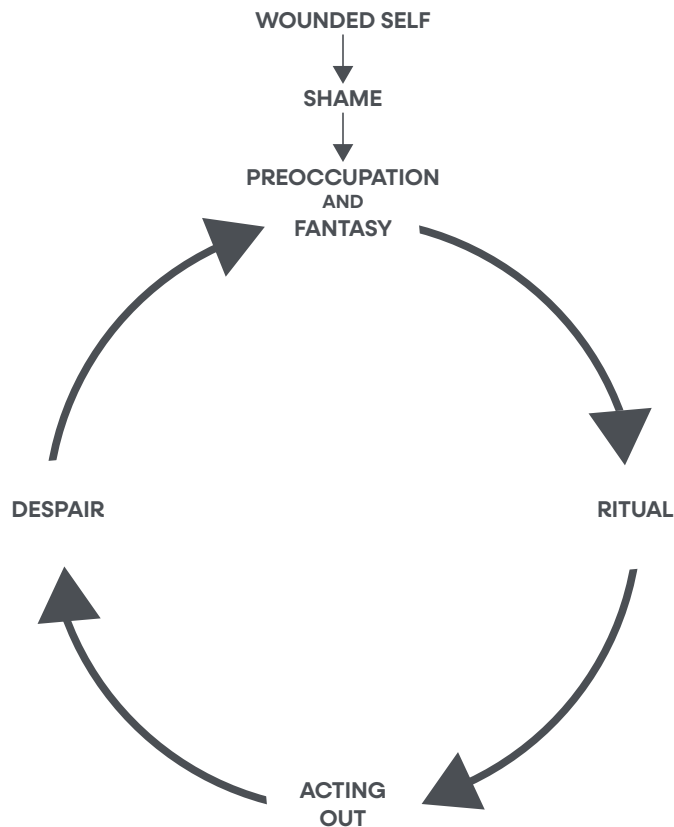
Congratulation on completion of your first cycle through the Seven Principles, and on the hard work you've already done to get to this point. You probably remember the challenge you faced in the first assignment of this Principle One—just getting honest with yourself and with others. If you need to review the introduction to Principle One, and the work you did in Assignment One, by all means do so. You'll find that beginning on page 21.

It's time for you to move forward to the next assignment, and begin another cycle through the Seven Principles, this time at a somewhat deeper level. And you'll be switching somewhat from the "what" of your behavior and its impacts to the "why" behind that behavior and the pointers within that understanding that can lead you towards freedom. This is no time to turn back—keep up your courage and move forward!

Assignment Two - Understanding Our Cycle

In this assignment, you will keep looking at that silent self that has kept you in bondage. The purpose of this assignment is to continue to bring into the light that which has been cloaked in darkness. It is also to show you some things that you will need to work on in a very specific and practical way.

In his book *Out of the Shadows*, Dr. Patrick Carnes first described the predictable cycle that an addiction follows. Dr. Laaser also defined it in his book. You may want to check out those resources for thorough explanations of all the features of the cycle of addiction. Briefly outlined, it looks like this:

CARNES' CYCLE OF ADDICTION

FANTASY is defined as those undisciplined thoughts that you have about sex. It's also been referred to as "preoccupation" – you've been preoccupied with sexual thoughts and imaginings. The next lesson will help you understand more about your fantasies and what they mean.

Sexual thoughts lead to **RITUALS**, which are those things we use to prepare to act out. Any thought or behavior that you use to get from fantasy to acting out is part of your ritual. Most of your work in this assignment is geared to help you identify your personal rituals. A ritual begins with **faulty thinking**, which launches the process long before you actually act out. The downward slide starts with the lies we tell ourselves. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) calls these kinds of thoughts "stinking thinking." They come in different variations at different times. The following descriptions will help you pinpoint your own thoughts that lead you astray.

What have you told yourself about why it is OK to act out? As a Christian, you've had to get around the fact that you are disobeying God's plan for sexual purity. Typically, we succumb to two main categories of stinking thinking:

Justification – For example, we might think that if we do enough good things for God, we are allowed to do a few bad things. It is like we have a balance in our heads - a formula we have worked out - and we reason, "God won't mind if I do these sexual things because I did so many other good things for Him."

The most obvious justification involves thinking about your spouse, “She doesn’t understand me or take care of my needs. If she were just prettier or more adventuresome sexually, I wouldn’t need to do these things.” Maybe some of us believe that being in a marriage will end all of our sexual lust. We think that if we just find the perfect woman, we won’t struggle with temptation. We’ve read 1 Corinthians 7 about how Paul says that we should marry so that we don’t “burn.” When we find that’s not the case with us, our faulty thinking tells us that our sexual struggles are our partner’s fault or that we’ve married the wrong person. We then feel justified in committing sexual sins. We might even believe our acting out is a way we can satisfy ourselves so that we can tolerate remaining in our marriage. In our sick thinking, we see our sexual sin as having the positive benefit of preventing a divorce.

We also tell ourselves that it’s OK to act out as long as “no one gets hurt.” We think that if we can just keep our sin a secret, especially from our wives, then no harm is done.

Entitlement – Sometimes we justify our sexual sins by thinking that we deserve it, which is a form of “entitlement.” Many of us have said to ourselves, “Nobody loves me and no one will take care of me. I have to do it for myself.” We believe no one else understands us and the pain we feel. Down deep, we’re angry about not getting our needs met, and we feel entitled to meet our needs ourselves, including using sex or unholy relationships.

Entitlement also tells us that we do so much, we work so hard, and we’re so stressed that we deserve a reward. Because life is often so difficult, we might even think it’s only fair to do these sexual things. We deserve some comfort and gratification.

Journaling Exercise: Your Stinking Thinking

Complete these following sentences in your journal

My thoughts of justification include...

My thoughts of entitlement include...

In addition to our faulty thinking, **painful emotions** also fuel our acting out. They, too, can spiral us into our rituals. Remember, acting out is usually an expression of our **anger**. We are lonely, yes, but it takes anger to get most of us past our moral and Christian beliefs.

Because of some of our painful experiences, both from our childhood, which we will explore in a later lesson, and from more current interactions, we addicts are often very angry people. We are angry with those who hurt us. We are angry with those who failed to love us or meet our needs. We are angry with our spouses or former spouses. We are angry with those who have tried to confront us about our sins. In a nutshell, we are just plain angry. And we use that emotion to sidestep our commitment to purity.

Journaling Exercise: Anger Inventory

Make a list of those people in your life that you feel anger toward. Next to each name, write down what you are so angry about. Remember that you may also be angry with God. King David, the “man after God’s own heart,” was furious with God at times, and he wrote many of the Psalms out of that anger. You also are probably angry with one other important person: yourself. Take as much time as you need to complete your list, and prayerfully ask God to help you. The following chart can serve as a guide.

Name	Reason(s)
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

RITUALS

As a reminder, we have been looking at our stinking thinking (justification and entitlement) and our anger because they are the beginning points of our rituals. Once we have justified our sexual sin somewhere in our mind, the next step is to prepare for acting out. These specific preparations are our **rituals**. It is important to identify our rituals, because stopping the ritual is key to stopping the acting out.

Following are some instructions to help you identify your rituals. You may want to make notes in your journal as you think through these questions. You may also need to talk to a man from your Captives Free Group to get insight into your rituals.

The best way to identify your ritual is to trace backward from your acting out behavior. First, select the sexually sinful behavior that you have done the most. Now remember the last time you did that behavior. What happened before you acted out? Back up in time to the point you first started thinking about acting out in that way. From that thought, what did you do next? And then? Those actions are part of your ritual.

If, for example, you have looked at Internet pornography, start by thinking of the last time you visited an inappropriate site. Retrace your steps to the moment you first started thinking about going online. Did you need to wait for private time, perhaps late at night or when no one else was home? Have you arranged for a confidential account? Do you have a secret screen name? All of those things are part of your ritual.

Rituals may be short, like the pornography ritual just described, or quite long. Some affair rituals take weeks or months to develop. They move from the first time you saw your affair partner, through initial conversations, to various acts of connecting before sex actually happened. Most people who have long-term affairs cross many emotional and moral boundaries before they ever cross sexual ones.

There are as many rituals as there are individuals and forms of acting out. Rituals are part of the cycle of all addicts, no matter how they act out or with whom. Whether your behavior involves solitary activity or crosses the flesh line to include another person (either opposite sex or same sex), you engage in an identifiable ritual. Some may be unique to you. Others are nearly universal. Some rituals may be quite subtle.

Repeat this process of retracing your actions for any of your unholy sexual or relationship behaviors. Start with the most common ones first and then progress to the ones that you may have done only one time.

Use the chart as a guide to record your rituals. (To accommodate the next exercise, leave some space between each kind of acting out behavior.)

Journaling Exercise: Your Rituals	
Acting Out Behavior	Ritual(s) Associated With It

Think and pray about how you were feeling going into your ritual. Were you lonely, stressed, frightened, angry, or anxious? This may take some hard thought and conversation with other members of the group. Have you ever found that the excitement of just being in the ritual is enough to “medicate” the feeling? You may find that different kinds of sexual behaviors are associated with specific feelings. For example, you may find that feeling stressed or anxious leads you to acting out through pornography or cybersex, while loneliness leads you into connecting with an affair partner.

Journaling Exercise: Feelings Behind Your Rituals

For every different kind of acting out behavior, write down (as best as you can remember) how you were feeling when you started your ritual. Try using a different color to represent each emotion, like red for anger, blue for loneliness, etc.

Boundaries: The Key to Interrupting Your Rituals

One of the great challenges of healing and building a new life is to intervene on these “preparations” — the rituals — you have used to escalate from preoccupation to acting out. It is one thing to say that you want to stop a particular sin. It is more complicated to stop your ritual behavior.

It is almost impossible to stop the cycle at the acting out stage. You have to intervene before you ever get into your ritual.

A key principle to remember is that once your ritual has started, you will probably act out eventually.

It is imperative, then, that you create a plan to stop the ritual behavior. You must conceptualize what that plan will be — very specifically. You must outline the **boundaries** you will need to keep you from entering into your ritual. These boundaries are the prohibitions that will keep you safe. They are the guardians of your sobriety.

Think back to a ritual that you described in the writing exercises. **What behaviors will you have to stop to avoid being in the ritual?** By identifying these behaviors, you can determine the boundaries you need.

For example, a man who uses a personal or work computer to access pornography, or views other material that leads him to act out, will need to establish boundaries that prevent access to that content. That man will also need to take similar steps related to his cell phone or any other device that provides such access. There are many current technologies and programs that can facilitate those boundaries, but the most effective will involve having others in a position of holding him accountable. This sounds harsh and very restrictive, but in the early days of establishing sobriety, it is probably necessary. In another example, a man who has affairs will have to avoid one-to-one conversations with any women he is not married to. This sounds unfriendly, but is probably necessary in the early days. For the man who's acting out has been same-sex, he needs clear boundaries around his interaction with other men. These prohibitions can be amended as strength is achieved. Perhaps you can talk to other women, but should never go out to lunch with them by yourself (if this is a part of your old ritual). **For now, make a list of boundaries you'll need to put in place for each of your rituals.**

Journaling Exercise: Your Boundaries

Rituals:

Necessary Boundaries:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

As we emphasized, rituals lead to **ACTING OUT**, which you've already identified in Assignment One. Are there any other forms of acting out you see you need to add to your list? If so, do that now.

The last stage in the cycle of addiction is **DESPAIR**. Another term for this desperate feeling is "depression." The vast majority of sex addicts are depressed. Go back and read the story of David for how he reacted to his own sexual sins. He was a desperate and depressed man. Pat Carnes discovered years ago that almost 75% of all sex addicts have contemplated suicide. Overwhelmed by guilt and shame, many men fear there is no other way to stop the pain.

Journaling Exercise: Your Despair

Write about the most depressing time of your life? What was that like? What were the circumstances during that time? Have you ever thought about suicide? Have you ever acted on those thoughts? Are you feeling suicidal now?

You may find that you need to be evaluated for clinical depression, which means that you see a professional to assess your level of despair. You might start with a counselor or therapist. If warranted, this clinician may refer you to a medical doctor, like a psychiatrist, who can map out a plan of treatment. (Some family practitioners, or internists, will also address depression.) **If you feel suicidal at any time, it's vital you share those thoughts with a professional and get adequate help.**

Additional Ways of Acting Out

Refer back to the cycle of addiction diagram and note that the point of despair leads back into preoccupation and fantasy. Sex addicts seek to relieve their feelings of despair. As crazy as it may seem, the best way to get relief is to start the process all over again. Addicts will return to the high of sexual fantasy, and the cycle repeats.

For some of us, it's important to recognize that we also turn to other behaviors that "medicate" the feeling of despair. Roughly half of all sex addicts are alcohol or chemically dependent. Many are smokers, hooked on caffeine, or on other "normal" drugs. Some turn to behaviors like work, sports, TV watching, or spending. We now know that many sex addicts are multiply addicted; i.e., they suffer from more than one addiction. It's common for many alcoholics, for example, to discover after they have months or years of recovery that they are also sex addicts. In the journey of your healing, you may need to deal with other substances or behaviors that you use to alter your moods.

One of the ways to look at it is to remember how your family taught you to avoid my feelings. Your family may have liked to watch TV, eat, smoke, play or watch sports, shop, work, and go to church. Some families have scriptural answers for everything, and that's not a bad thing, but it does serve at times to help avoid what we were really feeling. It will take you some weeks of sobriety from sexual addiction to recognize some of these other behaviors.

Journaling Exercise: Your Additional Behaviors

Based on your awareness now, make a list of other addictions or ways you use to medicate the pain of your acting out.

After all this hard work, take a grace break. Remember that we are all sinners and stuck in the cycle of our own sinful thinking and behavior. Even Paul admitted that he *didn't* do the good things he wanted to do, and he *did* do the things that he didn't want to. He said, "*Oh, what a wretched man am I!*"

Do you think God sent his Son to Earth because we were perfect? God simply asks you to lean on Him more and more each day and, one day at a time, begin to understand how much he loves you. Remember again the story of the Prodigal Son and focus on how the father rushes out to meet his child. God is watching for you to come home and he is preparing for a feast.

PRINCIPLE TWO

We believe in God, accept the grace offered through His Son, Jesus Christ, and surrender our lives and our wills to Him on a daily basis.

Finding the Solution: I Have Only One Option

Editor's Note

In last week's assignment, you began on the task of understanding the basis for your addictive behavior and finding some pointers toward recovery and freedom. This assignment continues that work, and just like in the last assignment refocuses your attention somewhat from the "what" to the "why". As before, you are always encouraged to review the discussion of the Principle you are on and the work you did in the earlier assignments of that Principle. You can find that discussion of Principle Two and Assignment One beginning on page 27.

Assignment Two - Surrendering Control

A subtitle for Assignment Two could be, "The choice I've never made." You may be feeling defensive after reading that heading. Maybe you bristle at the implication you haven't tried to do something about your addiction. You've probably done a lot of things about your addiction – except become sober from it.

Most of our attempts to deal with our addiction are unsuccessful because they're more about controlling our behavior or lust instead of surrendering it. We use a variety of excuses to rationalize this approach. (Review Assignment Two of Principle One, which outlines several examples of this kind of "stinking thinking.") We also excuse half-hearted attempts to surrender with rationalizations like, "I don't want to make radical changes like ending a 'friendship' because that might embarrass my family when people question why" or "God knows I need to support myself financially, so it's understandable that I can't quit traveling for my job."

In more subtle ways we sometimes try to control or bargain with God about our addiction. We make attempts to stop acting out and bargain that God will do something for us in exchange. Dr. Laaser has shared his own story about surrendering his use of pornography in exchange for God making him a tennis star. At age 16, at a Fellowship of Christian Athletes camp, he dedicated himself to ministry and vowed to stop stealing *Playboy*. In his spiritual immaturity, he believed God would reward him with tennis success. He fantasized

about winning Wimbledon and witnessing to the Queen. If you had asked him, he'd have assured you he'd tried to surrender his habit to God. What he'd really done was attempt to manipulate God into giving him something he deeply wanted: to be an outstanding tennis player.

Most of us have made many of these surrogate surrenders. We're usually quick to "surrender" when we're facing tough consequences of our addiction. We're afraid our partner is pregnant, so we promise to stop the affair if God will only spare us the complication of pregnancy. Or we try to get by with a partial surrender. We give up an acting out behavior that we think is especially bad, but we hold on to other, supposedly less offensive, behaviors. We end an affair, but we continue to use pornography or masturbate. That approach is really only substituting one sin for another. That exchange hardly constitutes genuine surrender! Sometimes we may even stop acting out totally for a while (by "white knuckling"), but we don't truly surrender our hearts and wills to God.

Some of us have tried to manipulate and control others, especially our spouses, by pseudo efforts to surrender. We may stop acting out with other people, but instead we bug our wife excessively for sex. We may agree to go to counseling as long as our mate agrees to stop pestering us about it. But though we sit in a counselor's office for an hour a week, we never commit to a genuine process of change.

Occasionally, an addict will surrender the specifics of his sexual addiction, but will continue to hold on to his heart. By that I mean that the now-sober addict will refuse to look any deeper than the sinful behaviors. If he's not physically acting out, he considers himself cured. He won't look at his character defects of pride or jealousy or insecurity or control. He's really nothing more than what AA calls a "dry drunk." Usually, he's still medicating with other more acceptable means like working or spending or losing himself in his children. That kind of "surrender" falls far short of God's call. He challenges us to:

"offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind"

- Romans 12:1

God is much more concerned with our transformation than with our mere sobriety. Can you honestly say you've truly surrendered to God in a spiritual sense? Are you willing to allow Him to transform you and mold you into the person He wants you to be?

A final example of a false kind of "choice" we make to surrender is our attempt to get sober on our own. Because of our shame and our fear of being known, we're tempted to try to recover without involving anyone else in our process. We believe we can recover in isolation by simply reading books, completing workbook exercises, or maybe talking with a therapist. But we won't share with other men individually, and we sure won't go to a group where others are seeking to become faithful and true.

This persistence of seeking recovery without becoming vulnerable to others exposes a key stronghold in many addicts' lives: the belief "I can do this on my own!" *We trust our ability*

to help ourselves more than we trust God. We hope that if we just try long enough, hard enough, or “right” enough, we’ll be successful. Instead of admitting powerlessness and surrendering totally to God, we try to work harder at getting it right by ourselves. Such efforts are doomed to fail. (I’ll talk more in a later Principle about the pitfalls of refusing to be in accountability and fellowship with others.)

Journaling Exercise: Reviewing Your Choices

1. What are your excuses for not surrendering your addiction totally to God?
2. List some of the deals you’ve made with God about your acting out.
3. How have you tried to control or manipulate others by promising to get sober from your addiction.
4. In what practical ways have you declared, “I can do this by myself!” instead of relying on God? Describe any attempts you’ve made to achieve sobriety by yourself. Describe, too, the results.
5. Outline what it will look like to totally surrender control to Christ.

PRINCIPLE THREE

We make a list of our sins and weaknesses and confess those to a person of spiritual authority.

Telling the Truth: I Must Leave the Darkness

Editor's Note:

As you continue now in these level two assignments, you will continue to go deeper into the understanding of each Principle and the impact that understanding will have on your journey to freedom. As you've seen already in the earlier level two assignments, it's time now for a deeper look into the darkness that has been so much a part of what held us captive and do an honest and detailed inventory of your life. You'll find some cautions spelled out in the instructions for this assignment, which you should read and heed carefully. The discussion of Principle Three and Assignment One can be found on page 33, if you should need to review.

Assignment Two - Outlining Our Darkness

At this point in your program, you are waking up from the fog of your acting out behaviors. You're starting to get honest. Reality is sinking in, which might be frightening and discouraging. You probably were hoping for what AA calls, "a softer, gentler way." Be aware of your distorted thinking. Satan is likely telling you some lie like, "If this healing journey is so great, why do you feel so bad?"

Have you ever had an injury or some kind of surgery? You know that the recovery process is very often painful. You may feel a lot worse before you start feeling better. Healing from sexual trauma, sin, and addiction is no different.

Now, it's time to prepare an **honest inventory** of your life. When Jesus confronted a man who had been possessed by demons, he asked, "What is your name?" The man said, "My name is Legion." It may seem that your sins are legion, and you may be overwhelmed by the enormity of your life's darkness.

Be aware that you're in a process of grieving - grieving all the painful experiences of the past. You're dealing with your shame and asking, "How could I have done such terrible things?" These feelings are normal. Though painful, they actually are signs of your transformation.

The best way to counter the darkness of your past is to continue to expose it to the light. You've been hiding your secret life for years, and your silence has been killing you. It's time to complete what the AA program calls a "searching and fearless moral inventory" and expose that outline of sins to the healing power of God's grace.

Instructions About Your Inventory

In preparing this inventory or outline, it's perhaps easiest to divide your life into stages and categories. As you examine the various areas of sin in your life, remember the words of Paul concerning his sinful nature. He wrote about *not* doing the things he *wanted* to do and about *doing* the things he *didn't* want to do. Paul is describing sins of *commission* and sins of *omission*. Think not only about the sins you've done, but also about the good that you haven't done. Include your actions or lack of actions, but also outline your negative or sinful thoughts and your lack of positive ones.

Divide your life into stages much like the way you created the timeline for your first assignment in this Captives Free Guide. ***One simple division would be these areas: childhood, adolescence, teenage, young adult, mid-life, and senior years.*** (Obviously, some of you haven't reached all of these stages).

Next, think about categories of your life such as these: ***family, education, social relationships, job or vocation, hobbies or recreation, sexuality, and your spiritual life.*** Some of your work will duplicate the sexual and relationship history you prepared earlier. That's fine. *This inventory, though, will be much broader than just your sexual behaviors. The intention is to outline every aspect of the sin in your life.* Explore every nook and cranny of your soul. Leave nothing hidden in the dark recesses of your spirit.

You may be overwhelmed by the variety or complexity of thoughts. Keep it simple. ***Start journaling about one age and one category, and then move on to another.*** Grow yourself up in your outline year by year, or at least stage by stage. Like all of the assignments in this workbook, this isn't a one-time exercise. It should be a living, changing document. You may update your inventory whenever a new memory or insight surfaces, even if that's years down the road.

Add examples (or even categories) as you think of them. You may have lied about many things or done a variety of crazy behaviors. For example, the first time that Dr. Laaser looked at pornography, he stole the magazine. He was both a sexual sinner and a thief. Have you done anything similar? Did you ever cheat on a test or your income tax, take something that wasn't yours, or tell a lie to gain approval from others? *Whatever the sin, include it in your inventory.*

Caution

Take note of this important boundary: This is not an exercise in which you describe in a grandiose way what a terrific sinner you are. This assignment isn't a competition to discover the most depraved person in the group. (The apostle Paul already claimed the title "chief of sinners.") Sometimes when an addict writes his inventory, it seems he's bragging about how terrible he was, so that his current state of sobriety will seem all the more amazing. False remorse is just another form of manipulation.

Also, when you're sharing about your assignment in your Captive Free Group, please observe appropriate boundaries the way you did when you shared your sexual and relationship history. **Don't be graphic in describing your sexual behaviors**, because you don't want to trigger (or educate) other members of the group.

This is a long assignment, and you'll probably fill pages and pages of work. Don't worry about leaving things out. The first time you compile your inventory, you may only hit the basics. You can go back and get more detailed later. Remember that you're practicing getting honest and you're taking many risks. Recovery is a process.

As you work on this assignment, be sure to take frequent breaks. Talk to a brother in recovery and get some support and encouragement. Be gentle with yourself. Remember again: ***no sin can separate us from the love of God***. The sacrifice of Christ's blood cleanses us from all sin and makes us pure and holy in God's eyes. Allow His enduring love to comfort and sustain you as you humbly outline the failures of your life. God promises to transform you into the "newness of life."

Journaling Exercise: Your Inventory

*This exercise isn't a 1-2-3 list like some of the assignments. Read the instructions and suggestions in the preceding paragraphs and then begin outlining the sins of your life. Any way you organize your work is fine. The important thing is to **write it down**.*

PRINCIPLE FOUR

***We seek accountability and to build our character
as children of God.***

Growing in Transformation: I Mature in Character

Editor's Note:

You no doubt remember how much effort was involved in Assignment One of this Principle Four, as you worked to establish your accountability structure and to understand the many facets of accepting responsibility and building your character. Refer to page 45 if you need to refresh your understanding of all that. This next assignment once again goes deeper into that work by making an assessment of where you are today and why. This assignment happens to be the mid-point in this workbook, and you should be pleased with how far you've come and what you've learned. Stay strong and press on—the path to freedom lies ahead.

Assignment Two – Assessing Our Character

In addition to practicing accountability, men of integrity are men of character.

Character refers to the kind of people we are even when there isn't accountability. Character is the way we live when we know no one is watching or will find out. The apostle Paul, in Galatians, describes a character marked by integrity. He outlines the disposition of the sinful nature and contrasts it with the makeup of a life lived in the Spirit:

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”

- Galatians 5:19-26 NIV

This verse is the theme of Principle Four. Working on the fruits of the Spirit will be a lifetime journey, which in many churches is a process referred to as “sanctification.” If, then, this process won’t be completed in this lifetime, there’s no way you will “complete” this assignment. But you can get started.

The Angry (Wounded) Heart

Since anger, along with loneliness, is the main emotion that drives sexual addiction, it’s a good place to start. You’ll notice how quickly Paul talks about anger in the passage above after he’s described sexual immorality. Paul uses a number of words to break down “anger”: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy.

These words are all obviously different, but their root is the same: a wounded heart that’s angry about not being loved and nurtured. Realize that we all need to be affirmed, praised, heard, touched in healthy ways, adored, and included in a healthy community. When we don’t feel we’re getting these things, we can become angry like a little child who’s having a temper tantrum. In fact, if you’re like most of us, there’s a lot about your acting out that’s very juvenile, exactly like a temper tantrum. Anger and a desperate need to get our needs met will lead to our being ambitious, envious, jealous, and competitive. We’ll have fits of rage, dissensions, and lots of discord.

Anger can come out in a lot of ways. Sometimes it’s direct; at other times it’s sarcastic (indirect). We might get angry at someone who doesn’t deserve it, because whatever he or she said or did reminded us of an older wound and an older anger, perhaps even unconsciously.

