

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 Two - Planning Amends

Assessing the damage as a result of your sexual sin and listing those whom you've harmed is only the starting point. In fact, those acknowledgments are hollow if you stop there. The list you've created serves as the springboard into action – specific, identifiable action. Assignment Two of Principle Five prepares you for taking the actions of *restitution*.

First, I need to define what I mean by making restitution. The Twelve Step programs refer to these actions as making amends for our wrongs. *In simple terms, making amends means offering an apology for the harm you've caused.* It's saying, "I'm sorry" with humility and without any expectation of receiving forgiveness. But making amends is also backing up the apology with specific attempts to make things right. Willingness to provide restitution is a good indicator of the genuineness of your apology.

Making Direct Amends

Addicts can offer two kinds of amends. The first is **direct amends**, where you provide restitution specifically to the person you've damaged. One by one, you approach the individuals who have suffered because of your sexual sin, and you express your remorse for what you've done and for the pain it caused. If there is some overt way to right the wrong, you suggest it, and then provide it if you are allowed.

Zacchaeus, the tax collector mentioned in Luke 19, provides a great example of making amends through specific restitution. He had apparently used the authority of his position to collect more money than citizens owed. After his encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus promised to pay people back four times the amount he had cheated from them. (See Luke 19: 1-9 for the biblical account of Zacchaeus' story.)

Making Indirect Amends

A second type of amends is **vicarious restitution** (often called indirect amends). This approach is used when it's impossible or inappropriate to make direct amends. Perhaps you don't know how to contact someone you've harmed, or maybe the person has died. In some cases you may not even know the identity of those you've hurt, especially if your acting out has been extensive. These are situations where you can make vicarious amends. For example, you could make a personal contribution to L.I.F.E. Recovery, over and above the offering referred to in the L.I.F.E. Recovery Group meeting format, or donate funds to help the victims of sexual sin receive counseling or treatment. One male addict I know routinely pays the way (anonymously) for one person to attend a Healing for Spouses program offered through Bethesda Workshops. This addict sees his donation as an on-going way to help others who have suffered because of their mate's sexual addiction, just as his wife did. The possibilities of vicarious repayment are endless.

A second situation that warrants indirect restitution is if it would be harmful to make direct amends. You take this path when it would be more injurious to interact specifically with someone you've harmed. Certain affair situations provide clear examples of cases where

it's inappropriate to make direct amends. One would be if the husband of a woman you've had an affair with doesn't know about your involvement. It would be harmful for him to learn about the betrayal through your confession and apology. He needs to learn of the affair from his own wife, not through you. Likewise, it would be wrong to apologize to the children of an affair partner, unless you were certain they were already aware of the infidelity and were old enough to understand your comments.

In these kinds of circumstances, devise some way of making indirect amends to injured parties. Get creative. After all of the thought and energy you've spent figuring out how to hide your sexual sin, put your creativity to positive use and come up with some constructive ways to counteract some of the damage you've done.

Explore Your Motives

Let me caution you about your work on this Principle. It's important you carefully examine why you want to make amends in each case. As addicts, we're used to manipulating outcomes, and it's possible you hope to benefit in some way by saying you're sorry. Maybe you think you'll be let off the hook or get back in someone's good graces. Those are flawed motives that will taint your actions. Refer again to the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. He wasn't trying to regain his status as a son. In fact, he was willing to be a lowly servant to his father. Be unflinching as you examine your heart for any possible selfish motives in making amends. Be courageous.

Scrutinize your motives for the reason behind your desire to make amends to each person on your list. Here are some possible motivations:

- to prevent or stop someone from being angry at you
- to make yourself feel better for what you've done
- to influence someone to trust you again
- to manipulate someone's pity or compassion
- to transfer blame by saying, "I'm sorry, but I wouldn't have done this if you hadn't done that"
- to attempt to avoid consequences by expressing regret
- to accept full responsibility for the harm you've caused
- to demonstrate empathy for those you've hurt
- to rectify your damage to the extent possible

Journaling Exercise: Your Motives

Journal about your true motives for making amends in each case. Pray for discernment and purity of heart.

On the other hand, be optimistic and thankful for the changes God is prompting in you. As you’ve worked through these principles of being faithful and true, you’ve progressed from a place of denial to the point of being willing to accept full responsibility for what you’ve done and the harm you’ve caused. This difficult work in Principle Five is one more step in your transformation journey. Remember, God will be faithful to finish the good work He has started in your heart (Philippians 1:6).

Plan specifically how you’ll go about making amends, both directly and vicariously. For each person, first determine if direct amends or indirect amends is most appropriate. Write the best method beside each name.

Journaling Exercise: Your Plan

Name of Person Harmed

Kind of Amends (Direct or Indirect)

Then develop a plan. Who will you approach first? How will you contact that person? What will you say? What action will you take?

Talk with your sponsor and L.I.F.E. Recovery Group about your list of those you’ve harmed, the damage you’ve done, and your plan for making amends. Ask for feedback. Are there any obvious omissions to your list? Are your motives as pure as you can make them? Is your plan appropriate and reasonable for the person and situation?