

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 L.I.F.E. Recovery 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 everyday.

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 I'll discuss more toward the end of this assignment.

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 L.I.F.E. Recovery 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. In my story, for example, the first time that I looked at pornography, I stole the magazine. I 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 L.I.F.E. Recovery 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 simple 1-2-3 list like some of the assignments. Read the instructions and suggestions in the preceding paragraphs, then begin outlining the sins in your life. Any way you organize your work is fine. The important thing is to write it down.