It is often important to identify who caused our original pain. Take a moment and ask God to teach you if your anger is older than the current situation. That is, if your anger at this person is really a reminder of an older wound. One way to identify older emotions is to ask, “How old am I feeling right now?” You may be surprised to discover you feel like you’re very young. You feel small and vulnerable and perhaps helpless. One symptom of responding in the moment to a much older situation is if painful memories come up for you. If you ask the right questions, memories of the original wound might surface. Don’t be afraid of these memories. They’re cleansing.

If you find that your anger is really out of control, you may need to work with a Christian therapist who can help discover its root. You may find that simply talking about your anger with trusted people will help dissipate it. Writing about the anger is another good way of expressing it. Remember, *anger can’t be suppressed*; it will always come out sooner or later, usually in unhealthy ways.

Often therapy and support revolves around understanding how we were wounded and feeling the freedom to express anger at those who wounded us. These steps are an important part of the journey. They allow us to know that we didn’t deserve the things that happened to us. They are ways we grieve, and therefore, heal.

Journaling Exercise: Your Anger

For now, make a list of those whom you know you're angry with. Identify the people and write specifically what you're angry about. Share these memories with your group and ask them for feedback about any anger you might be showing today. Could it be related to these older situations?

Our Anger at God

When you're exploring your anger at others, don't forget about being angry with God. In the pain of our addiction, we are often angry with God. Many times we may have prayed for Him to remove all lustful thoughts and temptations from our lives. We want to be magically healed or delivered. Even as a child may have been angry that God didn't prevent us from all harm. Later, as we grew up and even since becoming a Christian, we would get angry with God about anything that didn't go right in our lives.

And we can stay stuck in our anger with God. Of course, we didn't know it was OK to be angry with God. We thought our feelings were just one more item in a long list of strikes against us. We stuffed that anger deep inside our hearts and never shared it with anyone.

Perhaps you've felt the same way. You've believed it was wrong to be angry with God. If so, get out your Bible and read some of the Psalms that describe how angry King David felt with God at times. God doesn't ask us to squash our feelings, even the "bad" ones.

Journaling Exercise: Your Anger at God

Write a second list of reasons you've felt angry with God.

Now you have two lists of anger to share with your group. What do you do next?

Here's a radical suggestion that might surprise you: **Decide to forgive every person on your list.** You might respond, "What? You just told me to be angry with these people, and now you're telling me to forgive them. I don't feel like doing that! Besides, none of them has asked for my forgiveness." This reaction is common, but it also springs from misunderstanding forgiveness.

Understanding Forgiveness

Forgiving someone else is for your emotional healing, not theirs. You can decide at some point to forgive even if you don't feel like it. Often, we get this order backward. We think we have to feel like doing something before we do it. Actually, the reverse sequence is true: Our feelings may follow our decisions, not the other way around. An AA slogan is, "Take the right action, and the feelings will follow." Forgiveness is an act of the will. Healing emotions may follow immediately or only after considerable time has passed.

Some of us have been counseled not to give up our anger too quickly because if we do, we'll stay vulnerable to being hurt again. Don't confuse forgiveness with your ongoing need to set healthy boundaries. You can be safe and still forgive. In fact, forgiveness doesn't necessarily mean the reconciliation of relationship. Your boundaries may include not having contact with those who hurt you, and that's OK. Another mistake we make is in thinking that forgiveness is a one-time event. You may have to forgive someone over and over again.

Journaling Exercise: Forgiving

Write in your journal about a specific decision you've made to forgive someone. Describe the offense or wound, then write a statement of forgiveness to the one who hurt you. You might begin, "I choose to forgive

_____ for _____
_____"

— Here's the bottom line —

Forgiving someone is spiritual act of obedience. It's what Jesus tells us to do: **"Forgive our debts (trespasses) as we forgive our debtors."** Do you want to be forgiven for your sexual sins? Practice forgiving others for whatever hurt they have caused you. When you've made a decision to forgive, then you must **act** like you have. Remember that you can still have your boundaries and you may still experience strong feelings, but you **act** in a way that brings honor to God. Refer back to the fruits of the Spirit that Paul talks about: patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control.

We can choose to act according to these fruits as an act of obedience to God, no matter how we feel.

With God, you, of course, don't need to forgive Him. But you do need to work on accepting that everything God has allowed to happen to you has been for a reason. Just because you don't understand the reason yet doesn't mean there isn't one. Today, we can think back on all the things we were angry with God about, and see that from some of them we learned some great lessons. Would we take that knowledge away? Not on your life! We've

discovered that the times we're most angry or disappointed with God have ultimately been the ones that are the most character-building. Growth is usually painful.

Reflect on what you have learned from the pain that God has allowed in your life. Write in your journal about some of those lessons if you can. There are a number of great books about this. One that has profoundly affected many is Larry Crabb's *Shattered Dreams*.

Journaling Exercise: Lessons Learned

*Reflect in your journal about some of the lessons you've learned through adversity: **How have these experiences built your character?***

Anger Fueled by Fear or Anxiety

Often, we are angry because we are *afraid*. We don't feel safe and we worry about the future. Our wounds from the past may have impaired our ability to feel safe. We've been hurt and abandoned, and we have memories of fear and anxiety. Refer back to page 37 regarding how the Limbic Brain works. Something in the present can easily trigger us back to those older feelings. Fear and anxiety feed upon themselves and can create a vicious cycle of obsessive thinking about danger.

It's important to understand the difference between anxiety and fear. **Anxiety** is usually about something more global or general in nature – like being totally alone, having no meaning in your life, experiencing death, and being judged or condemned. **Fear** is usually about something specific.

We can be generally afraid of not getting our grass cut in the summer and our driveway shoveled in the winter (if we live in parts of the country where that's applicable). We can become really obsessed and worried about these things when they don't get done. We can get angry for not doing them or at others for not helping us. The fact is that taking care of our homes symbolizes taking care of our lives. A well-cut lawn or a well-shoveled driveway can help us feel that we're doing a good job of protecting our "space." It sounds silly, doesn't it?

Our "silly" obsessions are perhaps symbols of deep anxieties that we carry from our wounds. When you begin to understand that even little things can trigger you into deeper anxieties, you can realize why there are times when even little things bother you so much. An important part of assessing our character is understanding these "buttons" that trigger us into anger, anxiety, or fear. But how many of the things that you worry about have been labeled "silly" by others? (If you would like to work more on this distinction between anxiety and fear, the *Faithful and True* workbook leads you through it, pages 51-55.)

If you're really impaired by anxiety, the antidote may involve taking medication for a time. Don't be afraid of this approach; many people may need this help. Some of us have genetic

predispositions in our neurochemistry to have more difficulty with fear and anxiety. Others have experienced such profound trauma that they need extra help to feel safe. Neither situation is something to be ashamed of. It's simply a part of who we are. Part of maturing in character may be challenging our pride or embarrassment at requiring this level of help.

Journaling Exercise: Your Fear

Write in your journal about the last time you felt really afraid. Can you identify any words or events that triggered that feeling?

Fellowship: An Antidote to Fear

Another important antidote to fear and anxiety is the safety you're experiencing in your Captives Free Group. We learn to be afraid in unhealthy relationships, and we can learn to feel safe in healthy ones. Assessing our character may involve recognizing how our trust of others is impaired because of our woundedness. Finding fellowship through a support group can be a huge step of faith.

During check-in time at every group, be sure to report on any fears or anxieties you're having. Begin to think about what might help you to feel safe. At the appropriate times get some feedback from your accountability group about safety.

The main antidote to fear and anxiety is ***developing a greater dependence on God***. The journey of transformation and recovery is a spiritual journey. As many times as necessary, refer back to the work that you need to do in Principle Two, and remind yourself of the ongoing discipline you'll need to grow in your relationship with Christ.

PRINCIPLE FIVE

We explore the damage we have done, accept responsibility, and make amends for our wrongs.

Demonstrating Real Change: I Accept Responsibility

Editor's Note:

If you remember the first time you got to Principle Five (see page 63 for that assignment), you'll recall that this principle marks a turning point in the journey to freedom from captivity where you began to look outward to the pain your addiction has caused others. This Assignment Two continues that focus, as you begin to evaluate how you can make up for the damage and suffering that have resulted from your behaviors.

Assignment Two - Planning Amends

Assessing the damage as a result of your sexual sin and listing those whom you've harmed is only the starting point. In fact, those acknowledgments are hollow if you stop there. The list you've created serves as the springboard into action – specific, identifiable action. Assignment Two of Principle Five prepares you for taking the actions of **restitution**.

First, we need to define what we mean by making restitution. The Twelve Step programs refer to these actions as making amends for our wrongs. ***In simple terms, making amends means offering an apology for the harm you've caused.*** It's saying, "I'm sorry" with humility and without any expectation of receiving forgiveness. But making amends is also backing up the apology with specific attempts to make things right. Willingness to provide restitution is a good indicator of the genuineness of your apology.

Making Direct Amends

Addicts can offer two kinds of amends. The first is **direct amends**, where you provide restitution specifically to the person you've damaged. One by one, you approach the individuals who have suffered because of your sexual sin, and you express your remorse for what you've done and for the pain it caused. If there is some overt way to right the wrong, you suggest it, and then provide it if you are allowed.

Zacchaeus, the tax collector mentioned in Luke 19, provides a great example of making amends through specific restitution. He had apparently used the authority of his position to collect more money than citizens owed. After his encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus

promised to pay people back four times the amount he had cheated from them. (See Luke 19:1-9 for the biblical account of Zacchaeus' story.)

Making Indirect Amends

A second type of amends is **vicarious restitution** (often called indirect amends). This approach is used when it's impossible or inappropriate to make direct amends. Perhaps you don't know how to contact someone you've harmed, or maybe the person has died. In some cases you may not even know the identity of those you've hurt, especially if your acting out has been extensive. These are situations where you can make vicarious amends. For example, you could make a personal contribution to Captives Free, over and above the offering referred to in the Group meeting format, or donate funds to help the victims of sexual sin receive counseling or treatment. One male addict we know of routinely pays the way (anonymously) for one person to attend a Healing for Spouses program offered through Bethesda Workshops. This addict sees his donation as an on-going way to help others who have suffered because of their mate's sexual addiction, just as his wife did. The possibilities of vicarious repayment are endless.

A second situation that warrants indirect restitution is if it would be harmful to make direct amends. You take this path when it would be more injurious to interact specifically with someone you've harmed. Certain affair situations provide clear examples of cases where it's inappropriate to make direct amends. One would be if the husband of a woman you've had an affair with doesn't know about your involvement. It would be harmful for him to learn about the betrayal through your confession and apology. He needs to learn of the affair from his own wife, not through you. Likewise, it would be wrong to apologize to the children of an affair partner, unless you were certain they were already aware of the infidelity and were old enough to understand your comments.

In these kinds of circumstances, devise some way of making indirect amends to injured parties. Get creative. After all of the thought and energy you've spent figuring out how to hide your sexual sin, put your creativity to positive use and come up with some constructive ways to counteract some of the damage you've done.

Explore Your Motives

Let us caution you here about your work on this Principle. It's important you carefully examine **why** you want to make amends in each case. As addicts, we're used to manipulating outcomes, and it's possible you hope to benefit in some way by saying you're sorry. Maybe you think you'll be let off the hook or get back in someone's good graces. Those are flawed motives that will taint your actions. Refer again to the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. He wasn't trying to regain his status as a son. In fact, he was willing to be a lowly servant to his father. Be unflinching as you examine your heart for any possible selfish motives in making amends. Be courageous.

Scrutinize your motives for the reason behind your desire to make amends to each person on your list. Here are some possible motivations:

- to prevent or stop someone from being angry at you
- to make yourself feel better for what you've done
- to influence someone to trust you again
- to manipulate someone's pity or compassion
- to transfer blame by saying, "I'm sorry, but I wouldn't have done this if you hadn't done that"
- to attempt to avoid consequences by expressing regret
- to accept full responsibility for the harm you've caused
- to demonstrate empathy for those you've hurt
- to rectify your damage to the extent possible

Journaling Exercise: *Your Motives*

Journal about your true motives for making amends in each case. Pray for discernment and purity of heart.

On the other hand, be optimistic and thankful for the changes God is prompting in you. As you've worked through these principles of being faithful and true, you've progressed from a place of denial to the point of being willing to accept full responsibility for what you've done and the harm you've caused. This difficult work in Principle Five is one more step in your transformation journey. Remember, God will be faithful to finish the good work He has started in your heart (Philippians 1:6).

Journaling Exercise: Your Plan

Plan specifically how you'll go about making amends, both directly and vicariously. For each person, first determine if direct amends or indirect amends is most appropriate. Write the best method beside each name.

Name of Person Harmed**Kind of Amends (Direct or Indirect)**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

PRINCIPLE SIX

In fellowship with others we develop honest, intimate relationships, where we celebrate our progress and continue to address our weaknesses.

Living in Fellowship: I Cannot Succeed Alone

Editor's Note:

Once again, this assignment is based on work you've done previously, but this time we're looking back to Assignment Two of Principle One (page 75) as well as Assignment One of this Principle Six, beginning on page 67. Earlier, you got familiar with your personal "cycle", and we're now going to explore changing that to a new cycle that leads to recovery and freedom.

Assignment Two - Changing Our Cycle

By now the cycle of addiction as described by Patrick Carnes is a familiar diagram. This graphic outlines the woundedness, which is at the core of our disease, the shame, our preoccupation and fantasy, our rituals, then our acting out, and of course, our despair. (Though we probably don't need to remind you about this cycle, you can refer to Assignment Two of Principle One for more details.)

We pray you're maintaining uninterrupted sobriety. And we hope you're also experiencing some core changes of life and character. The journey you're making is about so much more than sexual integrity. **It's about the transformation of someone who is surrendered to Christ.**

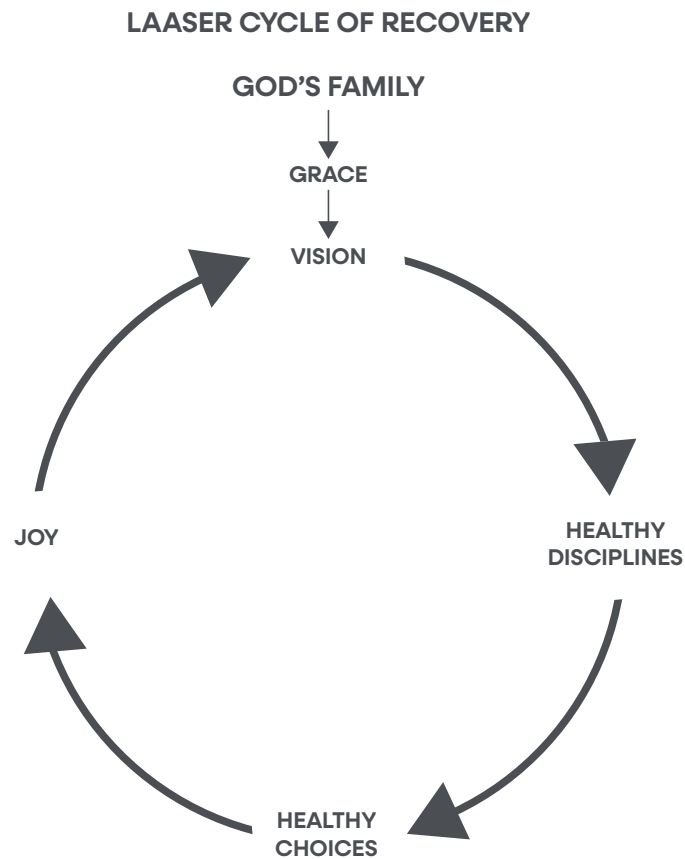
Review the commission of Romans 12:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

- Romans 12: 1-2

God is after so much more than our sexual purity. He longs to transform our sinful natures into a closer likeness of His Son. He desires our heart.

To illustrate this transformation process, Dr. Laaser created a cycle of recovery, which is diagrammed below.



Instead of the addictive cycle of pain and sin, the transformed life of a new creature in Christ is characterized by this cycle of recovery. (We'll talk about vision in Assignment Three of Principle Seven). Assignment Two, here, focuses on the main body of the cycle itself. It's actually just the visual representation of the behaviors we outlined in Assignment One. The checkpoints that make up the Daily Inventory are the Healthy Disciplines and Healthy Choices depicted in the cycle of recovery.

Review again the five core areas of healthy living that make up the Daily Inventory: physical, behavioral, personal, relational, and spiritual. The items listed are examples of healthy disciplines, such as attending a Captives Free Recovery Group meeting, calling your sponsor, or praying. These disciplines lead to healthy choices in behavior, thought, and character. Just as there's a predictable progression into sin, there's a known path of transformation. When you allow God to be in control of your life and heart, He can guide you into the pathway of joy as you grow in Him.

Being connected with the family of God provides the fellowship of healthy community. That's why we insist no one can ever recover alone. God made us for relationship, which we obviously can't experience in isolation. We need each other. It's partially through intimacy with others that we come to grow in intimacy with God.

When you live out the Principles of being faithful and true, you invite brothers to be part of your journey of transformation, and you become part of theirs. You dare to admit your sins, ask for help, be accountable, accept responsibility, heal core wounds, and share the grace you've found in Christ. In healthy fellowship you find brothers and sisters in the family of God. You tell your secrets, expose your dark heart to the light, and live every day in the freedom that provides.

Journaling Exercise: Expressing Our Gratitude

Write the names of three or four men who are part of your circle of fellowship. Write a sentence or two of gratitude for each one. Contact each person this week and share what you've written about your thankfulness for their part in your life.

List the healthy disciplines you commit to focus on this week. Identify one from each core area you need to improve.

1. Physical _____

2. Behavioral _____

3. Relational _____

4. Personal _____

5. Spiritual _____

Journaling Exercise: Reflecting On Our Changes

Reflect on the positive changes in your life over the last several weeks. Record three or four instances of joy that evidence your healthy choices.

PRINCIPLE SEVEN

*As we live in sexual integrity, we carry the message
of Christ's healing to those who still struggle, and we
pursue a vision of God's purpose for our lives*

Finding a Purpose: I Have a Vision

Editor's Note:

As you come to the completion of this second cycle through the Seven Principles, you should now find yourself ready to start sharing the story you began preparing in Assignment One of this Principle Seven (see page 71 to review that if necessary). Learning to share the pain and growing freedom of that story, i.e. your testimony, is a key step in finding your purpose.

Assignment Two - Sharing Your Pain

In Assignment One of Principle Seven, you made preparations to tell your story. Before you unleash yourself on others, take one more step. The goal of this assignment is to help you understand what God has been trying to teach you about Himself through your story.

We're not saying that God sat up in heaven one day and decided to make you an addict or even simply to permit all these crazy things to happen to you. God allows us to have free will and to gain knowledge of Him through our own decisions. Amazingly, God designed life in such a way that our experiences can teach us powerful lessons about what He is really like. Our job is to listen.

Many books can be resources to help with this assignment. We would encourage you to read Henri Nouwen's book *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. (The biblical account is found in Luke 15:11-32, but you probably already know the story.) In powerful and insightful ways, Nouwen's book describes the roles of the Prodigal Son, the father, and the older brother.

How is it, do you think, that the father in this story was so understanding of the son? How is this earthly father able to be so forgiving? Isn't he like most other earthly fathers, who would react more harshly to a disgraceful son? One interpretation is that perhaps this father had his own sinful past. Perhaps he knew what it was like to make mistakes and to feel like he was in the "pig pen." Did this father's understanding of how all of us turn away from home allow him to take his son back in such a loving and gracious way? Clearly, in this parable

Jesus illustrates the forgiving nature of God.

What's equally obvious is your own status as a prodigal son. You acknowledged your sinful rebellion back in Principle One, and you've continued your journey of returning home – your path into freedom from the captivity that rebellion represented.

While the father was glad to welcome the prodigal home, not everyone had the same reaction. Do you remember the jealousy of the older brother when the wayward son returned? He was judgmental and angry. Does that reaction describe your attitude toward others still mired in the pig pen of sin? Do you at times feel superior because of your progress in turning your life around? Wouldn't you want to be like the gracious father and not the older brother? It's your own life experience that can teach you to be forgiving and encouraging to others.

We also recommend another of Nouwen's books called *The Inner Voice of Love*. Nouwen personally experienced a time of great despair in his latter life. The word is that he, himself, struggled with some sexually sinful behavior. Eventually, he went on a personal retreat, where he kept a journal, just as you've been doing. Nouwen's journal was later published as *The Inner Voice of Love*.

One of his reflections in that book is very powerful. Nouwen says we should allow our pain to become "the pain." He believes that all of us have experienced circumstances in our lives that create painful memories and feelings. It is our pain. Nouwen goes on to say, however, that if we only spend time dwelling on the unique circumstances that caused our pain, we'll fall short of really understanding it. We might believe, he says, that if our circumstances had been different, we might not have any pain. Better, he thinks, is to come to an understanding that our personal pain is our "opportunity" to experience the pain of all humanity.

Think about it. What has connected you with others in your life? Was it success? Have your various achievements really brought you the peace and serenity you've longed for? Have you felt connected by being on the winning team? Or, have you felt more connected by getting honest in the last weeks with others who know what you've gone through? It seems to me that when we allow ourselves to share our suffering, we find true connection with other sufferers.

Another book with a similar message is Larry Crabb's *Shattered Dreams*. He describes our reactions when we become shattered by life experiences and how we come to true connection through our brokenness.

Consider these words of Jesus:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

- Matthew 11:28-30 NIV

As a man who has struggled with sexual sin and addiction, you have lived that first part about being tired and stressed out. You have sought the rest that Jesus promises. But if you're like most of us, you've had difficulty understanding the last part about taking on Christ's yoke. Was His burden really light? It certainly doesn't seem "light" to me.

As God's son, Jesus gave up His status and became a man. As a human, Christ experienced the difficult things that we do. He was even afraid of the pain of his death and asked God, "If it be Your will, take this cup from me." Jesus felt abandoned in the Garden by His disciples. He was rejected and despised by His own people. He was tortured and put to a painful death. On the cross, He doubted and wondered where God had gone, until Jesus cried in despair, "Why have You forsaken me?" Christ knew the meaninglessness of hell, because He descended into its depths for three days.

When we're in relationship with Christ, we have a brother who knows how we feel. Do you remember what it was like to go to your first meeting, tell your story, and experience the huge relief that others understood? In that moment, did your burden feel lighter? That is what Jesus is asking us to do — take His burden, and allow your pain to be the pain of all humanity. It is also His pain, and He knows full well how it feels. After you've considered how your pain connects you with the pain of others, would you take away your past if you could? Do you see that perhaps it's allowed you to experience the pain of others who suffer? Your own pain has given you compassion and empathy for your spouse, your children, your brothers and sisters. Can you begin to believe that the pain of your "burden" has been a gift?

How else would you begin to understand the gift of God's grace through His Son Jesus Christ?

Perhaps, it's time to stop feeling sorry for yourself. Do you see why some introduce themselves by saying, "Hi, my name is _____, and I'm a *grateful* recovering sex addict". That statement is a testimony to the transforming power of God!

Journaling Exercise: Depending on God

Reflect and write in your journal about what your losses and pain have taught you about depending on God.

Now, as you consider sharing your story, reflect on any testimonies you've heard. Which ones have really been helpful and inspirational? Has it been those in which people bragged about how well they're doing, or has it been those in which people honestly and transparently told about their struggles and their pain? Perhaps it was a man who was willing to tell you his story that got you to come to a Captives Free Group meeting in the first place.

Would you like to give the gift of your story to someone else? Remember back to all those times when you longed to know that someone else understood what you were going through. By God's grace, someone came along, shared his story of brokenness and his healing, and now you're on the road to recovery, too. Right now, we'd bet that you know someone who needs to hear *your* story.

Consider people to whom you'd like to tell your story. They don't have to be possible or probable sex addicts. They just need to be people whom you know struggle. You may feel frightened at the idea of telling your story to "normal" (non-addicted) people. You may even be having a "shame attack" - that is, you're thinking, "It'll be hard enough to tell my story to other sex addicts. How could I tell it to *anyone*?" Relax for now. You'll probably begin sharing your story only with those you know are relatively safe. As you grow in your recovery and transformation, you'll find others.

In Dr. Laaser's days of early recovery, there were no recovery groups or sex addiction groups to go to where he lived. He was advised to go to any kind of 12-step group. So, he chose AA. He started going to a relatively large group and tried to "pass." He wasn't an alcoholic, so he would just say that he was an "addict." No one seemed to mind at first. Then one of the men asked him, "Mark, just what kind of addict are you?" So, he told his story. It turned out that that man struggled with the same kind of sexual behaviors. Over the next weeks the two of them told their stories to a variety of the men who came to AA. Before they knew it, there were 20 men coming to a sex addict meeting that they had started. His belief is that the Holy Spirit will direct your storytelling. God will always bring people to you, and you will feel that tug at your heart, that they need to hear your story. Trust your feelings and be of good courage.

This doesn't mean you should rush out and tell your story to everyone. (That's not practicing healthy boundaries.) You may have that temptation, because part of you just wants to tell the whole world and get the truth out there. You might think spilling all would be a great catharsis - a cleansing of your soul. But you need to be careful so that you don't share indiscriminately with those who might not be safe. When in doubt, always check out your desire to share your story with your group or your accountability network. Get their feedback about the appropriateness of sharing with a specific person. On the other hand, your group might also be able to encourage you when you need support.

Journaling Exercise: Sharing Your Story

List the names of four people who might need to hear your story:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Keep track in your journal of those times when you do share about your journey. In your journal, record your feelings about what it was like to offer your "experience, strength, and hope." Describe the other person's reaction.

Do you see, again, that working this assignment of Principle Seven is a lifetime journey?

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

Editor's Note:

So here you are again, back to Principle One, but now ready to go to an even deeper level than before. In the earlier assignments for this principle, (see pages 21 and 75) you've worked to get honest, with both yourself and others, and developed an understanding of your own cycle of addiction. This third assignment is extensive and challenging, and will take you through concepts such as core issues, core wounds, and family systems to help you understand the factors that have led you to the addictive state you were in. You will end this work on a positive note, with a prayerful look at what all this reveals about your inmost desires and longings.

