

## 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 and 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 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. Many of you have heard my story about surrendering my use of pornography in exchange for God making me a tennis star. At age 16, at a Fellowship of Christian Athletes camp, I dedicated myself to ministry and vowed to stop stealing *Playboy*. In my spiritual immaturity, I believed God would reward me with tennis success. I fantasized about winning Wimbledon and witnessing to the Queen. If you had asked me, I’d have assured you I’d tried to surrender my habit to God. What I’d really done was attempt to manipulate God into giving me something I 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.*