

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.” (*Psalms 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 the 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 L.I.F.E. Recovery 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.