Assignment Three - Identifying our Roots and Desires

As you've worked through the Principles you should now have a pretty clear sense of how powerless you have been over your sexual addiction. We hope you're making progress in accepting responsibility for your sinful behavior, seeking accountability, and connecting in genuine fellowship with others. It's time now for you to examine the core causes that have contributed to your addiction.

We suggest that you have a solid foundation of sobriety and support before you begin probing into the underlying issues. You may have already noticed in your work thus far that many feelings have come up for you that you've historically sought to medicate.

Journaling Exercise: Your Good Qualities

In the first part of this assignment make a list of the good qualities about yourself. If you can't think of any, ask some of your group members to help you.

Now that you have reminded yourself of some of your positive attributes, you can move on. (However, don't forget that you need to work your program just as hard now as you did in the first few weeks.) It's time to go deeper into your thoughts and feelings. It's time to get to some of the root causes of your loneliness and anger.

Wounds From Your Family

It's important to remind you of the purpose of this kind of work. It's not to blame our parents or others for our problems. Blaming doesn't solve anything. The point is to gain understanding, which we can use to help us change our behavior and further our healing.

It seems that some of us have felt what we have come to call "family of origin shame." This can take two different paths. One of them is to think that we come from the worst possible family. Our story is really bad, our parents really terrible, and the wounds really damaging. We might even be tempted to think that it is no wonder we committed so many sexual sins - our history is just a nightmare. We can also get competitive in thinking that our story is the "worst." The other path is to feel shame because we really can't think of that many bad things that our family did. Now we're in trouble. How could we have committed terrible sexual sins, when there doesn't seem to be any root cause? Those of you who feel this way start worrying that the problem is really you and that thought is really shameful. We might even start thinking about "inventing" some stories about our family so that we can "fit in."

Even the therapeutic community is concerned about this last possibility. There is a debate that goes on about something called "False Memory Syndrome." The belief by some is that therapists can help a person create memories that didn't really happen. For example, if a therapist has ever said to you, "80% of all sex addicts are sexual abuse survivors. You must be one too," you might need to be careful.

Over the years we have found that the best approach is always the way of prayer. As you begin this assignment, take a moment every time you work on it and ask God to help you remember the events of the past that you need healing from. Tell God that you are willing to heal them and that you are not just looking for excuses. Tell God that you have a lot of pain, loneliness, and anger and you are wondering where it comes from and then ask Him to show you. Always be in counseling or in groups that remind you to engage in this kind of prayer. Therapists, pastors, and groups can only guide and encourage you in this prayerful journey; they can't suggest to you what really happened.

Remember that any work that you do is for the purpose of understanding. Some of you may work through this kind of material with a therapist or pastor who counsels.

As you work through this material about your family, let us summarize some of the issues that you should be aware of:

- The **rules** that existed in your family. Think of examples of how your family taught you to express your feelings, to talk, and to accept responsibility. Or did your family not talk, not feel, blame, minimize, or deny responsibility?
- The **roles** that were played out in your family. Examples include the heroine or saint, the little princess, the scapegoat, the mascot, the doer, the martyr, and the peacemaker.

- Did your family observe healthy **boundaries**? Did you feel safe? Did you feel loved, protected, nurtured, and affirmed?
- Were there **addictions** present in your family? Some of these might have been substances and others might have been behaviors. If there was an addict, who was the enabler?
- Were you emotionally, physically, sexually, or spiritually **abused** in an invasive way?
- Are there ways you were **abandoned**? Do you feel that you got what you needed? Were you affirmed, heard, protected, touched, and desired? Understand that it's often hard to identify ways we can be abandoned in a family (even if both parents are present in the home) because how do you know you missed something that you never had?

Please start by doing some reading in other places about family of origin issues. There are a wide variety of good options. Check out the resource section listed on the Captives Free website at captivesfree.com. If your group wants to be on the same page, read through chapters 5 and 6 of *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*. These chapters give an explanation of how families work and some of the mistakes they can make.

We have often found that people have an easier time understanding emotional issues of they can conceptualize or “see” the issues. The chart on the next page, from that book, describes the wounds of abuse and abandonment in the four core areas shown.

INVASIVE Boundaries are loose	EMOTIONAL	PHYSICAL	SEXUAL	SPIRITUAL
	Yelling	Hitting	Touching or penetrating genital area	Punitive and angry messages about God
	Screaming	Slapping	Teasing about body	Self-righteousness
	Putdowns	Pushing	Sexual Humor	Negative messages about sex
	Name Calling	Shoving	Sexual misinformation	Modeling unhealthy lifestyles
	Profanity	Spanking		
	Mind Rape			
	Incest			
	EMOTIONAL	PHYSICAL	SEXUAL	SPIRITUAL
ABANDONMENT Boundaries are rigid	No listening	Being left alone	Intimacy not modeled	Failure to model healthy spirituality
	No caring or nurturing	Inadequate food, shelter or clothing	Lack of appropriate sexual information	Lack of spiritual discipline
	No expression of affection	No modeling of appropriate physical self-care		

From Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction, Mark Laaser, 2004, Zondervan Press

It's important to remind you of the purpose of this kind of work. It's not to blame our parents or others for our problems. Blaming doesn't solve anything. The point is to gain understanding, which we can use to help us change our behavior and further our healing.

Since the original writing of that book, some more complete understandings have been reached concerning how we should think about our family of origin. We used to make the distinction between coming from an unhealthy or dysfunctional family and a healthy or functional family. That put many of us in a rather difficult position. Many of us had a hard time with this. We thought that we came from a rather nice family. We may have been rather protective of them and really not wanted to get into all these memories of problems. This is a rather natural resistance. We have been taught as Christians to love and honor our families. We do in fact love them and probably need them.

But our thinking in these matters gets too black and white. Do we really need our families to be either "good" or "bad?" In reality, all families are families that do many good and loving

things and all families make mistakes. We've all made many mistakes as fathers. Does that make any of us a dysfunctional dad? Hopefully it makes us fathers who love their kids and try their best. We believe that is true of those parents in life who make horrendous mistakes. Some of them are immature and selfish even to the point of really terrible things happening, but as you will see as we outline the healing journey, we shouldn't get stuck in trying to decide how good or bad they are. That is ultimately up to God to decide.

Journaling Exercise: Your Family

- List the main **rules** that existed in your family.
- What were the primary **roles** you played in your family? What roles did others play?
- Describe the **boundaries** in your family. Were they too loose? Too rigid? Or a combination of both?
- List the **addictions** present in your family and the identity of the addict(s).
- What forms of **abuse** did you experience? Who were the perpetrator(s)?
- In what ways were you **abandoned**? When did you feel lonely, frightened, left out, different, or weird? Can you describe times of feeling that no one cared about or wanted you?

NOTE: Remember, you may need more information about family dynamics in order to understand them fully and to complete this writing assignment. Refer to *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction* or a similar source for a thorough explanation.

Connecting with the Comforter

We know we're asking you to do some very painful work. You may resist delving into these feelings. You may even be feeling anxious or unsafe. We encourage you to pause for a few moments and conduct an imagery exercise at this point. It's important to only undertake this work with the comfort and presence of your heavenly Father.

Create, if you can, an image in your mind. Do you remember the Bible story recorded in Matthew 19:13-15 about the little children Jesus welcomed after the disciples had tried to keep them away? Imagine that you are one of those children. You really want to sit on Jesus' lap, but there is something that keeps you from doing so. Perhaps you're afraid you'll bother him, or worse, that you'll be ridiculed or rejected. You can't imagine that Jesus really wants to spend time with you.

Then, in your mind, let your eyes meet those of Jesus, and hear His words of invitation, “Come to me.” The Lord reaches out His hand and beckons you closer. When you climb up on His lap, imagine that He comforts you and He tells you how much He loves you.

Then Jesus gently asks, “What are you feeling, my child? What is it like to be you?” Remember, you aren’t an adult, but a child. Be honest with Jesus. Tell Him about your experiences growing up in your family. Share your hurts and fears. He can hear you and understand. He already knows what it was like for you. He wants you to say it.

Journaling Exercise: Conversation with Jesus

Describe in your journal what this conversation with Jesus was like. Write the things you told Him. Take as long as you need and simply allow the feelings to surface. When you’re through, consider making a special effort to talk with someone from your Captives Free Group about this exercise.

Trauma Reactions

The principle of why we do this hard work is simple. The aftereffects of trauma don’t go away by themselves. Painful memories have a way of surfacing and creating feelings. Have you ever had someone, like your spouse, say, “You’re overreacting!” or “Why did something so trivial create such a large reaction?” When the intensity of our response doesn’t match the precipitating event, it’s a clear sign we’ve been triggered into the pain of the past. Sometimes, these reactions to the past come in forms other than overreaction. You may think that someone is angry with you, and they say they’re not. In that case, you’re probably reacting to earlier times when a key person was angry in a similar situation. Or do you find yourself suddenly getting sad at some song, movie, TV show, or event, when no one else around seems to be having that reaction? Likewise, do you ever find yourself getting angry at something and it just doesn’t make sense? Then, of course, there is this big one: Has your spouse ever said “no” to your sexual advances and you felt a huge reaction of anger, resentment, or pain?

All these examples are possibilities of times when older feelings are affecting your current reaction.

A “trigger” is the term for any stimulus that brings up much older feelings.

Dr. Laaser has told the story of being at the funeral of a woman who was the mother of one of his best friends. When they closed the casket, he felt intense feelings of sadness and started to cry. But, he hardly knew this woman. What it reminded him of was the death of his own mother. She died four years earlier. His sadness was for her. Over the years there are many things that he noticed that triggered him into sadness or anger about her. For example:

- When one of her favorite hymns is played
- When he saw a woman who acted or looked like her
- Crossword puzzles (one of her favorite things to do)
- The month of February (the month in which she died) and anything about the month, like the events of the month, the temperature outside, snow, etc.
- His wife saying no to sex
- Anything any woman said that suggested rejection to him

This was only a partial list but it does give you examples of how broad and how trivial these triggers can be. Do you get the idea? If you're in a conversation with your wife, for example, about many different subjects and these old feelings are brought out, they can affect your reaction to your wife. They may really belong, however, to another, such as your mother.

These are only a few illustrations, but they give you some examples of how broad and how trivial these triggers can be. Do you get the idea?

Here's an important principal of being "faithful and true":

**Because your woundedness is the pain that drives
your addiction, you should heal your oldest feelings first.
Later feelings will follow, and your healing journey will be more successful.**

Your current issues may be the latest evolution or manifestation of wounds that you have felt since childhood. We have a way of repeating old issues, hoping for healing, and we're frustrated when they never seem to go away. This pattern could be true in your current relationships. If you argue with a spouse, friend, or anyone about superficial issues, you will probably stay stuck in repetitive fights, angers, and resentments. It's crucial that you get beneath the obvious problem to the deeper issues, which probably date back to childhood. Those relationships that are able to go deeper are generally the ones that are able to heal.

Eight Specific Trauma Reactions

We all have a variety of ways that we cope with our wounds from the past. Some of us avoid our feelings at all costs. Or we may use addictive activity to medicate those feelings. In his book *The Betrayal Bond*, Patrick Carnes talks about eight possible reactions to our wounds. You may want to read Carnes' book to get a more detailed description of these reactions. In addition to your individual reading, it might be good for your Captives Free Group to spend some time discussing these reactions.

For now, let me list them briefly.

1. Blocking. This refers to any behavior or substance that you use to avoid your feelings. Consider how this might be manifested in your life. You've already thought about sexual behaviors and, to some extent, other substances and behaviors. Don't forget those socially acceptable substances like caffeine, in addition to ones like nicotine and alcohol. Make sure you also include what would be considered "positive" behaviors (like work). Sleeping a lot is another example you may not have thought of. The effect of blocking is that you're "numbing" yourself. I often refer to this as "going to the land of numb."

2. Splitting. The clinical community refers to this reaction as "dissociating." When you split, you "leave." You may be lost in thoughts, daydreaming, or even having fantasies. (Does that sound familiar?) Rape victims are frequently known to leave their bodies and emotionally go to someplace far away. It's like that for some trauma survivors: their minds go far away.

3. Abstinence. This reaction means that you avoid any stimulus that reminds you of the trauma. Some sexual trauma survivors, for example, avoid sex altogether. This pattern is called "sexual anorexia," which is about avoidance. Abstinence can be very specific, such as avoiding certain sexual behaviors. For some, this pattern means avoiding success or eating or spending. Spending, for example, reminds them of not having money and thus activates their fear of poverty.

4. Reactions. This one is a broad category that refers to any way your mind or your body tells you that you're afraid. You may have dreams that wake you up in the middle of the night. You might experience "flashbacks" or sudden memories that suddenly leap into your mind. Your body may develop aches and pains that don't seem related to any medical condition. Stomach aches, backaches, and headaches are examples. Some chronic pain conditions, like fibromyalgia, could also point to a chronic fear of harm. Any stress-related symptoms could fit into this category.

5. Repetition. This reaction means that a person seeks to repeat experiences of trauma for two main possible reasons. First, he might hope for a different outcome. Why do some people seem to keep going back to damaging relationships or situations? It's because of their hope that this time the situation will be resolved or the relationship will work. The language of AA refers to

this pattern as the definition of insanity, when we keep doing the same thing and hoping for a different result. Second, a person might repeat a traumatic situation, but this time trying to be the one who is in the power position, rather than the one who's being harmed. There is the mistaken notion that by being in control, the pain of earlier memories will be diminished. This form of trauma repetition is sometimes referred to as the "victim to victimizer" cycle and is often behind offending behaviors.

6. Bonds. This pattern describes finding others who will help you play out old situations. When this person "bonds," he gets into relationships with people who remind him in some way of the person(s) who created the original harm. Why do our wives sometimes remind us of characteristics of our mothers or fathers? That's one example of a trauma bond. Examine your relationships and ask if you aren't seeking to replay old patterns with this person for either of the reasons described in the paragraph above about trauma repetition. In the cartoon strip "Peanuts," for example, why does Charlie Brown keep going back to a spiteful Lucy, who always pulls the football away?

7. Pleasure. This trauma reaction is one of the most painful patterns, possibly literally. People who have this pattern find pleasure in pain. Those who get involved with sado-masochistic behavior, for example, find a sexual high from painful situations. It could be that they are recreating situations from their past - ones in which they found the only touch or attention they ever received. It could also mean that the excitement and adrenalin, or the fear and danger involved, get neurochemically programmed in their brain. This man becomes addicted to the rush of his own neurochemistry in painful or threatening situations.

8. Shame. Old wounds create the core belief that "I am a bad and worthless person." People who experience trauma shame don't know how to be happy or content. They find a sense of identity from feeling shameful. They can often play the victim or martyr role.

Don't be frightened by these trauma reactions. With the help of your group and possibly a therapist, you can gain important insights from identifying which reactions apply to you. Understanding them can help you create new behaviors and boundaries that will break these patterns. You don't have to remain shackled to the traumas of the past! You can experience abundant life and the freedom that Jesus offers.

Journaling Exercise: Your Trauma Reactions

Note in your journal which trauma reactions apply to you. Describe specifically how you experience them.

Fantasy: A Window Into Your Trauma

As we close this lesson, we would like to introduce a vital principle to your recovery process. This principle reveals much about the source of your acting out behaviors, and that principle is...

**Fantasy, or preoccupied thought,
is an attempt to resolve traumatic pain.**

Our fantasies are an attempt to create an ideal world or scenario in which all of our wounds are healed. Think about it. Fantasies are the way in which we “correct” pain from our past. It’s pain about who we really are. Fantasies may correct our sense of who we are. In our fantasies, we are powerful, successful, and lovable, or so we believe. In our fantasies we get touched, praised, nurtured, and affirmed. We are immensely desirable.

Take athletic fantasies for example. Don’t many of us have those? In them we find athletic greatness. We are stars and receive adulation. You may have many basketball fantasies in which you correct all the mistakes, the losses, and the failure of the past. What about fantasies about physical appearance? Perhaps we fantasize about people turning their heads and noticing us.

What about money fantasies? In yours, you may have all the money you need for anything, so you pursue gambling, or, specifically, playing the lottery, or other schemes of chance. You might win the lottery and have houses, cars, boats, and planes. People love you and want to be with you because you are so rich.

Now turn to sexual fantasies. What are you correcting? It may simply be that you aren’t getting enough sex, at least in your own mind. You need to be desired and affirmed. You need to be touched. You need to feel like you are admired and valued. Everybody wants you and would just die to be with you and would do anything for you.

It may be more complicated than that. We strongly recommend that you separately work through and process the pain associated with your fantasies. But our purposes now, we introduce this topic and ask you to consider these questions about what seems to be the fantasy that you most commonly play out in your mind. It may be the most recent. It may be the one that you have played out a thousand or more times over the course of your life. It may have variations. The people may have changed. Your fantasy themes, like the examples above, might involve many scenarios: work, physical appearance, drugs (illicit or prescription), alcohol, anger, money, sex, romance...you get the idea. Yes, we inserted anger; 1) to see if you would notice it, and 2) to identify an emotion that we use just as we would use other forms of addictive acting out—to “numb” our pain by manipulating situations that are disturbing to us or are out of our control.

In your fantasy, or when you daydream that “it’ll be better when...,” what is the nature of the activity? As mentioned before, your fantasies could be about your performance in sports, gaming, business, relationships, your appearance, money, fame, or success. Consider how you will feel when you get the substance, the lottery ticket, the piece of cake, the gambling game, on the Internet, cosmetic enhancement, new clothing or possession, or whatever activity distracts you from the present uncomfortable, if not unbearable, situation. Then, define the emotion that you will feel. Is it contentment, relief, relaxation, calmness, peace?

How will you get your need met? Where does the use, activity, or consumption take place? What is the setting, the mood, and the atmosphere? Do you have a favorite place? Favorite people with whom you will share your experience?

Most of you will discover that perhaps only a few of these questions stand out to you. You may not care who shows up as long as a certain activity takes place. What is *important* to you can be *really important*.

Be courageous. Be honest. Secrets hinder intimacy. Remember, your secrets concerning your addiction have kept you in bondage. There is no sin that can separate you from the love of God. Now, once you have the description of your most common fantasy, the main question is what does it mean to you?

- Ask yourself what it suggests to you about your needs? Remember the principle that this fantasy could be your attempt to heal wounds.

We should not forget that there may be other reasons why you have this fantasy. It could be based on actual life experiences that were really exciting to you. It could be the result of the adrenalin that you have created in thinking it up. The guess is that even if these things are true, the fantasy speaks to the deepest longings of your heart for love and nurture, for relief from the stresses in your living situation. "I want to feel - better - more relaxed - more in control - more connected with others."

Why are your fantasies important? If it is true that this fantasy is an attempt to heal a part of your soul, when you seek to shut this fantasy off, it will quiet the voice of your soul. You must give voice to the deepest longing of your soul. If you don't, it will find other ways to talk to you. It craves to be heard, perhaps just as you did when you were a child. If you can hear that voice and find healthy ways to heal the wounds, your fantasies will go away. You won't need them.

Talk with your Captives Free Group about what are better answers to your need for affirmation, praise, touch, nurture, safety, and to belong.

First, as Christians, we know that the main answer to resolving the wounding of our value is in a relationship with God through his Son Jesus Christ. Secondly, we maintain that truth in fellowship with other Christians. In your relationship with God, you must come to understand that he loves you just as you are. There is no sin that stops Him from loving you. In your relationship with others, you must find safety, affirmation, healthy relational interaction, and a true sense of belonging.

Ask God to teach you what your fantasy means and how you can find more ultimate fulfillment in a deepening relationship with Him. Journal about this and discuss it with your group and/or your therapist.

Caution

The next exercise could be dangerous for an individual who is not very solid in his recovery. Before attempting this journaling exercise you should have:

- At least six months of sobriety
- A string accountability partner
- An active sponsor meeting weekly, in addition to the normal daily contact.

Journaling Exercise: Your Fantasy

1. Who shows up? Is it one person or more than one? Male or female or both? What do they look like? Is he or she tall, short, fat, skinny, blonde, red head, or brunette? Are there other important physical characteristics like broad shoulders or long legs? (do you get the picture?)

2. How does the main character(s) act? What is his or her emotional nature? Kind, sympathetic, compassionate? Harsh, aloof, or abusive? Is the person seductive? Does he or she seem to want you intensely? What's the individual's personality?

3. Where does the fantasy take place? What is the setting, the mood, the ambiance? For example, is it on a mountaintop, in the bedroom, or in front of a fire? Does the setting seem safe or frightening?

4. What is the nature of the sexual activity? Be fearless as you describe the activity.

NOTE: Most of you will discover that not all of these four categories are equally important. You may not care who shows up as long as a certain sexual activity takes place. You may not care about the sex particularly as long as a certain kind of person is involved. Maybe the setting is what's most important to you. What is important to you can be really crucial. Some would suggest that if sex is not important, for example, you may be more of a romance or love addict. Our fantasies are as varied as our wounds and our desires and needs. **Be courageous. Be honest. Remember that your secrets have kept you in bondage. There is no sin that can separate you from the love of God.**

Learning From Your Fantasy

Once you have the description of your most common fantasy, the main goal is to determine what it means. *Let us remind you that your fantasy holds a key to your healing.* No matter how debased, horrible, or bizarre your fantasy may seem, there's a reason behind it. The first clue to the underlying meaning may surface during this next assignment.

Journaling Exercise: Your Themes

Remember, your fantasy is a window into your trauma. It can be an important messenger about the wounds you need to heal. What does the theme(s) of your fantasy suggest about your needs? Remember the principle: This fantasy could be your attempt to heal the trauma of your abuse or abandonment.

There perhaps are other reasons why you have this fantasy. It could be based on actual life experiences that you found really exciting. It could come from pornography that you've seen. It could simply be the repetition of the adrenaline that was created in thinking it up. My guess is that even if these other explanations are true, the fantasy speaks to the deepest longings of your heart for love and nurture.

Perhaps the person who shows up resembles a person who abandoned you. Maybe he or she has the characteristics of love, nurture, and desire that you long for. The setting could be one in which you feel safe, excited, or stimulated. It might also be some kind of reenactment of previous experiences, even traumatic ones. (Remember the nature of the trauma reactions described earlier.) The kind of sexual activity you think about might symbolize ultimate excitement. It might also symbolize ultimate love. Fantasizing about oral sex, for example, may suggest that you're either being totally accepted or that you are totally consuming the essence of your sexual partner.

Why is understanding your fantasy so important? **If it's true that this fantasy is an attempt to heal a part of your spirit, if you try to shut off your fantasy, you will squelch the voice of your soul.**

Some uninformed counselors, pastors, or recovering people believe the goal is to stop fantasizing. We totally disagree. Fantasies can be your friend, because they provide crucial clues about the direction of your healing journey. They can be a map of the road to freedom.

Recovery isn't merely about stopping addictive behavior. Genuine transformation requires the healing of your spirit. You must give voice to the deepest longing of your soul. If you don't, your soul will find other ways to communicate with you. It craves to be heard, perhaps just as you did when you were a child.

**If you can hear that voice of your soul and find healthy ways
to heal the wounds, your fantasies will go away.
You won't need them.**

Are you listening? Can you identify the deepest desires of your heart? Talk with your Captives Free Group about better answers to your need for affirmation, praise, touch, nurture, safety, acceptance, and belonging.

As Christians, we know that the main answer to our core longings and needs is a relationship with God through his Son, Jesus Christ. You must come to believe that God loves you just as you are. There is no sin that stops Him from loving you. You have no need too great for Him to meet; you have no wound too deep for Him to heal.

Another part of the answer lies in your relationship with other Christians. We all need God "with skin on." One of the richest blessings of being in a Captives Free Group is the fellowship with other brothers, who can serve as conduits of God's healing touch on your life.

Journaling Exercise: Your Desires

Ask God to teach you the meaning of your fantasy and how you can find more ultimate fulfillment in a deepening relationship with Him. Journal about this hunger for God and for safe relationships. Discuss these core longings with your group and/or your therapist.

Congratulations! You've just finished the most difficult emotional assignment in the entire Captives Free Guide. You're well on your way to identifying the root causes that have driven your addiction. You've glimpsed the core desires of your heart. Our prayer is that you will begin to find new freedom from old memories, thoughts, and behaviors.

PRINCIPLE TWO

We believe in God, accept the grace offered through His Son, Jesus Christ, and surrender our lives and our wills to Him on a daily basis.

Finding the Solution: I Have Only One Option

Editor's Note:

For this third level assignment of Principle Two, you'll be going more deeply into the understanding that you have only one option. Having looked at your reluctance in Assignment 1 ("Do you want to get well?", page 27) and worked on surrendering control in Assignment Two (page 83), you'll now move on to placing your faith and trust in God. This is a short but very meaningful exercise, which should strengthen you for the remainder of these level three assignments.

Assignment Three – Placing Hope in God

We invite you to do an imaginative exercise somewhat like you did when you considered your most frequent sexual fantasy. This time, though, you'll be imagining a scene that springs from hope, instead of one that comes from the pain of the past. First, if your description or picture of God (Assignment Two of this Principle) is of an angry or distant Being, recreate (at least in your mind) an image that more accurately portrays God's love and grace.

Now we want you to see yourself interacting with that kind of God. This is the "Abba" God – the intimate "daddy" God. This is the God who would ride you on His shoulders, throw ball with you, listen to your stories, and comfort your fears. This is the perfect father. (A good description of this biblical view of God may be found in Sandra Wilson's *Into Abba's Arms* or in many of the writings by Max Lucado.)

Imagine the two of you talking and laughing together. Try to picture some specific activity or conversation. Observe all the details of the setting. Let this scene become real in your mind.

You can be confident that God is truly the loving, caring Abba Father you imagined. It's safe to depend on Him, because He is 100% trustworthy. To surrender to God is to place your life and will into the care of One who is eager to be in relationship with you. God loved you enough that He sent His only Son to die on the cross for your sins.

The connection you've sought through sinful sexual practices is really the longing for intimacy with God. Your passion is to be known and loved and cherished, despite your faults. Only God can fulfill that desire. Intimacy with Him can never be found through pursuit of the flesh.

An important part of your transformation process will be to experience the fathering of your Abba God. Only His love and the grace of Christ can sustain and heal you. All other substitutes are false. And the path to this intimacy with God begins with surrender.

