

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 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” I mean in a way that is spiritually significant to you.

Take note that this is Assignment Three of Principle Three. This L.I.F.E. 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?

I 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 L.I.F.E. Recovery Group about your motivation and readiness to take this step at this time.

I've always 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. I'm 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. I've 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 facilitator of your L.I.F.E. Recovery 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 L.I.F.E. Recovery 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. In my case, the first time I confessed my whole sexual story was to a retired Roman Catholic priest who was the chaplain at the treatment center where I was a patient. I didn't know him from Adam, but he was a person of spiritual authority to me, so when he said, "God forgives you," I believed.

My prayer is that you'll have a powerful encounter with the marvelous grace of God during this time of confession. I 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 L.I.F.E. Recovery Group, 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.