

PRINCIPLE ONE

We admit that we have absolutely no control of our lives.

Sexual sin has become unmanageable.

Confronting Reality: I'm Shackled in My Own Prison

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

Welcome.

You're in the right place.

We're glad you're here.

Imagine what it must have been like for the Prodigal Son. He just wanted to be home. He didn't think he deserved to return to his earlier status as a son because his sins were so great. He hoped merely to be like one of his father's hired servants. Maybe you're like that: You're just glad to be alive and able to get to a meeting. You'd like to simply be quiet and belong. The Prodigal Son's father, however, rushed out to meet him and prepared a great feast. That is what it is like with God. We want to be "imitators of God,

just like little children.” It may feel like you’re a little boy who has just come on the bus or into the lunchroom or onto the playground and you’re expecting to be rejected or at least ignored. Instead, we rush over to greet you! We’ve been where you’ve been. We understand your pain and your fears. We’re glad you’ve come. We can’t prepare a great feast, but we can go to coffee later.

Your first assignment is just to get honest. We know that the greatest enemy of sexual purity is silence. We also know how carefully you’ve guarded your sexual secrets. It’s hard to imagine letting them out. There are demons in your mind telling you, “No! You can’t talk about that. Someone will go running and screaming out of the room!” We encourage you to confront those demons. Those voices have kept you shackled in your pain for too long. We know, because we’re on a similar journey of learning to live in freedom everyday. 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 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. I 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

I think 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.

In my experience, some of us have felt what I 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 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 I 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 me 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 L.I.F.E Recovery's website at www.freedomeveryday.org. If your group wants to be on the same page, read through chapters 5 and 6 of my book *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*. These chapters give an explanation of how families work and some of the mistakes they can make.

I 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.

	Emotional	Physical	Sexual	Spiritual
<u>Invasive</u> Boundaries are loose	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
<u>Abandonment</u> Boundaries are rigid	No listening	Being left alone	Intimacy is 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

I think 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 I originally wrote that book, I have come to some more complete understandings of 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.

I've decided that our thinking in these matters gets too black and white. Do we really need our families to be either "good" or "bad?" I believe that all families are families that do many good and loving things and that all families make mistakes. I know that I've made many mistakes as a father. Does that make me a dysfunctional dad? I hope that it makes me a father who loves his kids and tries his best. I 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 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

I know I'm asking you to do some very painful work. You may resist delving into these feelings. You may even be feeling anxious or unsafe. I 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 L.I.F.E. Recovery 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.

Recently, for example, I was at the funeral of a woman who was the mother of one of my best friends. When they closed the casket I felt intense feelings of sadness and started to cry. Now, I hardly knew this woman. What it reminded me of was the death of my own mother. She died four years ago. My sadness was for her. Over the years there are many things that I notice that trigger me into my sadness or anger about my mother. For example:

- When one of her favorite hymns is played
- When I see a woman who acts or looks 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.
- My wife saying no to sex
- Anything any woman says that suggests rejection to me

This is 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 I'm in a conversation with my wife, for example, about many different subjects and my old feelings are brought out, they can affect my reaction to my wife. They really belong, however, to my 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 L.I.F.E. Recovery 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 L.I.F.E. 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. I have many basketball fantasies in which I 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 mine, I have all the money I need for anything, so I pursue gambling, or, specifically, playing the lottery, or other schemes of chance. I might win the lottery and have houses, cars, boats, and planes. People love me and want to be with me because I am 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 work through and process the pain associated with your fantasies in the L.I.F.E. Grieving Guide, a separate resource available from L.I.F.E. Recovery International. But here 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, I did insert 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 addiction 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. Then 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 are 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. My 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 L.I.F.E. Recovery 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 6 months of sobriety.
- A strong accountability group with regular contact throughout the week.
- 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, blond, 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, and compassionate? Or harsh, aloof, or abusive? Is the person seductive? Does he or she seem to want you intensely? What is the individual's personality?
3. Where does the fantasy take place? What are the setting, the mood, and the ambience? For example, it is 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 specific, but you don't need to be detailed. For example, "sexual intercourse" or "oral sex" is descriptive but not graphic. 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 me 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 adrenalin 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. I 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 L.I.F.E. Recovery 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 L.I.F.E. Recovery 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 L.I.F.E. Recovery 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. My prayer is that you will begin to find new freedom from old memories, thoughts, and behaviors.