Journaling Exercise: Placing Hope in God

1. Write a description of this encounter with God in your journal. Be specific; include as much detail as possible. What did you do? How did God respond? What did you say to each other? Share your image with someone from your Captives Free Group.
2. Compose a statement or surrender to God. (The Third Step Prayer of AA is an example.) Remember, the wording and grammar aren't important. The intent of your heart is what matters. Offer the prayer at your next group meeting, or share it with your pastor or accountability partner.

Two passages of Scripture seem particularly appropriate to this Principle about putting our hope in God and surrendering totally our wills to Him:

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

- Matthew 11: 28-30

"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

- Matthew 16: 24-26

PRINCIPLE THREE

We make a list of our sins and weaknesses and confess those to a person of spiritual authority.

Telling the Truth: I Must Leave the Darkness

Editor's Note:

You now come to the third step in the process of telling the truth and leaving the darkness. In the earlier assignments of Principle Three, you've admitted that darkness in Assignment 1 (page 33) and worked hard to understand and outline that darkness in Assignment 2 (page 87). Pay close attention to the guidance provided in this Assignment 3, as the cautions and instruction are important to the success of the effort.

Assignment Three - Confessing Our Darkness

This assignment is quite simple but extremely vital to your spiritual recovery. In James 5:16, the brother of Jesus tells us that we should confess our sins to one another. This assignment is your time to make a confession in a formal way. By "formal" we mean in a way that is spiritually significant to you.

Take note that this is Assignment Three of Principle Three. This Captives Free Recovery Guide hasn't asked you to do confession sooner, because you needed to take the time to carefully consider your life. The timing was also designed to keep you from rushing out and confessing to everyone who came along, which is a temptation for some. These people believe that if they confess and get it over with, everything will be right with their worlds. This kind of shallow confession can feel cathartic and may be dangerous. It's not appropriate to confess to everyone.

Here are several questions to reflect on as you prepare for this assignment:

1. Have you done serious and prayerful work on the first two assignments of Principle Three?
2. Have you looked at all areas of your life, not just the sexual ones?
3. Have you considered your reason for confessing at this time? What do you hope to accomplish? To be instantly forgiven by everyone? To be done with this painful process forever?

You may remember a famous evangelist years ago who publicly confessed his sexual sins on his TV show. He cried and lamented, then he quoted a variety of scriptures about God's grace and how we all need to forgive each other. There was something about his presentation and attitude that didn't feel quite right. Not surprisingly, several months later he relapsed with the same sexual behaviors.

For confession to be genuine, it must occur according to these important guidelines:

- Confession is done out of humility, not arrogance.
- Don't confess to anyone whose forgiveness you might be trying to manipulate.
- Don't confess if you expect that this is the one and only time.
- Don't confess if you're just trying to get it over with.
- Don't confess if you're thinking that others will be mad at you if you don't.
- Confession is a genuine act of repentance, not something you do because you got caught.

Pray and mull over these parameters for authentic confession. Then get some feedback from your Group about your motivation and readiness to take this step at this time.

You may have been bothered by the brief and usually collective acts of confession that most of us have done at church services. We might read together something printed in the bulletin, or we might pray silently to God about our sins. Those acts aren't enough.

The Roman Catholics have been better at confession than most Protestant groups. You may also be aware of how perfunctory or ritualistic confession may have become for many Catholics. It is, however, a sacrament, a *sacred* act to be done with a person (a priest) of spiritual authority. This principle of spiritual authority is important.

Consider who represents spiritual authority for you. Be careful here and don't automatically assume that it's your current pastor. Maybe you don't have a current pastor, because you don't have a regular church relationship. Maybe you don't like your current pastor.

Take the time to contemplate the idea of spiritual authority. Start with the religious traditions of your youth. Even though you may have converted to a different church body, you may still have a place in your heart that recognizes the spiritual authority of your childhood. You've possibly talked to many people, for example, who have converted from Roman Catholicism to a Protestant denomination. But they still remember the spiritual authority of a priest, and their heart still warms at the thought of hearing words of forgiveness from the mouth of a priest.

Part of your thinking should consider the role of authority in the Church. Do you believe that God calls some to be pastors and evangelists and that they've been given spiritual authority to represent God's grace? Today, who do you say is "my pastor"?

Maybe it's still someone from the past. Possible candidates would be the person who led you to the Lord, a person who disciplined or mentored you, a previous pastor, or a respected

Bible teacher or Sunday School teacher. It might even be a Christian counselor or possibly the leader of your Captives Free Group.

Journaling Exercise: Your Spiritual Authority

Write the names of a handful of people who represent spiritual authority to you.

Now, is it possible to schedule an appointment with someone from your list to go over all the work you've done in Principle Three? These meetings sometimes take hours because there's so much to say, so you need to be sure the person has enough time available to hear you out.

After you've scheduled this appointment, write down the time in your journal. Then report this meeting to your Group and ask the members to hold you accountable for keeping it. If it's not possible to meet with the first person on your list, keep going until you find someone who is available. Pray that the Lord will lead you to the right "priest." It could be someone that you don't know yet. Dr. Laaser has shared that the first time he confessed his whole sexual story was to a retired Roman Catholic priest who was the chaplain at the treatment center where he was a patient. He didn't know the priest from Adam, but he was a person of spiritual authority to him, so when he said, "God forgives you," Dr. Laaser believed.

Our prayer is that you'll have a powerful encounter with the marvelous grace of God during this time of confession. And we hope you'll find a listener who will be the ears and voice that reminds you of God's love and forgiveness.

Follow-up Journaling

After you've had this time of confession, journal about what it was like. You might write just a few sentences or paragraphs, or it may be longer. But it should be a definite entry in your journal that records this spiritual milestone.

As a final exercise, at your next Group meeting, use some time during check-in to report on your experience of confession. You might also, at some point, agree to be the person who does the talk on Principle Three for the appropriate meeting. Sharing what AA calls your “experience, strength, and hope” about confession would be a wonderful experience for you and a blessing to your fellow group members.

PRINCIPLE FOUR

*We seek accountability and to build our
character as children of God.*

Growing in Transformation: I Mature in Character

Editor's Note:

In some ways you might identify Principle Four as the center-point in this journey toward freedom from addiction, and not only numerically. The concepts of accountability and strong character are central to the revised behaviors we seek to develop in the following Principles Five, Six and Seven; while the self-examination, honesty and surrender in Principles One, Two and Three are essential to achieving that accountability and character. Feel free to revisit the earlier work of accepting responsibility in Assignment One (page 45) and assessing your character in Assignment Two (page 91) as you work through this assignment.

Assignment Three – Cultivating Our Character

Principle Four is about growing in transformation and maturing in character. This assignment focuses on how we *cultivate* our character. Fortunately, we have a detailed description of a mature character: the fruits of the Spirit that Paul describes in Galatians 5. These godly fruits are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Wouldn't we all like to be more like that in character? Again, modeling ourselves after these qualities will be a lifetime journey. Hopefully, as you continue your journey of healing, you'll develop more and more self-control.

One of the keys to the other qualities of character is the ability to be empathetic. Empathy is that ability to put yourself in the place of someone else and to completely understand what he or she is going through. Do you begin to see that your addiction has given you an opportunity to be more empathetic? You're beginning to understand your wounds, your pain, your loneliness, your anger, and your fear. This understanding will help you better understand those feelings in others. You'll be able to listen to their stories and understand their pain. You'll be more patient, kind, good, gentle, and peaceful. This change in character comes from your own humility.

This assignment is one piece in your ongoing journey to develop empathy. *Selfishness, of course, is the enemy of empathy.* Since most of us are turned off by the selfishness of others, why are we so often selfish? One formula we believe to be true is:

Selfishness is equal to unhealed wounds.

Selfish people are those who feel that their needs haven't been met. Selfish people are also those who think only *they* can meet their own needs. This belief is an aspect of the original sin, "I control my life; I don't trust God to do it." As you continue to work this program, you'll discover more and more that only God can meet your needs. You'll also find some of your desires are being met through safe, intimate relationships with others. You should become less selfish as you learn that there are healthy ways to get what you need.

Empathy for Others

Empathy begins when you discover that others are just as wounded as you are. One of the great tasks of recovery is to understand that you're not alone in your wounds. As you listen to others in your Captives Free Group, the universality of pain should become clear. As a way of aiding that process, Assignment Three asks you to do some rather strange things.

Journaling Exercise: Cultivating Empathy

1. First, interview one of your accountability partners about the wounds he's experienced. Make a list of these wounds in your journal. (Obviously ask his permission first. It's probably best to not identify him by name.)

2. Now, pick a member of your family. It may be your wife, a sibling, cousin, uncle or aunt, or anyone else you feel safe with. If that safe person isn't your wife yet, then use someone else. (This person should have done some reflecting on his or her own life journey. Don't seek to educate this person or convince him of any wounds he hasn't accepted or understood.) Interview this person about the wounds he's discovered about himself, and write in your journal about what you learned in this interview.

Let's continue with a rather dangerous assignment by imagining your last acting out partner. It may be a person in a pornographic picture or it may be someone you were with physically. It may be a person you lusted after.

NOTE: Even if you have the opportunity to interview this person, **don't**.

You should simply imagine what it might have been like for this person growing up. Let us help you. For example, do you know that the vast majority of women who pose for pornography were sexually abused as little girls? The same would be true for your average prostitute, both female and male. What's the life history of your last affair partner? In what ways was that person wounded as a child? Remember, all of these people are someone's daughter or son, someone's sibling, and perhaps someone's husband or wife. Do you see what we mean?

Journaling Exercise: Practicing Empathy

In your journal, write a few paragraphs that tell the life story of the acting out partner you chose. What do you think it was like for this person as a child? What pain or life challenges has he or she endured?

One of the basic truths about sexual acting out is that you have to objectify that person - that is, imagine him or her as an object - to diminish any feelings of guilt or discomfort that you might otherwise have. When you view your sexual partners as wounded human beings, you gain empathy for their pain, and it's much harder to objectify them.

Affirming Others

Now, let's work on cultivating character in another direction. How are you in being affirming and encouraging? Many of us, since we were abandoned in the area of those positive strokes ourselves, have a hard time being that way with others, particularly those whom we really love.

You might have to diligently practice this one. Make a conscious effort to be affirming and encouraging of your brothers in your Captives Free Group. When you give any feedback to someone who has shared, start with an affirmation. Be encouraging before, during, and after meetings.

Now, consider those around you whom you love. Who do you suspect is really starved for affirmation and encouragement? Maybe it's your spouse. Remember that she might not be acting like she needs encouragement because she's so angry or withdrawn. If you have children, they probably need affirmation.

Journaling Exercise: Affirmation

Make a commitment to affirm someone close to you everyday. Note in your journal what you did and how the person reacted.

Reflect back on a person who was affirming and encouraging in your life. It may not be the person whom you hoped it would be, like your mom or dad. Do you remember how kind and generous and patient and loving that person was to you. Wouldn't you like to offer those gifts to someone else?

We've all seen some miraculous changes in other people when we've simply taken the time to affirm them. Imagine the smile on someone's face who finds delight in your encouraging words.

You'll find that if you carry out these assignments, your character will improve. You'll become more patient, kind, gentle, and self-controlled. Why? Because of your ability to be empathetic. Do you see how important it is to cultivate your character in this area?

NOTE: If you find you have a hard time affirming others, go back to the anger section and continue to work on your core woundedness. Remember that there is no shame in talking to a pastor, counselor, or trusted friend.

Journaling Exercise: *From Scripture*

Study two separate but related scriptures and consider the words of Christ:

Luke 6:27-49

Matthew 7:1-12

Write in your journal your thoughts about these two teachings.

Finally, remember again that character formation is a lifetime journey. Affirm yourself for finally thinking about these things and taking them seriously.

PRINCIPLE FIVE

*We explore the damage we have done, accept responsibility,
and make amends for our wrongs.*

Demonstrating Real Change: I Accept Responsibility

Editor's Note:

This assignment continues the move to looking outward towards seeking forgiveness and making amends for the hurt you've caused to others. As you can see in the introductory paragraph below, you'll turn now to actually live out the process you've determined to follow and the steps you've determined to take.

Assignment Three - Living Amends

Assignments One (page 63) and Two (page 97) of Principle Five led you through a process of identifying those you've harmed and creating specific plans for making amends. Now, in Assignment Three, you have the opportunity to demonstrate real change. By taking action in making amends, you will show in overt ways the revolutions that are happening within your heart. For those around you, it may be the first clear example of your "walking the walk" of transformation.

Making Specific Amends

This assignment will consider two broad ways of making amends. First, we'll examine taking **specific actions**, whether directly or indirectly, of making restitution. Making indirect amends is less complicated. After getting feedback from your group, simply take the action. Do it quietly, without fanfare or attempting to draw attention to yourself.

Making **direct amends** is more risky. Be aware of these **guidelines** about your conversation with someone you've harmed:

- **State the reason you want to talk to this person.** Remember, you've probably hurt this individual in some deep way, and he or she may be wary about talking with you. If you make a specific appointment to meet, explain then why you want to talk. If you haven't contacted someone on your list, but God provides an unexpected opportunity for an impromptu conversation, state in the beginning your desire to express your sorrow at the harm you've caused.

- **Then state clearly how you've hurt this person.** Be specific. General apologies are lame. Instead of "I'm sorry I hurt you," say "I know it was painful when I forgot your birthday because I was absorbed in my sexual sin. I apologize." Be sure to say the actual words, "I'm sorry and I apologize." The mind-set of remorse is too important to let it be merely understood. We believe it's better, though, to avoid asking for forgiveness. It's too easy to be manipulative with a request for forgiveness. If the person extends forgiveness, that's great. But that choice is his or hers and should be made freely without prompting from you. Simply express your sorrow for the pain you've caused and let go of the outcome. You are powerless over the person's reaction.
- **Explain your intention to behave differently and any plan of restitution you'd like to make for the harm you've caused this person.** Again, be specific about what you'd like to do to right the wrong.
- **Listen to the individual's reaction.** He or she may express anger or hurt at what you've done. Be patient and non-defensive. Agree with the harm you've caused and be empathetic to the person's pain.
- **Thank the person for listening to your apology and for expressing his or her thoughts or feelings.**

Don't expect any certain reaction or outcome when you try to make specific amends. Some people won't understand what you're doing and may brush you off. Others may still be too angry to hear you out. Perhaps more will accept your apology. The individual's reaction isn't the issue. *Your willingness to humbly accept responsibility is the key point.* Remember the teaching in 1 Peter 5:6 - *"Humble yourselves ... under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time."* Making amends is as much for you as it is for those you've harmed. It further releases your burden of shame and deepens your trust in God to take care of the outcome when you submit your will to Him.

Practicing Living Amends

The life-long challenge and task of recovery is to live differently, not only in your sexual behavior, but in all areas of your life. By thought, word, and deed, an addict must daily observe the principles of being faithful and true. In recovery terms, this kind of practice is called "living amends." In every situation you make the decisions, to the best of your ability, which are beneficial instead of harmful.

A first area of living amends is obviously to maintain sexual sobriety. Without sexual integrity, no other progress is possible. (We'll discuss this concept at length in Principle Six.) Remember the caution that was part of the final assignment of Principle One: This period of time during your second six months of sobriety is a dangerous time for relapse. It's easy to get lax about your recovery efforts. We want to remind you of one important tool of working your program. *Boundaries remain critical to your sexual sobriety.* Review your work on boundaries from Principle One. Are you practicing good boundaries in the physical area? Mental? Emotional? Spiritual? Relational? Don't let down your guard.

A second major part of practicing living amends is following the Golden Rule: treating others the way you'd like to be treated. This goal requires maturity and self-sacrifice. It doesn't come naturally, especially to addicts who have a long history of focusing on their own gratification. A key way this objective relates to Principle Five is in learning to forgive others, just as you hoped they would forgive you when you offered your amends.

Your work this far through this text and with your Captives Free Group has put you in touch with some profound areas of your own woundedness. You've identified ways you've been deeply hurt by others, perhaps even some in your own family. You've allowed yourself to feel your feelings of loss, grief, hurt, anger, sadness, and loneliness. You understand the ways you've been abused or abandoned.

Principle Five challenges you to forgive those who have harmed you, as well as to humbly make amends to those you have harmed. For some of us, this undertaking is more difficult. Maybe you'd like to nurse your resentments a little longer. Perhaps you've become comfortable in your victim role. Holding on to a grudge lets you ignore any part you may have contributed to the relationship problems.

A clear sign of a changed life course is when you're willing to let go of the dues others owe you. Whether or not the offender expresses sorrow at the pain he or she has caused, you choose to forgive and move forward. You allow God to be the judge and the punisher for wrongs. Paul issues this challenge:

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil.... If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'"

- Romans 12: 17-21

Don't be discouraged by how difficult it is to make amends to others and to extend grace to others. This will be a life-long process as you grow in your relationship with a forgiving God. You won't do either of these recovery tasks perfectly. Sometimes you won't have the maturity or judgment to even try. Because you're human, you will continue to cause harm occasionally.

Remember our Lord's promise:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"

- 2 Corinthians 12: 9

Journaling Exercise: Your Tasks

Take two specific actions:

- 1. Make one direct amend to someone you've harmed.**
- 2. Make one form of indirect amend.**

Record what you did in your journal, along with how you felt. Be prepared to share your actions and feelings with your Captives Free Group.

Journaling Exercise: Forgiving

Share the names and situations with your sponsor. Pray together for willingness and help in letting go of your right to avenge the wrongs you've suffered.

Five People I Need to Forgive:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Ask your group for affirmation about how far you've come in your journey to freedom.

PRINCIPLE SIX

In fellowship with others we develop honest, intimate relationships, where we celebrate our progress and continue to address our weaknesses.

Living in Fellowship: I Cannot Succeed Alone

Editor's Note:

Your earlier work on this Principle Six have been centered on the practical aspects of following the program outlined in this workbook and on taking control of your responses and actions to change your behaviors (see page 67 and page 101). This assignment will focus instead on your spiritual side and strengthening your relationship with God.

Assignment Three – Growing In Spirituality

The main activity of this assignment is a matter of “**conversion.**” No, it’s probably not what you’re thinking. We don’t mean the kind of conversion that changes a person from a non-Christian to a Christian. You’ve hopefully already done that. The conversion we’re proposing is about converting all the energy you used in the past to pursue sex into energy that you use to pursue God.

You know, of course, that the key to this conversion will be **discipline** – an ongoing discipline necessary to make ongoing change in your life. Note how the word “discipline” is from the same root word as “disciple.” This word is rarely used in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament, it’s used to refer to a follower of Jesus. Does that description fit you? If so, you must be a man of discipline.

You already have some of the characteristics of a disciple. For example, you have the *energy* to follow Christ. Think again of how much energy you spent being a follower of sex and relationships. (If you can’t remember, go back and review Principle One.) If you can’t seem to find the energy for a spiritual walk, you may be experiencing some level of shame and depression.

You have the *plan* to follow Christ. Do you remember the category of ritual in the cycle of addiction? Ritual isn’t a bad word; it can be a spiritual one. You’ll need rituals to pursue your spiritual path.

For this assignment you'll also need **"enthusiasm."** Enthusiasm is a Greek word that literally means "God (Theos) is in us." *God is in you.* Did you know that?

Read the entire fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of John. Jesus says that He will be in you if you are in Him. He says a lot of other things, doesn't He? He describes the vine and the branches and how the Master Gardener prunes the branches that don't produce fruit. Are you feeling rather pruned? As you learn to abide in Christ, you'll draw nourishment from Him, and you'll bear more fruit.

In Assignment One of Principle Six, you started keeping a daily inventory. One of the categories you were asked to assess was spirituality. In this assignment, we want you to be much more aggressive in your thinking about this area.

Sometimes when we think about spiritual discipline, we mean that we need to have a "quiet time." Our experience suggests that many addicts aren't very good at that practice. We're impatient by nature and we don't like doing anything "quietly." For the restless among us, increasing our spirituality may be a matter of doing something more active, such as going somewhere to participate in Bible study or corporate prayer or corporate meditation. It may mean going to concerts or Christian seminars. It may be playing a favorite album or listening to an inspirational podcast while you're driving. (We addicts like to multi-task.) There are many different kinds of workbooks that might help you grow in spiritual discipline. Henry Blackaby's *Experiencing God*, for example. Be creative in planning how you can better connect with God, just as you were creative in your addiction.

Another way of describing what we're after is **"quest."** We're on a religious quest to get closer to God. For some, the quest may involve many active behaviors designed to help find Him. Some men, for example, actually travel to places of religious significance, like the Holy Lands, as a way of "experiencing God." This kind of quest may not be something that many of you can afford, but it's an example of something active. A spiritual retreat or dedicated time away from your daily responsibilities is another activity that could be part of a spiritual quest.

For some of us, discipline or quest may mean doing some act of service. It could be working in the soup kitchen, volunteering at church, visiting in the nursing home, or planning a mission trip. We might volunteer for work or participate in a church activity. We might teach a Sunday School class. (There's nothing quite like teaching to help you study yourself.)

Are you getting the idea? To be spiritually disciplined, you need to *do* something. It will probably be something you've never done before – perhaps even a practice far outside your comfort zone. You may need encouragement to get it done, which you can request from your Captives Free Group.

In some church traditions there's a role for "spiritual director," who is one who directs your prayer life, Bible study, and meditations. Has there ever been such a person in your life? In this recovery program, you might originally think of your sponsor as one who directs you in spiritual discipline. In this assignment, you may want to think of another person who can fill this role.

We encourage you to think "outside the box." Your spiritual director may not be from your own tradition or denomination. The key to this role of "spiritual director" is to hold you

accountable to those things that you have agreed to do. Your pastor may suggest some men in your church who are willing to take on such a role.

Maybe you don't have a regular church where you attend. It could be time to "shop" for one until you discover the fellowship where you feel both comfortable and challenged.

Finally, here is one last thought. In John 15, Jesus says that there is no greater gift than to lay down your life for another. Addicts are terrible at practicing self-sacrifice. *Our lust has been selfish.* As we grow in spirituality, we'll be transformed into *selflessness*. Think about the theme of sacrifice as you consider what you should do to have more discipline. Whatever the activity, it should involve some sacrifice of your time, energy, resources, or money.

Journaling Exercise: Growing in Spirituality

1. Write the name of a person(s) who will hold you accountable to having more spiritual discipline in your life.
2. What is one act of service you're willing to do?
3. Name a section of Scripture you commit to studying.
4. Who is a spiritual teacher you enjoy? What books are you reading or tapes are you listening to?
5. What is your favorite kind of spiritual music?
6. If you're participating in a Bible study or similar class, note that.
7. Have you attended any workshops or seminars recently?
8. Where are you attending worship services? Does this church feel like home? Why or why not?

These are just some suggestions to help you begin practicing spiritual disciplines. Remember, there's no such thing as the perfect spiritual program. This growth is a journey for life. If you've accepted Christ as your savior, you've already received salvation, so spiritual discipline isn't about your effort to win favor with God. It's about your time with God and your attempt to know Him more intimately.

God's blessings to you in this quest.

PRINCIPLE SEVEN

*As we live in sexual integrity, we carry the message of
Christ's healing to those who still struggle,
and we pursue a vision of God's purpose for our lives.*

Finding a Purpose: I Have a Vision

Editor's Note:

Welcome to the last assignment in the program! You've shown lots of determination and courage to get here, and have no doubt changed a lot in the process. As has been pointed out earlier, this will not be the end of the journey to freedom but do give yourself credit for reaching this important milestone. You've told your story in Assignment One (see page 71) and shared your pain (see page 105). It's time now to find your purpose and discover your vision, and to seek clarity on where God wants you to go and what God wants you to do.

And if this has been your first time through the twenty-one assignments in this guide, please don't make it your last. Recovery is a life-long journey, and repeated trips along this highway are highly recommended to maintain your sobriety and discover God's purposes for freeing you from captivity.

Assignment Three: Discovering Your Vision

Having a vision is a familiar biblical concept. Both the Old and New Testaments recount the stories of countless people who acted according to their visions. Today, a "vision" is a popular term to describe an inspiring or motivating mental image of the future.

In Assignment Three, you'll work on having that kind of positive mental image of where God wants you to go. Do you remember the earlier work around understanding your fantasies that was part of Principle One? We expressed my hope that you'd be able to replace the fantasies in your life with a vision.

Here's the comparison:

*A **fantasy** is an image of a preferred future in which all of your wounds are healed.*

*A **vision** is an image of a preferred future in which you pursue God's plan for your life.*

From your work in Assignment Two of this Principle, “Sharing Your Pain,” you saw how your wounds can be your guides, your teachers, about connecting with God and with others. Your wounds may also become your strengths, in that you’re a stronger person for having gone through your experiences in life.

The first task of this assignment is to figure out how you become a person of vision.

First, you must discover and accept your true gifts. You might be surprised to find that for years you’ve been pursuing what others, such as your parents, identified as your gifts. They may or may not have had your best interests at heart. Reflect on the messages your family gave you about what you were supposed to do in life. Dr. Laaser’s father, for example, never actually told him to be a minister, but he so valued that role that all of his modeling and encouragement was in that direction. Since part of his job was to take care of his father, it was also apparent that he was to have care-giving skills. He thinks that in order to please his father, he went into ministry. He now believes that he was truly called to ministry, but it is something he had to claim for himself, not something to do to please his dad. Dr. Laaser has also said that one of his pastor friends told him, “I was ordained by my mother and not by God.”

Think of your family’s messages, its modeling, and its values. How were you encouraged or discouraged? What was your role(s) in your family? Were some jobs or careers valued more than others?

Journaling Exercise: Your Family’s Mission for You

Write the “mission statement” you internalized from your family.

For example, my mission statement would be simple: “Become a minister and take care of everyone and not yourself.”

Of course it is possible for others to encourage you about your true gifts. First, think of those people in your life who were truly affirming and positive. Maybe it was a teacher, a coach, a pastor, or a friend. These supporters believed in you and encouraged your interests. What skills, talents, and abilities did they affirm in you?

Journaling Exercise: Your Encouragers

Write the names of supportive people and their affirmations:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Now, reflect on those times when you've felt truly passionate about what you were doing. These will be times when you're "in the zone" and are certain you're doing exactly the right thing. What do you relish? What brings you a sense of fulfillment? What do you do that lights others' faces with joy? For what things have others thanked you?

Journaling Exercise: Your Passions

Describe some of the times you felt passionate, energetic, and fulfilled. What were you doing? How did others respond? What were the results?

Next, reflect on your education and your life experiences. What's been your training? What jobs have you held? What volunteer work have you done? Do you have hobbies? Have you been involved with sports?

Journaling Exercise: Your Experience

Prepare or review your "resume" of education, employment, hobbies, and critical life experiences.

Finally, and this is a hard one, reflect again on what you've learned through painful experiences in your life, including the ones related to your sex addiction. Pain can be a great teacher and guide. God often speaks through hardship.

| *Count it all joy when you experience various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*

- James 1:2

Journaling Exercise: Your Lessons

Make a list of all the lessons you've learned through your own pain. Remember, this pain could be loss, failure, hardship, or crisis.

You now have several lists and sets of reflections. Read back over them until a picture emerges of your true gifts.

If you've never seen the movie *Chariots of Fire*, you might want to rent it. It's a wonderful comparison of two men who pursue their gifts and talents for two different reasons. The main characters in this true story are Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams, who each are preparing for the 1924 Olympic games. Both are fast and gifted runners. They're the best in the United Kingdom in the 100-meter dash, and they both have a dream of winning the Olympic gold medal.

Harold Abrahams is the son of a Jewish businessman. He knows his family has never been fully accepted in English society, and he longs to be accepted. The pain of ethnic prejudice burns inside him and fuels anger. He concludes that the way to be accepted is to be the world's fastest man and to "run all of his opponents into the ground." He even hires a coach and trains incessantly. Harold Abrahams does win the gold medal in the 100-meter dash, but the end of the movie shows that it doesn't bring joy. The accomplishment he'd dreamed about is almost a disappointment.

Eric Liddell is the son of missionaries to China. He's back in Scotland studying to be in ministry and to go back to China himself as a missionary. Eric Liddell knows that his athletic gift is from God. His sister, though, grows concerned that his athletic training for the Olympics is distracting him from his "true" work of studying and preparing to return to China. In a powerful scene, Eric takes his sister out on the hills overlooking Edinburgh, Scotland, and he says, "Jenny, I know that the Lord made me for China, but He also made me fast. *And when I run, I feel God's pleasure.*"

During the Olympic games, Eric Liddell refuses to run the 100-meter dash because one of the qualifying races is scheduled on a Sunday. He switches to the 400-meter dash instead, and he wins the gold medal. He's elated and knows a true sense of joy.

An interesting detail accurately depicted in *Chariots of Fire* is Eric's unusual running style. In the middle of the race, he would throw back his head and close his eyes. He literally couldn't see where he was going. Eric was a man running with God's help. He understood that when God was in control, he didn't need to see where he was going.

What are you doing when you feel God's pleasure - when you don't need to see where you're going? Many believe that Christians will know they hear the voice of the Holy Spirit by the joy and excitement they feel about what they're thinking or doing.

Journaling Exercise: God's Pleasure

Make a list of time when you've felt that you were doing something that brought you pure joy - when you could feel "God's pleasure."

You now have some lists to think and pray about. They encompass your own perception and the perception of others about your talents and gifts. How does this information match up with the expectations you brought from your family of origin? How does it match with what you're currently doing? Don't just think about these questions vocationally, but in the totality of your life.

Consider your work in Principle Four around developing character traits, which was based on the fruits of the Spirit described in Galatians 5. What do you think determines character? Is it a matter of pure will power, or is it a matter of **vision**? Think about it this way. You know that your fantasy life drove your behaviors for years, which led you into traits of character that resulted in despair. *Fantasy is actually a form of a vision*, because it's a mental image of an outcome you desire. If that kind of vision is capable of driving behavior and of driving character, wouldn't you also think that a godly vision would drive behavior and character?

A friend of Dr. Laaser's and a colleague in ministry, Eli Machen, was fond of talking about buzzards. Much to our distaste, buzzards have a huge appetite for dead animals. God made them that way. He also gave them the sight (or vision capability) to see dead animals miles away from hundreds of feet in the air. Because of their vision, these birds can fly around and see things that we don't see. *Buzzards have a buzzard's character and behavior.* And they teach us an important lesson:

Appetite can drive a vision.

What is your appetite? Remember the story of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well in Samaria. She was thirsty for "living water," but she confused it with relationships with men. Her "appetite" for connecting with men drove her into five marriages and a sixth live-in partner.

What, again, are you thirsty for? In your old life, you were thirsty for sex. Some of that is God-given instinctual biology. That appetite drives you to be attracted to women and to produce children. Spiritually, however, we also have an appetite for God. Our problem as

sex addicts is that we've confused these two appetites. **We've merged our appetite for God with our appetite for sex.** The great English writer G. K. Chesterton wrote, "A man who knocks at the door of a brothel is looking for God."

We've been thirsty for love, nurture, touch, affirmation, and fellowship. We've thought that we could get these normal desires met through sex, but we've been wrong. (For some of us, nearly dead wrong.) **We can only get these things from God.** This confused appetite has driven our character and our behavior: We've had a sex addict's behavior born from a flawed character created by a faulty appetite. It's time to get reoriented.

A vision pursues your appetite for God. If you allow yourself to see that truth, it will drive your character and your behavior. It will inform your discipline.

Imagine what it would be like to pursue God with the same energy you've pursued sex.

The next step in understanding your vision is to understand the legacy you hope to create. A legacy is how you'll be remembered and the influence you'll leave on others after you die. Here are some questions to consider, assuming you die before some important people in your life:

1. How would you like your wife to remember you? What will she say about you after you're gone?
2. How also would you like your children to remember you? What will they say about Dad at future family gatherings? What stories will they tell about you, your character, and your behavior?
3. Who else will remember you when you die? Who'll want to attend your funeral and why will they want to be there? What will be said at your memorial service? What will be highlighted in your obituary?
4. What contributions and acts of service will you be remembered for?

Journaling Exercise: Your Legacy

Journal your answers to the questions above. Humbly ask God to show you the truth about your current legacy. If you doubt your ability to see yourself clearly, ask a trusted friend to share his honest impressions.

Tough questions, aren't they? I suggest that if you can answer them courageously, you'll have a vision of what your true heart desires. Strangely enough, I believe it will be consistent with what God desires for you, too.

When you've worked through all of the suggested writing exercises, you're ready for the last part of this assignment: articulating your personal vision.

As an example, here is what Dr. Laaser described as his vision: “I am to write, teach, speak, and counsel for the purpose of educating the Church about sexual health and integrity.” This brief statement incorporated his gifts, talents, and passion, and expressed what brought him joy. It also describes what he wanted to be remembered for after his death.

Journaling Exercise: Your Vision

Men of integrity are men of vision. They know where they're going and what they want to do. They follow their passions with purity and fervor. If you continue to develop and honor your vision, you'll find that your behaviors will follow. Remember, again, how your sexual and relationship behaviors followed your fantasies. As you're transformed into the man God intends you to be, your vision will direct your decisions.

Before you finish, go back and look at the healthy cycle Dr. Laaser created that's presented in Principle Six, Assignment Two. It shows the progression from connection with God and His family, to vision, to healthy disciplines, to healthy choices, to joy. Our guess is that you've changed a great deal already. Our expectation is that the integrity of your behavior blesses you with serenity and joy. And our ongoing prayer is that you'll continue to grow in strength and faith as you allow God to transform you into a man living free from captivity to sexual addiction.

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

Transformation Principles from Nehemiah

For this section we will need warriors. The work of understanding these principles is not for cowards. It is for those who are willing to take risks.

Before you have a shame attack concerning your lack of courage, remember that you have been given all that you need by God. Your job is to find it. It might be as simple as deciding to act courageously.

A reporter once asked a famous British general during the era of the great empire under Queen Victoria, “Why is the British soldier so much braver than others?” His reply was fascinating. He said, “The British soldier is not braver than our enemies; he is simply braver one minute longer.”

Are you willing to be braver one minute longer? AA says that we should take it one day at a time. Are you willing to be brave today?

If you are, decide to tackle the material in the book of Nehemiah, which contains a blueprint for accountability. Your job is to seek God’s wisdom about how He would have you act responsibly and courageously to defend against the attacks of Satan that would seek to defeat your sobriety.

The book of Nehemiah is perhaps less familiar and less frequently studied than many of the other books of the Old Testament. To overlook this book, however, is to miss some of the richest material in the Bible. The teaching hidden in Nehemiah is highly applicable to our journey to freedom from addiction. Indeed, it’s a great summary of much of this entire *Captives Free Guide*. Groups may want to discuss one of these principles at every meeting, or at least at selected meetings.

The story of Nehemiah takes place during a time when the Babylonians had defeated Israel. The city of Jerusalem and the temple of God had been destroyed. Many Jews had been taken back to Babylon to work as slaves. Nehemiah was one of these captives. He apparently had distinguished himself as responsible and trustworthy, because he’d been given an important job: the cupbearer to the Babylonian king, Artaxerxes. The cupbearer was required to taste all of the king’s food and drink to make sure that someone wasn’t trying to poison the king. It was a potentially dangerous job, but at least Nehemiah’s living conditions were vastly superior to his fellow slaves. He got to hang out with the king in the throne room and partake of the finest food in the land. Yet Nehemiah was constantly mindful of his dependence on God and of the devastation of God’s holy land.

With this background in mind, consider the following principles from the book of Nehemiah. These 18 principles tie together the process of transformation that is outlined in this *Captives Free Guide*.

— NEHEMIAH: TRANSFORMATION PRINCIPLES —

1. Accountability begins with humility.
2. Accountability depends on honest confession about your situation.
3. Accountability involves asking for help and stating your needs.
4. The journey of healing is never traveled alone. You will need the army around you.
5. The process of accountability assumes that the enemy wants to defeat us, especially when we start trying to do the right thing.
6. In the face of overwhelming damage and discouragement, rebuilding may be a matter of just getting started.
7. Being transformed requires getting the garbage out of your life.
8. Transformation begins at home.
9. Transformation requires preparing ahead of time for the attacks that will come.
10. Transformation means guarding the weakest places, where you're most vulnerable.
11. Accountability is always with a group, not just with one person.
12. Our motivation for transformation should be selfless.
13. Transformation means building as well as defending.
14. Transformation means putting positive things into your life.
15. Transformation is an on-going, lifelong process, but God provides sustaining energy.
16. When tempted, remain committed to transformation without wavering.
17. Transformation targets you for rumors and personal attacks.
18. Transformation results in a willingness to sacrifice even your own life.

Nehemiah Principle One

Accountability begins with humility.

In the beginning of the book, one of Nehemiah's brothers, Hanani, comes with other men to tell about the destruction of Jerusalem. You might expect that if Nehemiah were to be a great leader, he'd jump up with a plan to do something about this problem. As you read the story, however, you see that when he heard this news, Nehemiah sat down and wept (Nehemiah 1:4).

In Principle Two, you were challenged about your willingness to find sobriety from sexual addiction and sin. Willingness is about humility. It's about knowing that we can't control our own lives. It's about knowing that we need God. Nehemiah is humble with a humility that comes from his great sadness.

You, also, may find humility in your sadness as you consider the destructive nature of your sexual sins. Sadness over your current state is the beginning of transformation. Humility reminds you that you can only get well with the help of God. The basic lesson from the first chapter of Nehemiah is that if you aren't willing to depend on God instead of relying on yourself, you won't find healing.

The rest of chapter one is Nehemiah's prayer to God. He first confesses that the Jews have behaved wickedly. (Remember the work you completed in Principle Three about confession.) The second part of the prayer asks God to restore the Jews to their home. Confessional prayer is the first response of a humble heart. After your confession of humility, ask God to restore you by His grace.

Nehemiah Principle Two

Accountability depends on honest confession about your situation.

In the opening of chapter two, Nehemiah still doesn't have a plan. He is still sad. The king, who apparently was quite discerning, asks Nehemiah why he looks so sad and then gives his own diagnosis, recognizing, "This can only be sadness of heart." Nehemiah honestly replies, "Why shouldn't I look so sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" (Nehemiah 2:4). The account continues with Nehemiah's admission, "I was very much afraid."

Our journey begins when we honestly admit the condition of our lives. As long as we hide our situation and deny our feelings, we'll remain captives of the enemy.

Nehemiah Principle Three

Accountability means asking for help and stating your needs.

The king surprises Nehemiah by responding with an unexpected question: “What is it you want?” Despite his fear, Nehemiah dares to ask the king’s help. (Notice that he prays first and prefaces his request with a compliment for the king.) Then, perhaps even more surprising than the king’s question is his answer to Nehemiah’s request: The king says “yes.” So, Nehemiah gets to go home. When you confront your fears, ask for help, and clearly state your needs, you may be surprised at the result.

Nehemiah Principle Four

***The journey of healing is never traveled alone.
You need an army around you.***

Nehemiah asks also for some letters of reference that will give safe passage through the territories on the way to Jerusalem. With those letters in hand, he’s ready to go. Nehemiah plans to travel alone almost 1,000 miles through territory occupied by many enemies of the Jews. But the king is wiser, and he keeps Nehemiah from making one of the great mistakes that many of us also make. We frequently imitate Nehemiah, who thought he could take this enormous journey alone. The king, however, sent army officers and cavalry to accompany Nehemiah (2:9). Remember, you must not attempt a journey of transformation alone.

Nehemiah Principle Five

***Accountability assumes that the enemy wants to defeat us,
especially when we start trying to do the right thing.***

In verse 10 of chapter two, it’s clear that the enemies of Israel don’t like any thought of rebuilding projects. There are vital analogies throughout this book, and this is an important one. So many Christians assume that when they start a healing process and seek to return to the Lord, their lives will automatically get better. We may think we’ll be spared the consequences of our behavior because we’ve committed to change. We hope our new way of life erases the results of the old. This passage from Nehemiah reminds us that Satan hates our intention to do the right thing and to rebuild. In 1 Peter 5:8, Peter compares Satan to a lion roaming around and waiting to devour his prey.

Nehemiah Principle Six

In the face of overwhelming damage and discouragement, rebuilding may simply be a matter of just getting started.

When Nehemiah gets home to Jerusalem, the end of chapter two describes how he goes out at night to survey the damage. It must have been like looking at Ground Zero after the World Trade Center was destroyed by terrorists. What a terrible sight! The analogy here is that for many of us who seek healing, we might suddenly wake up to all the damage we've created around us. This realization can be extremely discouraging. The enormity of the rebuilding task can be daunting. We may feel paralyzed and not know how or where to start to rebuild. In AA language, Nehemiah does "the next right thing." He simply gathers everyone and non-dramatically says, "Let's start rebuilding."

At the end of chapter two the enemies present themselves again. Nehemiah reminds everyone that God is in control and that they belong to Him. He says that the enemies have no historic claim to the people of God. In like fashion, when you're under attack, remind yourself that Satan has no claim on your life if you're a believer in Christ.

The next section is an outline of the specific way Nehemiah starts his enormous job. Chapter three, on the surface, is a hard one with its long list of difficult names. However, the chapter is a wonderful example of organization. Nehemiah divides the work into small segments, and various groups accept responsibility for each piece.

The division of labor outlined in Nehemiah Three isn't a unique principle. This age-old wisdom reminds us that if we look at the whole project of pursuing recovery, we may feel overwhelmed. But when we simply start building and focus on the immediate task at hand, we ultimately will reach our goal. The great AA phrase "one day at a time" certainly applies. Despite the damage and the discouragement, the first step of transformation is to simply get started.

Nehemiah Principle Seven

Accountability requires getting the garbage out of your life.

Hidden in the verses of chapter three are two great principles. Verse 14 reports that Malkijah repairs the Dung Gate. (That term is the NIV translation. Substitute your own word - garbage, manure, or whatever suits you.) Jerusalem had many gates and each one had a function. Obviously, the Dung Gate was the gate that channeled the garbage and refuse out of the city. It was the sanitation gate, which was vital or else the city would choke on its own filth. If you've ever been in a city that was having a garbage strike, you'll understand the

importance of the Dung Gate. Many health experts believe that the greatest advance of the 20th century was the widespread use of sanitation. This modern practice is responsible for ridding the world of more filth and disease than any other medical advance.

One analogy applicable here is that you might feel sometimes that your lot in life has involved dealing with dung. You get the worst assignments, the unimportant tasks, etc. An important principle from Nehemiah is that sometimes what seems like the filthy project might be the most important one.

There's another important point about the Dung Gate: What is the filth in your life? What do you need to get rid of? Maybe it's to throw away a stash of pornography, remove Internet access from your computer, cancel cable service to your home, or say goodbye to an affair partner.

Don't forget that there may be emotions you need to deal with as part of the garbage of your life. This "dung" could be anger, resentments, or jealousy. It could be deep hurts from old memories. These may take longer to work on, but don't ignore the feelings you need to deal with.

Nehemiah Principle Eight

Accountability means building close to home.

Look at verses 23 and 30 of chapter three and note that these people made repairs to the parts of the walls that were across from or next to their own houses. This is an important point. So many of us get into "global thinking" when we embrace the healing journey. We want to rush out and tell the world about the new and helpful things we're learning. Before recovery, many of us distract ourselves by helping others rather than addressing our own problems. The message of Nehemiah 3 is that we need to build close to home. Before we go off in haste to evangelize the world about recovery, we should repair the damage to our own homes, to our spouses, and to our children. "First things first" is another AA slogan, and the first rebuilding must happen at home. Before we go off too hastily, we should ask ourselves what repairs need to be made to our own homes, to our spouses, and to our children. We should be home and be available.

Nehemiah Principle Nine

Accountability means preparing ahead of time for the attacks to come.

Chapter four is a vital chapter. It begins with a description of how the enemies are marshalling their energies to come against the building project. The people could easily get discouraged by the threat. Nehemiah deals with the menace by praying and by posting

a guard day and night (verse 9).

The message for recovery is clear: *You can't wait for the attack to come. Instead, you must prepare for it.* Living by this principle is a great challenge. So many men fall because they tell themselves, "When I get tempted, then I'll call someone or do something." That's your pride talking. When you get tempted, a part of the temptation is that you're lonely, angry, bored, and lustful. You probably won't feel like calling anyone then. You won't want to resist the temptation or deal with it. You may be into your juvenile feelings of entitlement and convince yourself that you "deserve" to get some of your needs met in a sinful way. *If you wait until you're in trouble before asking for help, you won't ask.* Let me state this principle another way:

We must prepare in a time of strength for the times of weakness that will surely come.

You must prepare for the attacks against your sobriety. When you are humble and convicted enough that you want to change and to be sober, put energy into fortifying your recovery plan. Consider specifically how you'll guard your heart and position others to stand with you for protection.

Reflect back on the work you did in Principle One about your rituals. Do you remember the lists you made of behaviors you'll have to stop in order to prevent yourself from getting into your rituals? Thinking through your rituals and setting boundaries is part of preparation. Again, just to be clear:

Don't wait for temptation! Prepare for it, because it will come.

Do you get the point? What? You think being in recovery means you've had brain surgery and all sexual desire has been removed? Did you think that the world has been transformed and all triggers have vanished? You think you're better than other men who must work at being sexually sober? Get humble and get prepared.

Nehemiah Principle Ten

Accountability means guarding the weakest places, where you are the most vulnerable.

Nehemiah chapter four describes another important strategy that applies to recovery: Not only is the guard positioned day and night, but it's also placed at the weakest places. You must be sure you have warriors standing with you in your most vulnerable places.

This isn't rocket science. When you know your rituals and how you get most sorely tempted, make sure a number of men in your group are aware of those pitfalls. Ask them to help you prepare for those times, so that you have automatic defenses in place. How can defense happen automatically? One basic example is to call recovering men every day.

Schedule times during the day when you know you'll talk to someone. And don't depend on your willingness to make a call. Ask a brother to call you if he doesn't hear from you by a certain time. Most often you may talk about the weather, and that's OK. At other times your conversation may be serious as you discuss whatever is going on. In a second example, if you travel, a good plan for preparing upfront for possible temptations is to make sure several men know your schedule and where you're going. Arrange with them to call you at various times so that you can expect to hear from someone and not get yourself into trouble. Do you see how this strategy works?

During your Captives Free Group meeting, share your weakest places of vulnerability. Ask your group to help you construct a plan that's **proactive** in providing defenses.

Nehemiah Principle Eleven

Accountability is always in a group, not in only one person.

You will also notice that Nehemiah uses a lot of warriors, never just one. Warriors stand together. A powerful illustration is a scene from the movie *Gladiator*. The main character, Maximus, has been made into a slave and forced to fight as a gladiator. He's in the Coliseum, where the plan of the Romans is that he and a group of other gladiators are going to be slaughtered in a re-creation of the second battle of Carthage. Maximus gathers the men around and says to them, "Whatever comes through those gates, if we stay together, we will survive." As the Roman chariots enter the arena, the gladiators stand together, lock shields, and fend off the attack. Maximus continually exhorts them, "Stay as one." Because of their connected strength, they survive against superior odds.

That movie scene is a great picture of accountability: Men standing as one, together. Whatever the world or Satan sends your way, if you stand together with other recovering men, you can survive.

The most common mistake concerning accountability that's made by well-intentioned Christian men is to think that they can have an accountability "partner." This plan is foolishness. Haven't you lied skillfully enough to defeat one partner? After all, we addicts are usually great liars. We know how to get by without revealing the truth, especially if we only have to convince one person. You need a group of men who really know you and who won't be fooled when you're having times of weakness.

There is strength in fellowship. Loneliness is one of the reasons you acted out in the first place. *Fellowship is the answer*. Make no mistake, though, about the meaning of "fellowship." I'm defining fellowship as men who really know you. It isn't your average Bible study group or church-based class. The men in your group must really know everything about you – all your secret sins, your wounds, your temptations, your feelings. It's also important for them to be encouragers, and not disciplinarians. All of us respond much better to positive reinforcement. One of our principles is that:

Fellowship equals freedom from lust.

You must identify at least four or five men who are willing to stand with you. These brothers should know all your acting out behaviors, all your rituals, all of the ways you've fantasized, and all of your emotional history. Checking in with them won't take long because they know you so well already. They'll quickly be able to give you feedback about what you should do to protect yourself in the days to come. These safe men will stand with you in the gap against all attacks.

Nehemiah Principle Twelve

Our motivation for transformation should be selfless.

There is a great battle cry in the fourteenth verse of chapter four. Nehemiah says, *"Don't be afraid of them [the attackers]. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes"* (NIV). The great reminder here, again, is that the battle belongs to the Lord. But there's much more in this exhortation: The battle is also to be fought for others.

After the great catastrophe of September 11, 2001, we were all inspired by the example of the firefighters and police officers who sacrificed their lives in attempts to save others. That is what heroes do. That is what warriors do. You should be no different. Your motivation should be to prevent injuring anybody else around you. It should be to never again see the look of pain on the face of someone close to you, like your wife. It should be to keep your home safe for your children and others. And it should be to provide leadership and an example for your brothers who also seek to be transformed.

If your motivation is to avoid all personal consequences - and if your recovery is fear-based - you'll probably fail. Fear only lasts so long. When it subsides, you'll be tempted to act out again. Motivation that's proactive and includes eventually helping others is usually much more successful. After you're stable in your recovery, focus your energy outward. Get out of your selfishness. Be willing to lead a life of sacrifice.

Suppose you had the opportunity to speak to a military group. When we think about battles and fighting wars, what do we honor in soldiers? It's that they are willing to die for their country. This willingness to sacrifice, even to the point of death, is part of what it means to be transformed. Would you be willing to die for someone beyond yourself? What about your children? Your wife? Your sisters and brothers? When you can answer "yes" to those questions, you'll be successful in your journey of transformation.

Nehemiah Principle Thirteen

Accountability means building as well as defending.

Here is one last point from chapter four. Notice in verses 16 and 17 that half of the men built and half stood guard with their spears, bows, and shields. Even the men who carried material carried the supplies in one hand and a sword in the other. The picture is that there was a balance between building and defending - a balance in equal measure. Those who only have a defensive strategy in place get really tired of always being on guard. It takes a lot of energy to defend all the time. Defending is only negative. It's about the things you don't do.

The challenge of this picture in Nehemiah chapter four is that we must be *building* something, not just defending. The real journey of transformation is about going forward in positive directions. Our healing must be proactive. It's not enough to be removing the rubble from your life or even to be guarding against slips and relapse. Genuine and lasting transformation requires building an entire way of living life that goes far beyond your sexual behavior.

Nehemiah Principle Fourteen

Accountability means putting positive things into your life.

The program of recovery can't be about deprivation, or it will fail. Many falter in their recovery because all of their program activity is negative. Remember that you're probably an abandonment victim.

A voice inside you screams for love, attention, and activity. If all you do is continue to deny these basic needs, that same voice will continue to scream – and will probably get louder. You'll remain vulnerable to the false substitutes you've historically used to meet your legitimate needs and medicate your feelings.

Positive actions are discussed in Principle Seven, where we talk about asking the Lord to give you a vision. Remember some of those practical, positive steps. Examples include:

- Eating better
- Getting more rest
- Getting a medical check-up
- Exercising

- Inviting a friend for coffee
- Making a date with your spouse
- Making an appointment with a therapist or counselor
- Going to a workshop
- Getting into a Bible study
- Buying yourself some music that inspires you
- Doing anything just for fun

This isn't a complete list, but it provides some sample ideas. You'll notice that most of these items concern self-care, which is something most addicts have difficulty doing. Many of us got the false message that taking care of ourselves is "selfish." The reality is that historically you *have been* selfish, but not in this sense. You've been selfishly providing yourself with false substitutes for excitement, fun, and pleasure. Part of building a healthy life is to find positive ways of meeting your needs.

The Captives Free Group meeting guidelines suggest that at every meeting each person share something positive he's done for himself that week as a part of the check-in.

Nehemiah Principle Fifteen

***Accountability is an ongoing, lifelong process,
but God provides sustaining energy.***

Chapter five of Nehemiah reports that the work gets tiring and expensive. The strength of the workers gives out. The rebuilding costs mount, and some begin extracting taxes and expenses.

However, instead of simply helping the cause, these workers are making a profit. Some of the people even go so far as to sell their own children into slavery, which was a custom of the time.

Listen to others describe the first year of recovery, they went to therapy and support groups all the time. They were scared enough to go to something recovery-oriented almost every day. The effort was expensive and it was tiring. They probably remember thinking during that time, "When does this end? When do I get to stop being an addict?" Pat Carnes discovered in some of his early research about sex addiction that the period between the sixth and the twelfth months of healing is the most dangerous time for relapse. The main reason is probably because early recovery is so exhausting. Another reason is because we're still facing the consequences of our addiction during the first year, and life hasn't necessarily become much better. During this time, we might be tempted to go back into slavery.

It's important you accept that doing the work of healing will be expensive and exhausting. Rebuilding is difficult, but God is sufficient. Don't sell yourself back into slavery.

Read chapter five, verse 13. Nehemiah reports, *"I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, 'In this way may God shake out of His house and possessions every man who does not keep this promise. So may such a man be shaken out and emptied!' At this the whole assembly said, 'Amen,' and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised."*

As a man in the process of transformation, keep your promises!

This principle from Nehemiah is a reminder that when you think you can't go on - or you think you've finished your recovery work or that you're healed - realize you're not. Keep reaching out for help and support.

A friend of Dr. Lasser's once told him about a new meeting that he had just started and that he was going back to all the basics of doing all the work all over again. This is a healthy way of life, and he doesn't plan to change a thing. Maintaining fellowship and accountability are crucial to your journey. Be sure to watch against falling into the dangerous trap of thinking you've "made it," are "healed," or can now "let down your guard."

Nehemiah Principle Sixteen

When tempted, remain committed to transformation without wavering.

In Nehemiah chapter six, the wall is nearing completion. The enemies are frustrated with the results of their frontal assaults, so they come up with three different schemes to defeat the rebuilding project.

True to the "cunning" nature of addiction (and Satan), these attacks are much more subtle.

First, the enemies invite Nehemiah to a meeting outside of the city to talk about their differences. But instead of this reasonable-sounding plan, they actually are plotting to kill. This scheme is the plot of "distraction." The enemies are being polite and civil, and it might seem rational to have a meeting. It's tempting to ignore the potential consequences of getting involved with the enemy, especially if you believe you have a "good" reason. Rest assured that the enemies of transformation have a hidden (and evil) agenda. Understand that Satan will come after you with very subtle, civil, and rational-sounding distractions. It may simply be something like, "You've been working so hard, why not take a break? Have a little fun." Or perhaps Satan deceives you through your own self-talk: "I'm tired. Why do I have to spend so much energy working my program? I have such restrictive boundaries; maybe I can relax them a little." You may be tempted to stop thinking of yourself as an "addict" and decide you've gotten beyond your earlier temptations. Maybe it's OK to go online without accountability if you're only going to visit appropriate sites. Or surely by now you can handle seeing that former affair partner. After all, you have a legitimate connection through (_____ fill in the blank).

Temptation comes in many disguises and many voices, including your own. Remember, you're dealing with spiritual warfare. Hear the battle cry of Nehemiah: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot come down." Take his example to heart. Don't lose sight of the great work you're doing, and never waiver from your commitment to transformation.

Nehemiah Principle Seventeen

Transformation targets you for rumors and personal attacks.

The enemies step up the attack as chapter six unfolds. In the second scheme, they circulate a rumor that Nehemiah is trying to usurp the power of the king. The enemies are basically accusing him of grandiosity. They claim Nehemiah is trying to be too powerful and is too full of himself. They suggest he come to the meeting (outside the city, remember) and discuss his intentions.

Be aware that your journey of transformation will target you for rumors. Some of the attacking voices will come from the religious folk. People may accuse you of trying to be something that you're not, or condemn you for being "selfish" in making healthy choices. They may question your participation in a secular 12-Step program that acknowledges a "Higher Power" and insist you've turned your back on God. Other attacking voices will be secular ones. They'll taunt you for being "self-righteous" about your sexual morality. Don't be surprised if you're accused of being "judgmental" for maintaining your standards of healthy sexuality. People from both religious and secular communities will wonder about your recovery program in general and believe you're trying to escape responsibility by hiding behind an "addiction."

An article in *Playboy* magazine accused Dr. Laaser and others of inventing the concept of sexual addiction so that "professionals" could make money treating it. The assumption being that sexual addiction doesn't exist. These rumors and attacks can get really tiring and sometimes frightening. You will often be misunderstood about your feelings and motivations as you seek to be transformed into a closer image of Christ.

These false accusations against Nehemiah are the same kind of rumors that Jewish leaders circulated about Jesus. They said He was trying to be King. They dragged Him in front of Pilate and accused Him of being a radical and a revolutionary. Pilate knew these charges were crazy and thought he could resolve the problem when he stood Jesus next to Barabbas and asked the people their choice of whom he should release. Barabbas was a known revolutionary, and Pilate must have thought this solution was a way to "wash his hands" of the matter and get the people to do his work for him. Of course, Pilate's plan backfired - to Jesus' ultimate glory and our eternal salvation.

The point is that you'll deal with misunderstanding and perhaps false rumors. It's easy to get distracted by trying to explain yourself. You may, at least, tend to get defensive, which only robs you of energy you need to focus on your work of transformation. Nehemiah provides a better example of how to deal with this kind of attack. He says to his accusers, "Nothing

like what you're saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head" (verse 8). Nehemiah responds simply and directly, and then he quickly gets back to work.

He is, though, in touch with his emotions regarding this attack. He recognizes the enemies are trying to frighten him and the others. The attackers hope, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed" (verse 9). Nehemiah prays that God will "strengthen my hands" as he leads the people. At times you'll need to pray for strength and ask supportive friends to encourage you in the ongoing work.

You do not have to be fully understood to pursue your "great work" of transformation. You may be falsely accused of pride, arrogance, ambition, or selfishness. You may be stung by rumors. You'll certainly feel distracted and discouraged. You'll fear your hands are too weak for their work. Consider Nehemiah's response and renew your courage and commitment.

Nehemiah Principle Eighteen

Transformation results in a willingness to sacrifice even your own life.

There is one final plot. An invalid by the name of Shemaiah invites Nehemiah to come with him to the temple where they will be safe. The work is dangerous he says, and if Nehemiah is going to continue his good effort of rebuilding the wall, he must stay safe. Nehemiah's response is powerful: "Should a man like me run away or try to save his own life?"

As you seek to build and lead a transformed life, at times you'll be tempted to retreat to safety. Others may even encourage you to take the easy path of self-protection. For example, when you're being successful in living a pure life and are finding opportunities to share the message about God's transforming power, you may be tempted (or advised) not to share your story because it might harm your reputation. Many people were tempted to stop traveling after the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. In a variety of ways you may be pressured to stop your important work.

Nehemiah, though, wisely discerned that Shemaiah was no true friend out to protect his best interest. He knew that Shemaiah actually was in on a plot to kill him inside the supposed safety of the temple itself. The guess is that Nehemiah's response would have been the same even if he wasn't aware of Shemaiah's true intentions. Nehemiah would have refused to retreat from his mission.

Our response must be the same. In Ephesians 5:1-2, Paul says we should be "imitators" of God and be willing, like Christ, to give ourselves up as a "fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Sacrifice can mean taking risks to do the right thing, even if it makes us feel afraid. Obviously, we won't be perfect at courageously continuing in our work, no matter the risk. Only Jesus was perfectly self-sacrificing. But we can draw strength from His example, face our fears, and ignore the voices that suggest we abandon our work.

— Tying It All Together —

We have gone to such length to teach these 18 principles from Nehemiah because we believe they provide a wonderful example of the total process of living in freedom from captivity to addiction. This story of humility, courage, action, focus, and dependence on God illustrates the Seven Principles outlined in this Captives Free Guide. Rebuilding the wall is a picture of transforming your life.

This process involves surrender on a daily basis. Regardless of the challenges, whether from within your own heart or from external sources, being transformed means surrendering your life, your will, and the outcomes to God.

Taking life one day at a time and maintaining accountability will be the core of your program for the rest of your life. This reality isn't just because you're a sex addict. It's because you're a man who seeks to follow Christ.

— Time is God's —

Before we finish with Nehemiah, notice a statement at the end of chapter six. How long do you think the building project takes? A dozen years? Maybe only eight to ten years? Surely such a huge project takes three or four years, at least, right?

Wrong. Verse 15 reports, "So the wall was completed on the 25th of Elul, in 52 days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God." Did you catch that? *The wall was finished in only 52 days!*

In one sense, the process of transformation is a lifelong endeavor. We're never "finished" with the journey of becoming transformed into a sacrificial life in Christ. We continually must be about the task of rebuilding the walls – of our hearts, our lives, our families, and our relationship with Christ.

But in another sense, the intensity of the work will not last as long as you may fear. It won't always be as hard as it is in the beginning. The struggle to maintain sobriety will ease. Integrity will take the place of dishonesty. The pain of the past will recede. Relationships will be restored. Wounds will heal. Fellowship and community will replace loneliness. You'll discover you've even been surprised by joy – that your spirit knows a peace that passes understanding.

Another great slogan from Alcoholics Anonymous is found in the "Promises of Recovery." After listing a variety of positives the recovering person will experience, the "Big Book" gives a time frame for when these promises will be fulfilled: "before you're half way through" the first intense part of your journey. Perhaps after only 52 days.

During those times when you're tired and lonely and frightened, remember Nehemiah's story and be encouraged by his example. You, too, are doing a great work as you build a life of purity, and good things may start coming to you in a shorter time than you might imagine.

Time belongs to God, and He will guide your journey from beginning to end.

DEFINITIONS

Communication is essential to intimate fellowship, and that fellowship is vital to your recovery. Group discussions, feedback, and presentations are the life-blood of support and encouragement. Effective communication and fellowship require that we understand each other – that we speak the same language. Standard terminology is a tool for clear communication, and agreement about definitions allows each Captives Free Group member to communicate easily with others in his own group and in the ministry network across the country. Each group member should study the following definitions to eliminate as much confusion as possible in regard to terminology. (These definitions may also provide a productive discussion topic for a Captives Free Group meeting.) The definitions are based on my understanding gleaned from talking to hundreds of recovering people from a variety of geographic locations. Every group, though, may have local or personal understandings that are important in their setting. What's crucial is that the group discusses variations in meanings so that everyone can be clear about them.

90 DAYS

The term “90 Days” comes from the AA slogan “90 days, 90 meetings,” which refers to the first three months of an alcoholic's recovery. Many times it's necessary for a person to go to a meeting every day for the first 90 days in order to remain sober. This commitment is a good one for sex addicts, as well. In the beginning of your healing journey or after a relapse, committing to a “90 in 90” is an excellent plan.

Ninety days has also been applied to the period of time a sex addict may choose to be sexually abstinent with self and others, including his spouse. (You'll find more information about the concept of a 90-day abstinence period in Principle Four, Assignment One.)

ABANDONMENT (emotional abandonment)

People tend to think of abandonment as something physical, but emotional abandonment has nothing to do with proximity. It can happen when you can't connect and your emotional needs aren't being met. Emotional abandonment in childhood can happen if the primary caretaker, usually the mother, is unable to be present emotionally for her child. Abandonment happens later, too, when children are criticized, controlled, unfairly treated, or otherwise given a message that they or their experience is unimportant or wrong. A few instances of emotional abandonment don't typically harm a child's healthy development, but when they're common occurrences, they can affect the child's sense of self and security and thereby lead to intimacy issues and codependency in adult relationships.

ABSTINENCE

This is the state of being non-sexual with self or others. For some men, abstinence may also indicate a planned time-out from any romantic relationship. Abstinence is the act or practice of refraining from indulging an appetite or desire, especially for alcoholic drink or sexual intercourse. It is the state of restraint being without a substance, drug, such as alcohol or heroin, or behavior on which one is dependent.

ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER

This is any person who agrees to be in your network of people holding you accountable. A common mistake is thinking that you can have one accountability partner. I've never known a person to recover when he's only accountable to one person. One of your accountability partners can be your sponsor, but your spouse shouldn't be either your sponsor or an accountability partner. The word "partner" usually describes more mutuality in the relationship than is typical with a sponsor.

ACTING OUT/ACTING IN

Acting out refers to the practice of engaging in sinful or dysfunctional behaviors - in this case, sexual behaviors. "Acting in" refers to rigidly controlling sexual behaviors in an unhealthy way. It often means that sex (or some other behavior) is being strictly avoided, but the person isn't growing emotionally and spiritually. "Acting in" is often used synonymously with sexual anorexia. "Acting out" and "acting in" are really opposite ends of the same continuum. They both can be attempts to control painful memories or emotions.

ADDICTION

Historically, the word "addiction" has been controversial in the Christian community. Some fear the concept of addiction removes personal responsibility for sinful behavior. Some believe those who call themselves addicts blame their personal decisions on an "addiction." All truly repentant and humble addicts, however, always accept personal responsibility for their actions.

The medical and psychological community has several universal criteria for determining if a substance or a behavior is an addiction:

1. Use of the substance or behavior has become "unmanageable." This means the addict has tried to stop, over and over again, but can't. There is a history of failed attempts. Some clinicians believe there must be a two-year history, at least, of an unmanageable pattern for a person to be labeled an addict. The word "powerless" has also been used to describe this pattern. Sometimes addicts refer to themselves as "out of control." Even when an addict creates destructive consequences for himself by sinful behavior, it's not enough to get him to stop.

2. The addiction gets worse over time. This means that more and more of the substance or behavior will be needed over time to achieve the same effect. An alcoholic knows, for example, that as he continues to drink, he'll need more and more alcohol to get "high" or drunk. Sex addicts know that they need more and more sexual activity to achieve the same "high" of the acting out experience. This escalation can take two forms. The most basic is that the addict does more and more of the same kind of behavior. I've known, for example, people who start masturbating once a month and progress to once a day or more in the course of their addiction. For some addicts, progression means they'll need new kinds of acting out experiences to achieve the same "high." It's important to remember that most addicts won't progress to illegal, highly dangerous, or sexually offending kinds of behavior. Some do, but the majority does not. Sexual addicts may be able to stop their behaviors for periods of time, but until they find healing, will always return to them. Over time, a pattern of repeated failure will be evident.

3. Tolerance is one reason for the factor of progression. Medical science is discovering new things about the human brain that broaden our understanding of addictive behavior. The chemistry of the brain adjusts to whatever an addict puts into it. Over time the brain demands more to achieve the same effect. For alcoholics, the brain adjusts to alcohol and requires more. Thinking about sex and engaging in sexual behavior requires that the brain produce the brain chemistry to achieve sexual response. New research is finding that the sexual chemistry of the brain can also become tolerant, which means more and more thought or activity is necessary to have the same brain chemistry effects — the feelings of arousal, excitement, and pleasure. In many ways, sex addicts are drug addicts, because they become “high” on the drug produced in their own brain.

4. Because of the brain chemistry involved, addicts use the thoughts and behaviors that produce the neurochemical highs to either raise or lower their mood. We say then that addicts “medicate” their feelings. If an addict is depressed, lonely, or bored, he can think of exciting sexual encounters, either remembered or imagined, and the arousal part of the sexual response produces chemicals that raise his mood. If an addict is stressed, anxious, or fearful, he will tend to think of the relationship or romance quality of the encounter. These associated brain chemicals create a feeling of well-being and contentment that lowers his mood. Most addicts are capable of both kinds of thoughts and, therefore, can both raise and lower their moods depending on their feelings at the moment.

5. Finally, addicts act out despite negative consequences. Addicts don’t pay attention to negative consequences and are in what’s commonly called “denial.” They also usually “minimize” or “rationalize” their acting out, despite the consequences. Until an addict decides to surrender control of his fears that prevent him from getting help, he’ll continue to act out. Addicts may also continue to act out because it’s usually a slow and insidious form of suicide, instead of immediately deadly. They know at some level they’re destroying their lives, but their depression prevents them from caring.

ADDICTIVE BEHAVIORS

An “addictive behavior” is a boundary that refers to the distinction between which behaviors are tolerable and which ones are not. An addict may designate addictive behaviors as to what sexual behaviors are outside of his sobriety definition, such as not spending time with others who still engage in a particular behavior. A spouse may also have a definition about which behaviors would cause her to leave if they happened again. This kind of addictive behavior is sometimes referred to as a “line in the sand.” Addictive behaviors are those that, if engaged in, may jeopardize our recovery plan and our ability to grow toward healthy, intimate relationship. If someone is recovering from romance obsession, one of his designated “addictive behaviors” to avoid may be listening to romantic music or watching romantic movies because entertaining those thoughts or activities would set him up for failure. Perhaps a shopaholic would no longer carry credit or debit cards or spend time at a shopping mall. Similarly, avoiding a workaholic’s “addictive behaviors” may require strict adherence to leaving the job after 8 hours even if work is left undone. Re-evaluate and update addictive behaviors frequently. Our success with avoiding addictive behaviors gives us hope that we will, in time, reach our healthy choices. For more information on this process, see “Healthy Choices.”

BOUNDARIES

In simplest terms, boundaries are guidelines for safety. They define which behaviors should and shouldn't occur in relationships and in families. They **proscribe** what behaviors should not be allowed, and when these boundaries are violated, that is "invasion." Boundaries also **prescribe** what behaviors should happen. When these boundaries are violated (or not upheld, to describe it another way), then "abandonment" happens. Some people have non-existent or "loose" boundaries, which frequently causes them to be harmed in some way. Other people have too high or "rigid" boundaries. They won't allow themselves to be loved or nurtured. Many people don't know how to establish their own boundaries. They might be codependent. Other people don't know how to observe boundaries. They might be perpetrators of harm or abuse. Stating your boundaries is a way of asking for safety, which is a different practice from making "demands." A demand is a request for more immediate action, which may have more to do with fear and anger than it does with personal safety.

CAPTIVES FREE RECOVERY PLAN (CFRP)

The CFRP is a compilation of "Best Practices" for addiction recovery from practitioners, group leaders, and those who have implemented these practices to successfully become free from the captivity. Captives Free is committed to continually provide and update the CFRP with proven addiction recovery information from a biblical and clinical basis. The CFRP was created out of compassion for persons seeking sexual addiction recovery in an ever increasing and diverse market of programs, materials, and books of which most offer incomplete or misguided information. An additional purpose of the CFRP is now to provide proven methods for addressing other addictive behaviors, as well as sexual addiction, and thus unite the recovery strategies of individuals, organizations, and ministries to work together, worldwide.

Individually, before recovery can be experienced, one must develop disciplines that pursue wholeness. These disciplines are presented in the CFRP, with particular emphasis on the initiatives begun in the First Year of Recovery. When these multiple disciplines are applied consistently, they result in healthy, intimate relationships where individuals are safe to express feelings and process pain. There is great hope for those who view this model and follow its practices. See our website to view the CFRP in its entirety:

CODEPENDENCY

Codependency was first used in the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) community to refer to anyone who was in relationship with an alcoholic. The assumption was that these individuals tolerated drinking, as evidenced by their remaining in the relationship. These individuals, then, were considered "dependent" on the alcoholic. And since the alcoholic is dependent on alcohol, these people are "codependent" on alcohol. These people (usually spouses) tolerate an alcoholic and his/her drinking behavior out of their fear of being alone. It's more important for the codependent to maintain the relationship than it is to confront drinking and the problems it creates. As understanding about addiction has broadened beyond alcoholism to sexual and other forms of compulsive behaviors, the term codependent has come to refer to anyone who tolerates problematic or addictive behavior.

From this basic definition, many have written about codependency and said that codependents abandon their own needs and attend to the needs of the addict. They are

more interested in maintaining the approval and presence of the addict than they are in speaking the truth. This objective causes them to ignore their own needs and wants and sacrifice themselves. This sacrifice is out of their fears, not out of their strengths.

Codependents often “enable” the addict by making excuses for him and generally looking the other way. They also perform many of the tasks that an addict should be responsible for, which lead many to term codependents “doers.” Accordingly, all that codependents “do” may save addicts from consequences, which often earn codependents the title of “rescuers.” Finally, since codependents seem selfless, some have called them (and they may see themselves as) “martyrs.” Essentially, codependency is a fear and anxiety-based disorder in which the individual has an addiction to approval.

“Codependency is the fallacy of trying to control interior feelings by controlling people, things, and events on the outside.” - *Love is a Choice*, Drs. Hemfelt, Minirth, and Meier

Please be aware that any labels, such as codependency or co-addiction, are used only for the purpose of identifying problems that need to be healed. We should always seek to use these terms in love and not in judgment. Some primary partners (spouses) soundly reject these labels as humiliating. They might say, “It’s his problem, not mine.” These spouses could benefit from exploring why they choose to stay in the relationship.

CO-ADDICTION

Co-addicts are people who are in a *primary* relationship (such as marriage) with an addict. “Co-addict” defines a relationship between two people, just as “aunt” and “niece” indicates a certain relationship. Co-addicts may or may not suffer from the symptoms of codependency. Some co-addicts may not be consciously aware of their partner’s addiction. They may seem strong and self-assured, but this appearance, too, can be a disguise for insecurity.

COMPARTMENTALIZING

In James 4:8, the brother of Christ says that we can be “double-minded.” This term means that various parts of our brain can be at war with each other, which is certainly true with addiction. Paul, in Romans 7, says that we don’t always do what we want to do, and that we often do what we *don’t* want to do. One reason for this failure can be due to our “compartmentalizing.” We segregate off parts of ourselves and aren’t “unified.” Another word for this state is “dissociating,” which is a clinical term for a defense mechanism that refers to trying not to think about (or even to be aware of) something that is painful. Addicts often compartmentalize their sinful behavior and then deny that it even exists in reality.

CORE ISSUES/WOUNDS

Addictive behavior is widely understood to be an attempt to medicate the pain of some past trauma or relational wounding that has not been resolved. The original emotional damage thus becomes a core issue, and the fact that it remains unresolved becomes the often subconscious excuse for the relationally and spiritually destructive behavior. The behavioral controls we impose, emotionally and spiritually, on childhood traumas as we mature into adulthood often serve only to rationalize and entrench the addictive behavior.

We numb the pain over and over, often with increasing levels of the pain-killing behavior, just to maintain that numbness. Satan is always there to use and intensify that inability to identify and express emotions, and to further disable our ability to have relationship with those we care about or even with God Himself. The principles within this Captives Free Guide can help you invite Christ into the painful emotion associated with your suffering and identify those core issues from the past. Jesus himself expressed emotions in very open and often strong ways: he was moved to tears in the Garden and to righteous anger in clearing the money changers from the Temple. Many of us have not been taught how to process and express such feelings. In order to heal, we must be able to express emotions in a manner that is consistent and constructive, and to deal with those core wounds in a safe environment such as a Captives Free Group, where real relationships are built—open, transparent, and accountable.

CROSS TALK

This reference simply means talking back and forth during meetings - the process of feedback. Some groups have struggled with this concept because certain members may talk too long, give too much advice, be too angry or judgmental, or simply be rude. People are encouraged at meetings to be good listeners and not to be amateur counselors. Members should always seek to be loving in their feedback. The practice for Captives Free Groups is to allow cross talk, because it provides essential support when done appropriately. See the Safety Guidelines in the Meeting Guide section.

CRUISING

This term refers to any ritual behavior (described in Principle One, Assignment Two) designed to find a partner to act out with sexually or relationally. Cruising rituals may include dress, appearance, facial expressions, flirting, “hanging out” in certain places, or any variety of behaviors designed to find or attract a partner.

CYCLE

A cycle is a predictable pattern where one thought or behavior leads to others that eventually lead back to the original thought or emotion. The sexual addiction cycle is explained in Principle One, Assignment Two, and the recovery cycle is described in Principle Six, Assignment Two.

DENIAL

Simply put, denial is avoiding or “denying” reality. Fear of consequences, such as others’ reactions or our own painful emotions, is the usual cause for avoiding the truth. Denial involves both direct lies and the avoidance of reality.

ENTITLEMENT

All addicts need to “excuse” their behaviors. They search for reasons why it’s OK to act out. One of the main excuses is called “entitlement,” which means that the addicts “deserve” to act out. Some addicts keep a balance sheet in their heads and feel that when they’ve done enough good behaviors, they’re entitled to do some bad behaviors. Some addicts feel so unjustly treated in life (martyrs) that they believe it’s only fair for them to get something for themselves. Anger and narcissism are usually behind the feeling of entitlement.

FAMILY OF ORIGIN

Your family of origin generally refers to your immediate biological family: your parents and brothers and sisters. It can also mean any people who have lived with you under the same roof. Examples might include stepparents, uncles, aunts, grandparents and cousins, but “family of origin” can also indicate others who lived with you, even if they weren’t biologically related to you.

FAMILY SYSTEMS

Dr. Murray Bowen authored the Family Systems Theory. A core assumption in this theory is that an emotional system that evolved over several billion years governs all human relationship systems. Bowen posited that *“transmission between family members appeared to be based on prolonged association.”* Bowen further purported that *“there seems to be a link to the deep inclination of human beings to imitate one another.”* Bowen has done extensive study in the area of family-of-origin issues. He is responsible for developing many family-of-origin perspectives and theories. Bowen believed that *“individuals could not be understood apart from their family.”* Bowen also believed that *“the degree of unresolved attachment, or indifference between parent and child, influenced how well a person functioned throughout their life.”* Dr. Murray Bowen explains the family as a system:

“A family is a system in which each member had 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.”

The family system is also known as family of origin. Family of origin is the source for launching children into adult life with the attitudes, behaviors, and skills that facilitate success. Some family-of-origin systems equipped children to be healthy functioning adults and some family-of-origin systems arrested this development. Early influences operate to shape future behavior. The shaping process occurs through the following four vehicles: “(1) parent-child emotional relationship, (2) parental guidelines, (3) parental approaches to child development, and (4) behavior modeling.” The family system often sets up an individual to be vulnerable to compulsive behavior, addictive behavior, and life-controlling issues. It can even go so far in modeling this type of behavior that an individual ends up imitating well into adult life.

FANTASY

Fantasy is an attempt at trauma resolution, an escape from reality, imagining an *“it will be better when...”* scenario to provide a different outcome. Fantasies are thoughts about anything in an imaginary way, any preoccupation or obsessive thought patterns about the experience of using your “coping mechanism” to change your mood or gain a sense of control and relief from your unpleasant emotional distress. We develop a dependency or affection for our behavior because of the relief (albeit temporary) that we feel. Fantasy has also been referred to as “preoccupation” - being preoccupied with the comforting thoughts and imagining the relief of your distress.

Chris Charleton, an internationally recognized addiction/trauma expert and author of the book *Relapse* states that:

“Fantasy is an intellectual process utilized to escape the powerlessness and helplessness associated with unrelenting emotional, relational and spiritual pain. Examining the Carnes addiction model clearly demonstrates that shame is the direct result of unresolved trauma and is compounded by the addictive process. Every addictive relapse intensifies and reinforces the already-existing shame. Shame is the emotional, relational and spiritual equivalent of AIDS, wherein a person attacks his or her own being. At varying levels, shame leads us to detest our existence, inundating us with feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, incompetence and unworthiness which are inescapable. It directly opposes God’s proclamation of our lovability and worth.

“As shame becomes further entrenched within our being, fantasy becomes a desperate, last-ditch attempt to remedy the conviction of our unloveability, worthlessness and rejectability. Fantasy therefore, like the phoenix, arises from the burning embers of self-contempt and hatred to create a distraction from the immensity of our inescapable pain. Hence fantasies are an illusory and ultimately ineffective mechanism devised to counter our conviction of unworthiness for relationship with God, others and ourselves. Healing from the addictive process necessitates identifying our fantasies to illuminate and ultimately conquer the shame-based convictions that are robbing us of the victory that God desires for our lives.”

FIRST YEAR OF RECOVERY

There are non-negotiable aspects for a successful “First Year of Recovery” that are detailed in the Captives Free Recovery Plan. Before a successful first year of recovery can be experienced, one must intentionally develop disciplines that pursue wholeness. One of these disciplines is a commitment to maintaining a recovery plan. Intentionally following this plan works toward consistent application of multiple disciplines that result in healthy intimate relationships where we are safe to express feelings and to process pain. Frequent evaluation of a recovery plan in the first year is crucial for long-term success, especially at times when fulfillment appears elusive. The First Year of Recovery and the Captives Free Recovery Plan can be viewed in their entirety on our website: captivesfree.com.

GROOMING

Grooming behaviors are those which seem innocent, but are intended to gain someone’s trust and therefore to gain opportunity for making sexual advances. Both sexual perpetrators and sexual addicts sometimes engage in grooming potential victims or sexual partners.

HEALTHY CHOICES

A “Healthy Choice” is a boundary or behavior that guides or protects our becoming all that God desires us to be. Healthy choices support our recovery plan and require taking responsibility for feelings, actions, and especially for the protection of our value. For example, spending time with others who are safe and demonstrate, or are learning, healthy boundaries and healthy behavior would be a healthy choice. Healthy choices can look like goals or objectives. We might include Captives Free Group and Christian fellowship

as a healthy choice, as well as studying addiction recovery material or other elements listed in the Captives Free Plan that set us up for successful recovery - each of these could be considered a “Healthy Choice.” For more information on this process, see Addictive Behaviors.

INTIMACY

Intimacy described in the Bible is seen in the Hebrew word “yada”; that is “to know” by experience, to learn, to perceive, to discern, to experience, to know and be known relationally. For intimate relationships to flourish, whether with man or God, we must feel safe to reveal ourselves without holding back or keeping secrets.

INTIMACY DISORDER

Intimacy disorder results from the core beliefs “I am a bad and worthless person” and “No one will like me as I am.” These ideas are foundational to addicts and co-addicts. Those who suffer from either disorder believe that if they tell the truth or express their real emotions, other people won’t like them or may even end up hating them and leaving. This fear often means that the people whom we’re most afraid of losing, like our spouse, will be the one to whom we are least likely to tell the truth. Intimacy Disorder is a fear- and anxiety-based disorder. Fear that someone will leave us, and the anxiety that we’ll be all alone.

Patrick Carnes, a renowned addiction recovery expert, states that “more than 87 percent of patients 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.” http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200504/200504_022_internet.cfm

MEDICATING/PHARMACOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT

Medicating refers to using a substance or behavior to alter mood. Some substances and behaviors can elevate “down” moods such as loneliness, depression or boredom; and some can depress (or lower) moods like anxiety, fear, or stress. Medicating has been called “pharmacological management” in that the person manipulates his own mood, becoming like a pharmacist of his own brain.

MINIMIZING

Similar to denial (and really a form of it) minimizing literally means attempting to make smaller what is really true. Typically, a person tries to minimize how his destructive behaviors affect himself and others.

MODELS OF RECOVERY

There are fundamentally two models of recovery: the Disease Model and the Core Issue/Trauma Model, as described below.

Disease Model - focus is on the behavior and not the issues driving the behavior. This is the typical secular approach that stresses behavior modification and

improvement of behavioral skills. This is perhaps best represented by the classic “12 Step” approach. The typical Christian approach follows this model as well, represented by Christ-centered 12 Step programs, heavy focus on spiritual disciplines, and on deliverance and inner healing

Core Issue/Trauma Model - focus is on the issues driving the behavior. This approach recognizes that the behavior is driven by the need to medicate the wound, and that recovery must go deeper than just behavioral change. The goal is not just to get sober, but to get well—to actually experience transformation. That’s based on the understanding that rules can’t change the heart, only the Holy Spirit can do that.

NARCISSISM

This is a clinical term that is more commonly used to refer to self-centered behavior. Narcissus was a Greek figure who loved looking at his own reflection. “Narcissists” often congratulate themselves on their own accomplishments or give themselves a wide variety of compliments. They seem to be thinking only about themselves and not about others. Their own agenda is the most important. Narcissists often seem very grandiose and self-confident or self-assured, but they really are not. Instead, they are very insecure and concerned about others’ approval. Usually, these people have been “narcissistically wounded” - that is, they’ve experienced life traumas that have damaged their sense of belonging and of being worthy. Narcissists actually lack self-confidence and are trying to bolster themselves.

NEUROCHEMICAL

All activities of the brain are facilitated by the interaction of chemicals in the brain. What is sometimes called the electrical activity of the brain is based on chemistry, or “neurochemistry.” Scientists have identified hundreds of chemicals involved in the process of “communication” among brain cells. Some people are born with genetic predispositions to having problems with the proper balance of these chemicals. Addictive and dysfunctional behavior can also alter the normal state of brain chemistry. Psychiatry is the medical science that seeks to understand the right balance and prescribe medications to correct such disorders.

OBJECTIFICATION

This literally means to view someone who is fully human as an object rather than a person. Sexually, objectification means to see someone as only a physical body and not as a person with a mind and soul. Objectifying is de-humanizing. When we objectify someone, it’s easier to lust after that person as just a body to be desired.

RATIONALIZATION

This is an excuse or justification. Rationalizations are used to try to explain why something was or wasn’t done.

RECOVERY PLAN

A recovery plan is an intentional effort working toward consistent application of multiple disciplines that result in healthy intimate relationships where we are safe to express feelings and process pain. Before such recovery can be experienced, one must develop disciplines that pursue wholeness, all of which are presented in the Captives Free Recovery Plan, defined earlier

RELAPSE

A relapse is a series of slips that reflect the crossing of emotional, spiritual, and sexual boundaries. A relapse is an on-going violation of sobriety.

RUBBER-NECKING

This simply means turning your head to take in a sexual stimulus (usually another person) for a longer period of time.

SEXUAL ANOREXIA

Like those who struggle with food anorexia inhibit their eating, sexual anorexics avoid sex. Other clinical terms are “inhibited sexual desire” or “disorder of sexual desire.” Painful memories (conscious or unconscious) shut down sexual desire or availability. Anorexia is often about anger and/or anxiety. Sex addicts can be sexual with others and anorexic with their spouses. In these cases, guilt, shame, anxiety, or a variety of other factors shut them down sexually within their marriages.

SHAME

One of the core beliefs of sexual addicts is “I am a bad and worthless person,” which is a shame-based conviction. Shame, though, isn’t inherently bad. There can be “healthy shame,” which we feel when we know we need God. “Unhealthy shame” occurs when a person’s life experiences, like trauma, lead him to believe he doesn’t deserve God’s love.

In Hebrew, “shame,” or “to be ashamed,” is defined as the confusion, disgrace, embarrassment, dismay, or disappointment that things didn’t turn out as expected. Utter defeat pervades the mood; disillusion and a broken spirit will follow.

If shame still exists, it hinders full development in Christ. Shame comes from past circumstances and experiences that injure our value. Shame must be vigorously uprooted, and we must grieve the “injury” to our value or we cannot grow into the vision (fullness of joy).

SLIP

A slip is a one-time violation of sobriety in any form. “Slip is an acronym for “Short Lapse In Progress.” A violation of sobriety remains a “short lapse” only if the person learns from it, repents, and grows in understanding as a result.

SOBRIETY

Most simply in terms of Christian morality, a state of sobriety exists when a person is not being sexual with self or anyone other than his spouse. Any sex outside of marriage is a violation of sobriety. **That is also true of any sexual behavior used to medicate negative emotions, whether within a marriage or not.** As Jesus said in Matthew 5, these violations can include thought life or fantasy.

SOBRIETY FOR CO-ADDICTS

As Captives Free continues to work with those who are in relationship with an addict, we have found that certain behaviors, or the absence of certain behaviors, indicate sobriety for co-addicts and they are listed below.

- No Controlling and Manipulative Behavior
- No Fantasy
- No Transference, Taking on the Addict's Recovery or Behaviors
- No Self-Medicating or Escaping Behavior
- No Surrender of Values or Self
- Appropriate Boundaries and Respect for the Boundaries of Others

SPIRITUAL ABUSE

Spiritual Abuse can be hard to identify, but no less difficult to endure than any other kind of abuse. If it's discussed at all, most examples of spiritual abuse refer to a church elder or faith leader inflicting abuse on congregation members, often by creating a toxic culture within the church or group by shaming or controlling members using the power of their position. However, spiritual abuse can also occur within an intimate partner relationship. Spiritual abuse is not limited to a certain religion or denomination. Any person, of any belief system, is capable of perpetrating spiritual abuse, just as anyone can be the victim of it.

SPONSOR

A sponsor is the person who is your main accountability partner. The qualities of a sponsor are described in Principle Four, Assignment One. While you will need many people in your accountability group or network, there will be one person who takes charge and helps you direct the show. This person helps you plan your overall healing journey, including meeting attendance, phone calls, counseling, and spiritual direction. He will not necessarily do all of these things, but he'll help you monitor how you are doing in the program. You will need to "submit" to your sponsor's authority and to determine what consequences will be appropriate if you fail to honor your commitments to healing.

TRAUMA

Injury, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or spiritual, to the true value of a person as bestowed by God upon one created in His image.

TRAUMA BONDING

This is one of the trauma reactions described in Principle One, Assignment Three. It's commonly used to refer to dysfunctional attachments and unhealthy relationships. To be trauma bonded means that two people are attracted to each other because of conscious and unconscious characteristics that remind them of earlier people in their lives who wounded them. The unconscious hope is that attaching to this kind of person will provide a new chance to heal the old wounds. Basically, the hope is that if you keep repeating old behaviors you'll eventually get it right. Sometimes trauma bonding occurs when one person hopes this time to be more in control, to reverse the roles, or to be the one with the power.

TRIGGER

There are two basic kinds of triggers in our program. It is generally assumed that the word trigger refers to the stimulation of inappropriate sexual desire or action. Any stimulus that is seen, heard, felt, smelled, tasted, remembered, or fantasized about that creates sexual desire or action (even if only in the brain) is a **sexual trigger**. Any stimulus (in the variety of ways just described) that creates emotional and spiritual feelings of anxiety, fear, loneliness, boredom, depression, or anger is a **general trigger**. Often, general triggers are also referred to as "emotional triggers." General triggers become sexual triggers when sex is used to medicate the feeling that general triggers create.

We're conscious of many possible sexual triggers, such as looking at pornography or an attractive person. Memories of past sexual experiences (sometimes referred to as "euphoric recall") can trigger sexual thoughts. Music, such as a particular song, can have the same effect. Other triggers may be more unconscious. They can be based on life experiences that we don't always consciously remember. Certain words or actions, certain expressions or tones of voice, certain times of the year or events, certain music, and certain sexual behavior can all trigger emotions or reactions. One key to identifying a trigger is to discern if your emotional reaction seems out of proportion to the event that's taking place. When that happens, your unconscious memory may be taking you to old places in ways you don't always realize. Have you ever had someone say, "You're overreacting"? The reason behind your "overreaction" is probably some unconscious trigger.

A FINAL WORD ON WORDS

Words are words. Definitions and understandings change over the years. It's never a good idea to argue about definitions. They aren't something to live or die for. Words are simply tools to help us communicate. If there's a disagreement about some term, come to a group consensus and move forward.

In addition to these terms that we've defined, your group may encounter many others that we haven't included. Please contact Captives Free with items you'd like to know about, have a good definition for, or simply think should be included in future editions of the Captives Free Guide.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1	Captives Free Readings	178
APPENDIX 2	Captives Free Recovery Highway – Road Map	186
APPENDIX 3	Captives Free Recovery Highway – MERGE Exercise	188
APPENDIX 4	Feelings Check Process	195

APPENDIX 1

Captives Free Meeting Guide Readings

Safety Guidelines	179
Mission Statement	180
The Seven Principles	181
The Seven “Cs”	182
The Hope	183
Group Covenant.....	184

Captives Free Group Safety Guidelines

It is absolutely essential that every Captives Free Group be safe. Safety produces the best environment for honesty and fellowship. All group members are responsible for observing these Safety Guidelines, and if they are violated, group members must confront each other in love. If an individual cannot observe the guidelines consistently or after being confronted, he will be asked to leave the meeting. The well-being of the entire group is more important than any individual member.

1. It is safe to be honest. We expect all members to tell the truth.
2. It is safe to have feelings. All feelings are acceptable to God and to us.
3. We will allow safe group conversation but please refrain from graphic sexual descriptions or identifying specific clubs, magazines, or websites, as that could lead to unnecessary temptation for group members. We give each other feedback as long as it only reflects our own experience, strength, and hope. Therefore, we begin our feedback with “I,” and not with “You.” We do not give advice.
4. We do not preach. It is acceptable to share messages of spiritual strength and hope, to quote Scripture, or to make theological statements. But we avoid comments that use words like “should,” “always,” or “never,” and expressions such as “God says...,” “God’s will for your life is...,” and, “God will be angry if...” We all seek to follow Christ in our own way.
5. We do not shame ourselves or others. We do not put down ourselves or anyone else.
6. We focus on ourselves, not on our spouses. We do not blame anyone for our sinful behavior. We take total responsibility for our actions, but no one else’s.
7. We do not use the group to promote our own self-interest, to promote or sell a product or business, or to directly solicit individual donations. This is not a business. We are respectful of our Recovery Group environment as a safe place for individuals to focus on their healing.
8. We abide by the principle of group confidentiality. We do not request personal identifiable information from others, such as last name or place of employment, and we do not reveal the identity of other group members or any other personal information outside the group, even to our spouses. There is only one exception to this rule. If anyone discloses feelings or actions that indicate he is a possible danger to himself or to others, including minor children, we will take all necessary action outside of the Captives Free Group to report that danger and to ensure others’ safety. Even more specifically, we must and will report to the proper authorities any disclosure of unreported child abuse or elder abuse, including possession of child pornography, and we cannot protect the confidentiality of illegal or “sex-offender” activity. **We are very clear about these exceptions to confidentiality.**

The Mission of Captives Free

Ours is a fellowship of Christian men who have a sincere desire to abstain from sinful sexual and relational behavior and to present lives holy and pure before God. Many of us have been trapped in the vicious cycle of sexual addiction. Ours has been a life of sexual or relational fantasy, ritual, sexual sin, and despair. We have felt out of control. We identify with the words of Paul in Romans 7:19:

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. What a wretched man I am!"

We realize our sin has grown worse over time. We have been addicted to the high of our lust, our sexual activity, or our unholy relationships. We have not been able to stop despite the consequences, and we experience great shame.

Ours is a history of broken promises, violated vows, wounded families, lost jobs, physical pain, financial chaos, spiritual bankruptcy, and even potential death. All through our difficult personal histories, what we truly sought was love and nurturing. We've been angry because we felt unloved, and we burned with unmet needs. We've even been angry with God because He didn't take away our temptations, our pain, or our problems. We have been bored with ourselves, with life, and with others around us. We have substituted sex or an unholy relationship for love, thinking that the high that these pleasures afforded would erase our true needs of communion with God, a relationship with Christ, and genuine connection with healthy others.

Many of us have promised, "This is the last time I'll act out," but it was not. Don't be discouraged. You are not alone. Those of us who have chosen to become honest about our past and our emotions are experiencing healing with the help of the Holy Spirit. Many of us have tried to recover through our own thinking and on our own. We've even tried to manipulate God's healing through constant prayer, Bible studies, and church attendance. We are finding that God will help us heal only if we are truly willing to submit to His will by keeping ourselves humble and accountable.

If you desire what we have and are willing to go to any lengths to get it, we invite you to join us in the fellowship of men living free from sexual addiction, with the help of our all-loving and all-powerful God, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Seven Principles for Finding Freedom From Captivity

These are the principles that we follow as a path for healing our sexual woundedness, sin, and addiction:

- 1.** We admit that we have absolutely no control of our lives. Sexual sin has become unmanageable.
- 2.** We believe in God, accept the grace offered through His Son, Jesus Christ, and surrender our lives and our wills to Him on a daily basis.
- 3.** We make a list of our sins and weaknesses and confess those to a person of spiritual authority.
- 4.** We seek accountability and to build our character as children of God.
- 5.** We explore the damage we have done, accept responsibility, and make amends for our wrongs.
- 6.** In fellowship with others we develop honest, intimate relationships, where we celebrate our progress and continue to address our weaknesses.
- 7.** As we live in sexual integrity, we carry the message of Christ's healing to those who still struggle, and we pursue a vision of God's purpose for our lives.

Seven “Cs” of Transformation

For some of us it's easier to remember these Principles in the form of Seven “Cs”:

1. Conceit is gone.
2. Control is surrendered.
3. Confession is made.
4. Character is changing.
5. Contrition is offered.
6. Consistency is established.
7. Communicating “the hope” is essential.

These principles are a guide on the journey of recovery and not the magical cure. If you're willing to surrender your old way of thinking and your methods of medicating your pain, then you, too, can be free to live every day in sexual and relational purity.

Because we may come from different Christian backgrounds and traditions, we do not endorse any particular church or denomination. As a group, we have no opinions concerning outside issues, such as race, economic or educational background, politics, philosophy, or differences between people as long as they claim Jesus as their personal Savior.

What we share is a common desire to be totally honest about ourselves, about what we have done, about who we are and how we feel, and about our commitment to remain sexually and relationally pure. We define sexual purity as being sexual solely through the expression of emotional and spiritual intimacy in the context of heterosexual marriage. We define relational purity as connecting with others only in ways that bring honor to God and bring no dishonor to anyone.

If you sincerely and humbly share these desires, we welcome you in this fellowship of men who embrace being free from the captivity to sexual addiction.

The Hope of Freedom From Addiction

If we are truly humble and broken,
If we have genuinely surrendered our lives to Christ,
If we have confessed the exact nature of our sins,
If we continue to grow in our relationship with the Lord,
If we desire to become men of purity and integrity,
If we continually seek to correct the sins of our past,
If we remain constantly in accountability with God and with others,
And if we search for ways to spread this message of hope,
Then we will experience these promises of transformation:

We will know that God loves us because He created us as His sons
and sent His son to die for our sins.

We will accept God's grace and forgive ourselves.

We will accept that there are others who love us regardless of who we
are and what we have done.

We will stop equating sex or an unholy relationship with love and
nurturing.

Our lust will diminish.

Our fear of being discovered in our sin will stop.

Our fear regarding money will cease.

Our anxiety regarding the future will fade.

We will learn how to make healthy choices.

We will become more in touch with all of our feelings.

We will heal from the wounds of our past.

We will be more intimate with our spouses and friends.

We will be better parents, adult children, workers, and men.

We will come to know, trust, and praise the Lord in ever increasing
and meaningful ways.

Is this an unbelievable hope? *We think not.*

Our lives are testimonies that God is working in us,
sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly,
always toward His greater glory.

Captives Free Group Covenant

To encourage a high level of trust, love, accountability, and openness in my Captives Free Group, in order to experience wholeness, healing, purity, and freedom in Christ, I covenant with my group's other members to do the following:

I will make attendance at each group session **a priority**. During this time, I will choose the group first when making decisions about my priorities and time. I will arrive on time, knowing the meeting begins promptly at the scheduled time. If I cannot attend, I will call my group leader beforehand to notify him. This helps to hold me accountable in my attendance. I will commit my time each week to complete the appropriate unit of study in the *Captives Free Guide* **before** the group session. I will confirm with my group leader that I have done the homework. This helps to hold me accountable to my recovery. Homework is an important part of recovery and we need to put time and effort into our recovery. Showing up and just 'drafting' off of the group is unfair not only to the group but to myself.

I will keep confidential all personal information group members share. I will not share matters from the group with any outside person or mention the information as a prayer concern. I understand that **what** I see and what I hear in this place **stays** here when I leave. I understand that breaking confidentiality could result in my being asked to leave the group. I may share with my spouse only those things I have learned about myself by being in the group environment.

I will commit to the following:

- To honesty, openness, a willingness to listen, and readiness to implement new behaviors.
- To reaching out and openly sharing my challenges instead of isolating.
- When I share, I will not be graphic or state names or places that were involved in my sinful behavior.
- To submit to the group to lovingly confront me when I am in denial or sin or am acting codependently in my marriage or other relationships.
- To support other group members in their desire to grow emotionally and spiritually.
- To be honest in my actions, thoughts, and emotions as I participate in the group.
- To be patient with other group members as we allow God to work in each of our lives.
- To not give advice or pressure other group members to do what I think is best.
- To inform my group leader of any physical or emotional problems that might arise through my participation in the group.
- To spend time with the Lord. This is time for me to hear from God and to get to know Him. This is time in prayer for me, and for my loved ones.
- To journal faithfully as feelings and memories surface, for God has no time-

line as He allows me to feel the emotions I have “stuffed.” I know that whatever emotions come, God wants me to feel them. I give myself the grace to feel whatever comes.

- To surrender the changes that come to God, knowing that He will work this for my good. I also agree to surrender my marriage (all relationships) and my coping mechanisms to allow Him to make these necessary changes. I understand I will need to do this daily.

I will seek to honor and observe the group rules. This group is safe, therefore:

1. We can be honest.
2. We can be angry (even at God).
3. We can have conflict.
4. We can be sad, lonely, or frightened.
5. We will not put ourselves or others down.
6. We will make no self-righteous statements.
7. We will not blame others; we will take responsibility for our own actions.
8. We will only give feedback when asked.
9. We will practice confidentiality.
10. We will strive to affirm ourselves and others.
11. We will pray for God’s presence and guidance in all of our discussion.
12. Group time will be divided among those who have completed homework and ask for time to share. If unable to complete homework, we ask that you listen and not give input.

Please Initial: _____ I acknowledge that the **First Year of Recovery** and the **Captives Free Recovery Plan** CFRP have been explained to me and I understand my active role in recovery. I understand that **Captives Free** must report or cause a report to be made and cannot keep silent on the grounds of confidentiality or privileged communication in the following areas:

- When a disclosure indicates a group participant may cause harm to self.
- When a disclosure indicates that a group participant may pose a danger to others (Child abuse, Spouse abuse or Elder abuse).

*I have read the above and agree to the articles
of this Covenant for the Captives Free Group.*

Signature

Date

APPENDIX 2

Captives Free Recovery Highway Road Map

You are beginning a journey of recovery. This will not be a short trip. It may well be the longest and most challenging trip of your life, but it has the potential to change the direction of your life. As with any journey, a road map that gives you an idea of where you are and where you are going is helpful. Here is a diagram and an outline that will serve that purpose. We all travel at different speeds so the duration of this trip is to a great extent up to you. And just like when you're driving there are speed limits set to ensure your safety, there are timelines here to guide and protect you.

MONTH 1

- Mile Marker 1** - Attend Captives Free Group *(continues)*
- Mile Marker 2** - Sign Captives Free Group covenant
- Mile Marker 3** - Begin to journal *(continues)*
- Mile Marker 4** - Find counselor (individual and couples) *(continues)*

MONTH 2

- Mile Marker 5** - Begin working on Captives Free Guide Assignments *(continues)*
- Mile Marker 6** - Financially support Captives Free Group *(continues)*
- Mile Marker 7** - Identify accountability partners
- Mile Marker 8** - Identify sponsor

MONTH 3

- Mile Marker 9** - Begin communicating daily with accountability partners *(continues)*
- Mile Marker 10** - Begin weekly check-in with sponsor *(continues)*
- Mile Marker 11** - Begin addiction recovery self-education *(continues)*
- Mile Marker 12** - Sign 90-day Abstinence Contract
- Mile Marker 13** - Sign Marriage Contract

MONTH 4

- Mile Marker 14** - If 90 days sober, become accountability partner to another *(continues)*

MONTH 5 & 6

- Mile Marker 15** - Seek God's vision for your life regarding how you give back *(continues)*

MONTH 7 & 8

- Mile Marker 16** - If sobriety and accountability maintained and 90-day abstinence completed, make yourself available to become a sponsor to another *(continues)*

Mile Marker 17 - Begin participating in conducting group meetings
(continues)

Mile Marker 18 - Become co-leader (continues)

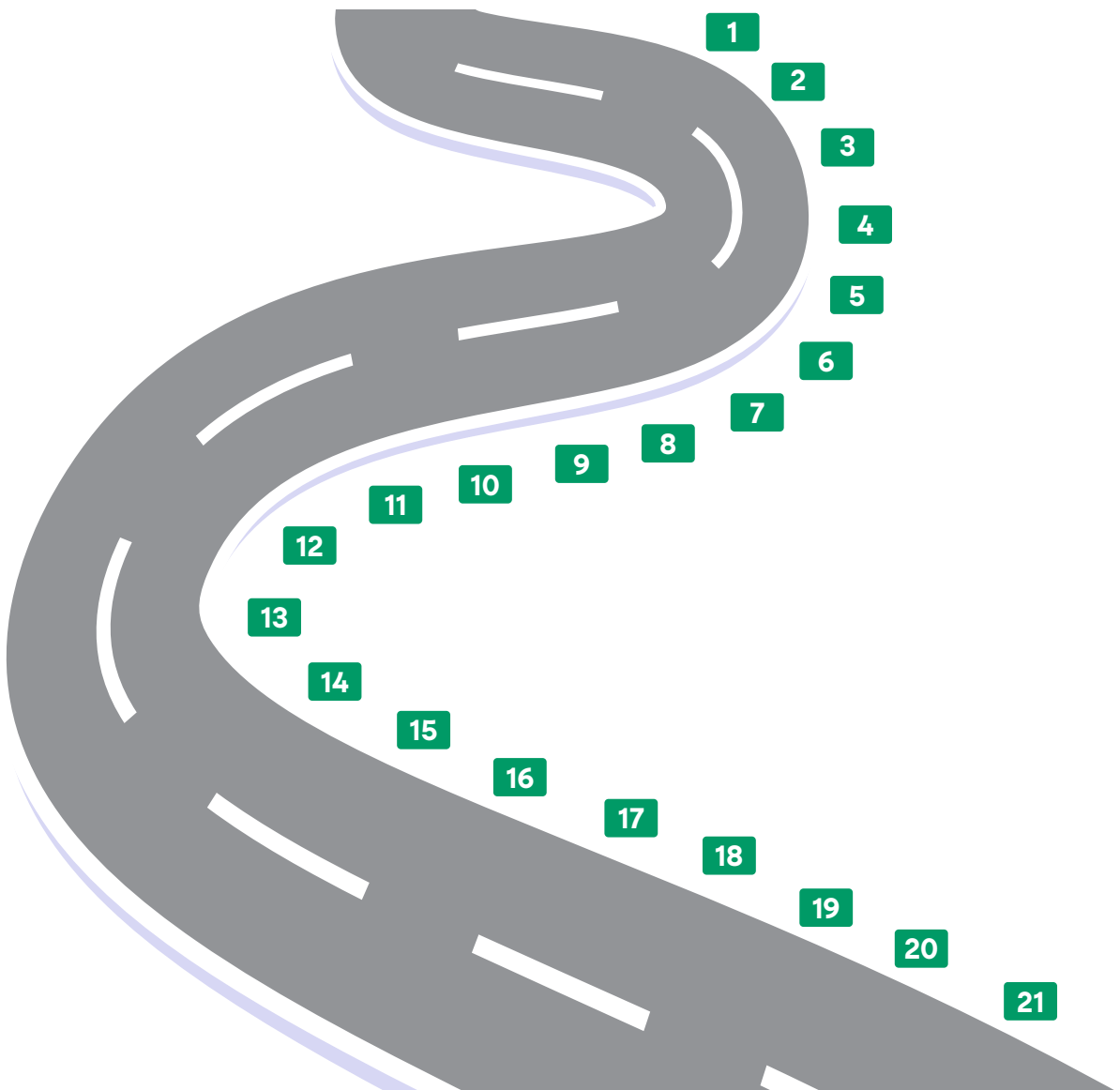
MONTH 9, 10 & 11

Mile Marker 19 - Leader training, become Captives Free Group
Leader

Mile Marker 20 - Sponsor new Captives Free Group

MONTH 12 AND BEYOND

Mile Marker 21 - Proactively engage in giving back using your
witness of God's power to transform to minister to those still in
captivity



APPENDIX 3

Captives Free Recovery Highway – MERGE Exercise

If you've ever taught anyone how to drive, you probably realized that at first they did not have control of the vehicle. They were weaving from one side of the road to the other, reacting to everything they did. In fact, they were overreacting, overcompensating, and you both had a very rough ride. When another car approached you and they saw it, they actually began to steer their car towards it! At that point you probably grabbed the wheel and took control of the car. Race car drivers know this tendency very well; that we can easily wind up driving to where we are looking. If we look just over the hood, we will try to drive to that spot on the pavement. If we look at an approaching car, or at the wall on the edge of the track, we will steer towards that car or the wall. Driving instructors tell us to look well down the road, to keep our vision high because our vehicles will go where we look. As we learn how to live life in recovery, we are the same as a new driver. We look just over the hood and have a very bumpy ride bouncing from one side of the lane to the other and hitting every pot hole we see. When we look up and focus well down the road, we can see where we want to go, and our steering becomes smooth.

The recovery highway is a tool to allow visual representation of your recovery plan. It will help you to concisely place activities and thoughts regarding your recovery. There are four parts to the highway: Destination, Roadway, Exit Ramp, and Bottom of the Ramp.

Destination: sobriety, recovery, freedom, God's purpose.

Roadway: Positive self-care, vision that leads you to your destination.

Exit ramp: Rituals, triggers, vulnerabilities that sidetrack you from your destination.

Bottom of the Ramp: Behaviors including lying, adultery, masturbation, pornography.

Use the attached diagrams to list the following:

Where you want to go: Do you want to become sober and stop acting out? Do you want a stronger personal relationship with God? Do you want to restore your marriage? Do you want to prepare yourself for a lifetime of joy with the person God has planned for you, even if that person has yet to be revealed to you? This is your destination; God's ultimate purpose for your life.

How you plan to get there: These are healthy disciplines that take you along the recovery highway to your goal of sobriety.

- Having and attending an accountability group on a regular basis is critical.
- Participating in counseling both individual and relational (for those who are married or engaged).
- Practicing spiritual discipline including prayer, Bible study, doing devotions, corporate worship with other believers (church service attendance), developing a personal relationship with God that includes having personal conversations with God.

- Paying attention to your physical health including regular exercise, good nutrition, personal hygiene, and appropriate doctor visits.
- Focusing on your contribution to your community including your work and your vocations.
- Accepting financial responsibility.
- Taking care of your environment including our home, workplace, even your car.
- Healthy recreation is also important. This is doing things that are fun such as hobbies, sports, time spent with your spouse and friends. You should also include your search for your passion and purpose in your life. This is your recovery highway to your destination.

NOTE: If you're married and were to get in the car with your wife and begin driving without telling her where you were going, she would soon begin to question you. She would want to know—after all she's on this trip too. She has likely been on previous “trips” with you and did not like where you went. This is why it's important to share your Recovery Highway with her. She is your partner in these travels—she deserves to know.

What can take you off course, the exit ramp: You should include things that take you off the recovery highway such as your rituals, thoughts, triggers, and vulnerabilities. Be specific. You may list here places, people, technologies, or actions that you need to restrict, remove or rethink.

Where you do NOT want to go, the bottom of your exit ramp: These are behaviors you agreed to stop. Basically, not doing these things is your definition of sobriety. These should include, but are not limited to, lying, adultery, masturbation, and pornography. Use the following drawings to place your destination and how you plan to arrive there. Fill in your exit ramp with the things you know you should avoid that will take you to the bottom of your exit ramp. State your “No Go Zone.” Be clear and give specifics.

The MERGE Exercise

A Recovery Highway Self Check for RELAPSE prevention.

The MERGE Exercise is an adaptation of the FASTER Scale developed by a Christian Counselor named Michael Dye of the Genesis Process, and can point out the subconscious and emotional things in your life that indicate movement back toward addictive behavior; i.e. RELAPSE.

Imagine you are speeding along your Recovery Highway. As with most highways, there are billboard advertisements telling you what is at the next exit. This isn't your exit; you are nowhere near your destination. Yet, the billboards are enticing you to stop. Maybe you let up on the gas pedal and start thinking of exiting your recovery highway. But you don't just make a right turn to exit. Rather, you begin to MERGE over to the right. But in order to MERGE you will be taking specific actions. Not all may be present all the time, but the presence of these may tell you that you are headed to an exit ramp.

M

Making decisions about your recovery. You begin to rearrange your priorities. You move your eyes from sobriety and begin looking at the exit.

- Keeping secrets, changes in goals, isolating
- Bored, less time/energy for God, meetings, or church
- Avoiding support and accountability, hiding money
- Superficial conversations, sarcasm
- Flirting, obsessed with relationships
- Breaking promises/commitments, neglecting family
- Preoccupation with material things, television, or entertainment
- Procrastination, over confidence

E

Energy from emotions. You draw energy from your emotions.

- Anxiety, worry, being fearful, replaying old negative thoughts
- Using profanity, perfectionism, resentful
- Judging other's motives, mind reading, co-dependent rescuing
- Making goals and lists you cannot complete
- Fantasy, problems sleeping, creating drama
- Gossiping, trouble concentrating
- Use of over-the-counter medication for pain, sleep or weight control

R**Running from depression. You are avoiding the truth.**

- Super busy, workaholic, cannot relax, driving too fast, not slowing down
- Feeling driven, cannot turn off thoughts, making excuses for having to “do it all”
- Repetitive negative thoughts, hard to listen to others
- Skipping meals, binge eating, too much caffeine
- Overspending, excessive exercising, obsessive video gaming
- Cannot identify feelings or needs, dramatic mood swings
- Lust, nervousness, avoiding support, hard to be alone or with others

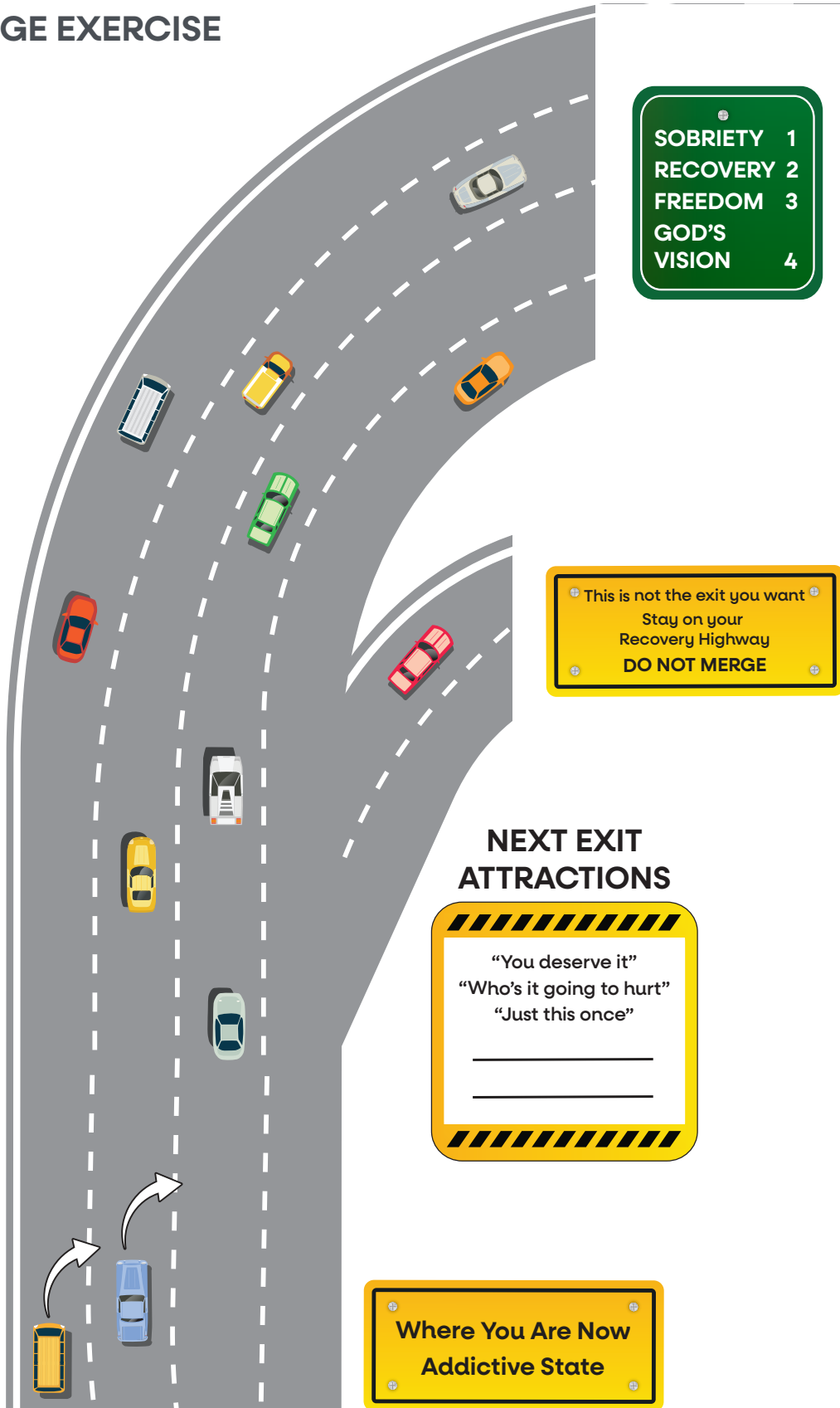
G**Gaining control with anger or aggression. You are trying to change the conversation.**

- Procrastination bringing crises with money, work, or relationships
- Sarcasm, feeling superior, linear or “all or nothing” thinking, obsessive thoughts
- Low tolerance for criticism, defensive, overreacting, road rage, resentments
- Self-pity, isolating, feeling alone, no one understands, intimidation, aggressiveness
- Blaming others or having to be right, unable to forgive
- Belief people are avoiding you, irrational arguments
- Problems with health; digestion, headaches, aches, pains

E**Exhausted. You are running out of gas.**

- Panicked, confused, hopeless, forgetful, unable to cope, overwhelmed, helpless
- Sleep problems, too much or too little, loss of appetite
- Uncontrolled expression of emotions, self-abuse, suicidal thoughts
- Unable to think clearly, tired, numb, irritable, pessimistic
- Wanting to run away, missing work, feeling others are angry with you
- No goals, always in the response mode, not returning phone calls or text messages
- Craving old coping behaviors such as drugs or alcohol
- Seeking old unhealthy people or places, either in reality or virtually

MERGE EXERCISE

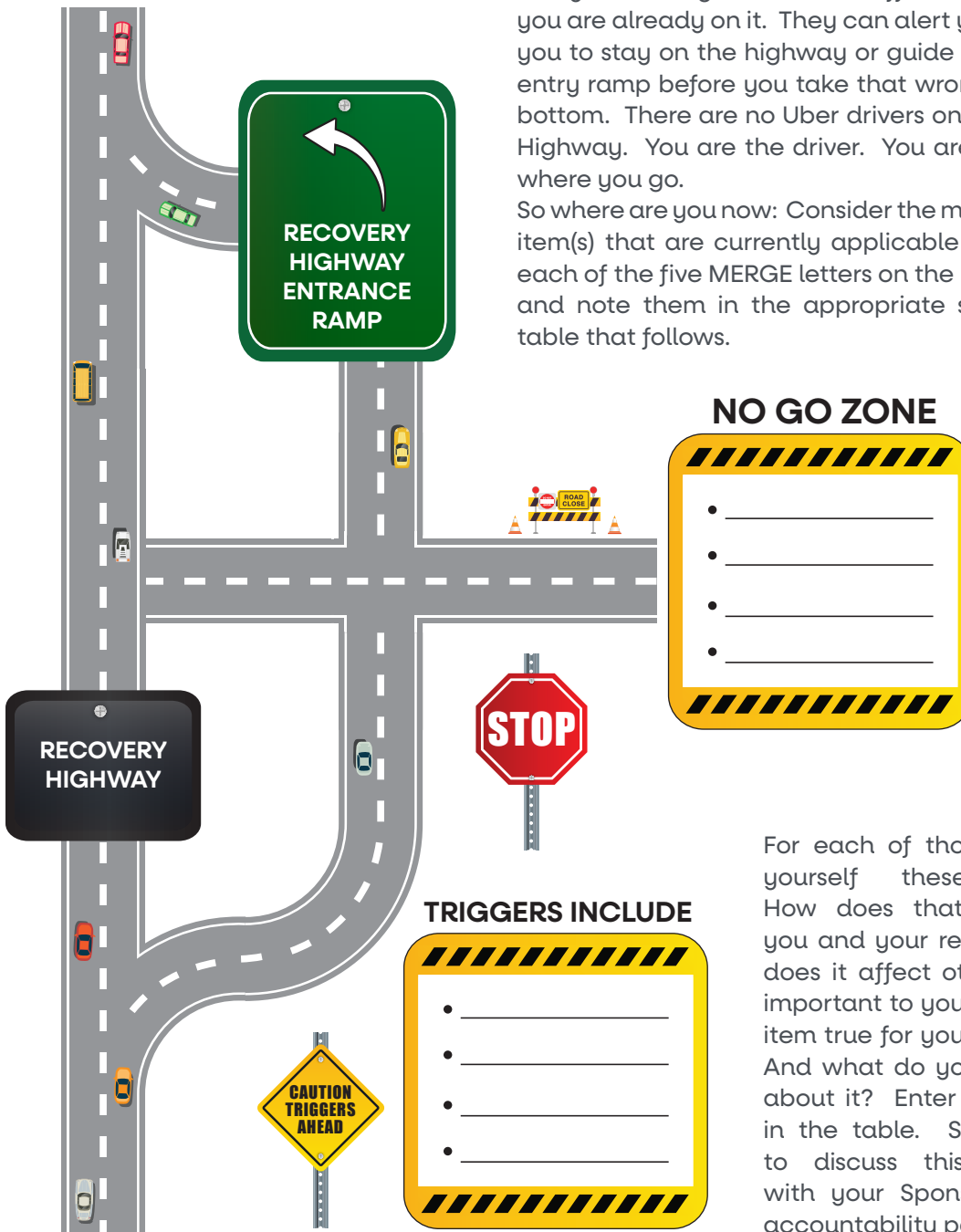


RECOVERY HIGHWAY

Once you have merged over, you see the exit ramp and enter it. This is where you are extremely vulnerable, your triggers begin to fire, and your rituals begin. At this point, you can follow the ramp to the bottom, which is RELAPSE. There you are going to the places you swore you would never again enter. You're giving up and giving in to your addiction. But it's not too late, you can still look for the re-entry ramp. You can use the boundaries and drills, such as making phone calls, that you have in place and veer back onto your recovery highway to continue in the direction of your destination. Your fellow group members are

also traveling the highway with you. Sort of like a group of "bikers" traveling together, they can often see you veering towards an off ramp or see that you are already on it. They can alert you and guide you to stay on the highway or guide you to the re-entry ramp before you take that wrong turn at the bottom. There are no Uber drivers on the Recovery Highway. You are the driver. You are in control of where you go.

So where are you now: Consider the most significant item(s) that are currently applicable to you under each of the five MERGE letters on the previous page and note them in the appropriate spaces in the table that follows.



For each of those items, ask yourself these questions: How does that item affect you and your recovery? How does it affect others that are important to you? Why is that item true for you at this point? And what do you need to do about it? Enter your answers in the table. Set up a time to discuss this assessment with your Sponsor and your accountability partners.

Letter	Description	Item(s)	Answer(s)
M	Making decisions about your recovery		
E	Energy from emotions		
R	Running from depression		
G	Gaining control with anger or aggression		
E	Exhausted		

APPENDIX 4

Feelings Check Process

This Feelings Check Process can and should be used when you experience a strong reaction to an event or situation. It will help you to fully understand your triggers, provide insight as to why you were triggered, and can help you uncover the core wounds from your past that affect your current behavior. It also gives you a tool to be able to express your feelings and identify avenues of change. The exercise can be done by yourself, with God, your spouse, your sponsor or other accountability partners.

The Feelings Check Process has four steps:

- Step 1** State what happened or describe the situation.
- Step 2** State your feelings using the Feelings Wheel that follows as a guide.
- Step 3** Explore why you felt this way, is this related to some core wound from the past?
- Step 4** State what you need to happen to address or resolve your reaction or feeling.

It might look something like this:

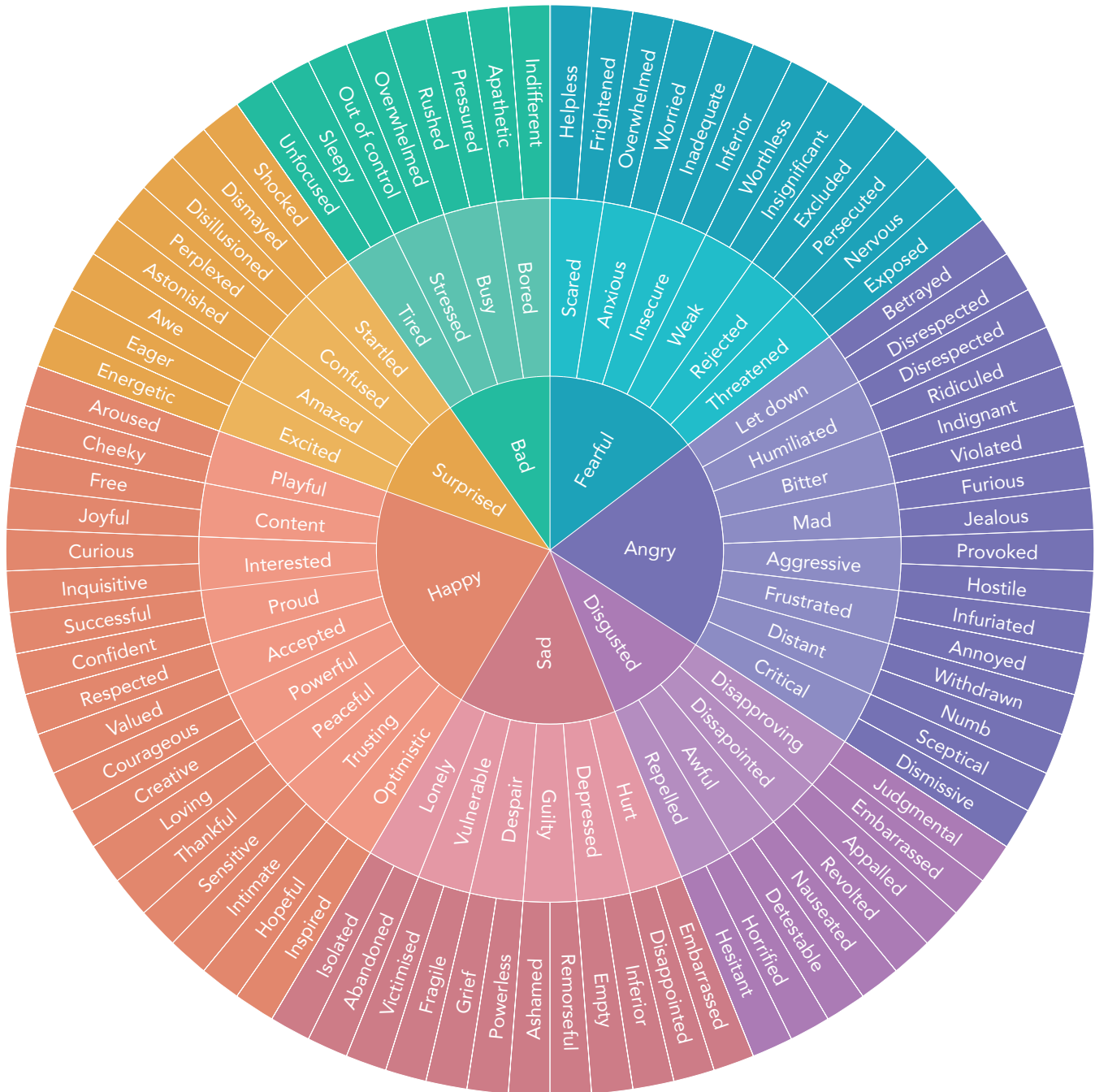
This happened: _____ (*state the trigger – the event or action that caused the feeling*); and I felt _____ (*state your feeling(s) – use the Feelings Wheel*); because _____ (*identify possible core wounds; i.e. pain, traumas from the past that have not been resolved*). I need _____ (*identify necessary changes; i.e. to be heard, to be affirmed, to be blessed, to be safe, to be touched, to be chosen, to be included**)

Here's an example showing the blanks completed:

When I'm given a new task at work that I am not prepared for, I feel inadequate, insecure and not in control; because when I was young, our family moved frequently due to my health issues. I didn't have a stable environment in which I felt secure. I need to be affirmed, to feel safe and to be included.

* From "Seven Desires of the Heart" by Dr. Mark Laaser

The Feelings Wheel



CAPTIVES FREE INFORMATION

Mission

The mission of Captives Free is to encourage, empower, and equip God's people to live every day free from the captivity of addictive behaviors. Captives Free works with church leadership and committed individuals to offer hurting people a safe place to confront sexual addiction and brokenness and to walk in Christ's unconditional love.

Services

Captives Free offers Christ-centered and relationally oriented support groups that incorporate spiritual discipline, small group accountability, and ongoing prayer and support for those struggling with sexual brokenness. Captives Free also provides training for support group leaders and other recovery materials for helping the captives find freedom.

| ...He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim
| freedom for the captives.

Isaiah 61:1B

Ministry Founders

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captivesfree.com

DON'T SOLDIER ALONE. CONNECTION IS THE CURE.

Even the most casual observer of our current culture should recognize that sexual dysfunction has become a common cancer, affecting essentially all segments of our lives to include even the church. The late Dr. Mark Laaser, author of the original versions of this Captives Free Guide for Men, once commented that our entire society is being sexually abused, and the number of people struggling with sexual brokenness has skyrocketed due to two main factors: the prevalence and availability of pornography, and a sexually saturated media.

Much has changed over the years of that original ministry, and the recovery community at large now recognizes the role of neuro-chemistry, the limbic system, family systems history, and other such subjects, in addition to core wounds, in addressing the causes of, and processes of recovery from sexual addiction. The whole concept of communication and connectedness, so central to the recovery process, is also far different than it was those twenty years ago. Social media is now a standard medium for both personal communication and dissemination of information. The sexual addiction problem, if anything, has only grown due to these technological advances, and continues to affect the Body of Christ to an extent similar to the culture at large.

Despite that, only 7 % of churches has any kind of program to address pornography sexual addiction.

Captives Free is a new branding and complete "re-launch" of L.I.F.E. Recovery International, a ministry dedicated to helping God's people find freedom from those struggles. This publication is the first of a series of new editions of primary printed resources, beginning with this Captives Free Men's Guide, in grateful memory of Dr. Mark Laaser, creator of the Seven Principles that are the foundation of our recovery program, and author of the original version used for over twenty years. This resource selectively incorporates elements of all these concepts and more, while carefully retaining the original truth and wisdom of our time-tested materials and methodologies.



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