

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 Three - Living Amends

Assignments One and Two of Principle Five led you through a process of identifying those you've harmed and creating specific plans for making amends. Now, in Assignment Three, you have the opportunity to demonstrate real change. By taking action in making amends, you will show in overt ways the revolutions that are happening within your heart. For those around you, it may be the first clear example of your "walking the walk" of transformation.

Making Specific Amends

This assignment will consider two broad ways of making amends. First, we'll examine taking **specific actions**, whether directly or indirectly, of making restitution. Making indirect amends is less complicated. After getting feedback from your group, simply take the action. Do it quietly, without fanfare or attempting to draw attention to yourself.

Making **direct amends** is more risky. Be aware of these **guidelines** about your conversation with someone you've harmed:

- State the reason you want to talk to this person. Remember, you've probably hurt this individual in some deep way, and he or she may be wary about talking with you. If you make a specific appointment to meet, explain then why you want to talk. If you haven't contacted someone on your list, but God provides an unexpected opportunity for an impromptu conversation, state in the beginning your desire to express your sorrow at the harm you've caused.
- Then state clearly how you've hurt this person. Be specific. General apologies are lame. Instead of "I'm sorry I hurt you," say "I know it was painful when I forgot your birthday because I was absorbed in my sexual sin. I apologize." Be sure to say the actual words, "*I'm sorry and I apologize.*" The mind-set of remorse is too important to let it be merely understood. I believe it's better, though, to avoid asking for forgiveness. It's too easy to be manipulative with a request for forgiveness. If the person extends forgiveness, that's great. But that choice is his or hers and should be made freely without prompting from you. Simply express your sorrow for the pain you've caused and let go of the outcome. You are powerless over the person's reaction.
- Explain your intention to behave differently and any plan of restitution you'd like to make for the harm you've caused this person. Again, be specific about what you'd

like to do to right the wrong.

- Listen to the individual's reaction. He or she may express anger or hurt at what you've done. Be patient and non-defensive. Agree with the harm you've caused and be empathetic to the person's pain.
- Thank the person for listening to your apology and for expressing his or her thoughts or feelings.

Don't expect any certain reaction or outcome when you try to make specific amends. Some people won't understand what you're doing and may brush you off. Others may still be too angry to hear you out. Perhaps more will accept your apology. The individual's reaction isn't the issue. *Your willingness to humbly accept responsibility is the key point.* Remember the teaching in 1 Peter 5: 6: "*Humble yourselves ... under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time.*" Making amends is as much for you as it is for those you've harmed. It further releases your burden of shame and deepens your trust in God to take care of the outcome when you submit your will to Him.

Practicing Living Amends

The life-long challenge and task of recovery is to live differently, not only in your sexual behavior, but in all areas of your life. By thought, word, and deed, an addict must daily observe the principles of being faithful and true. In recovery terms, this kind of practice is called "living amends." In every situation you make the decisions, to the best of your ability, which are beneficial instead of harmful.

A first area of living amends is obviously to maintain sexual sobriety. Without sexual integrity, no other progress is possible. (I'll discuss this concept at length in Principle Six.) Remember the caution that was part of the final assignment of Principle One: This period of time during your second six months of sobriety is a dangerous time for relapse. It's easy to get lax about your recovery efforts. I want to remind you of one important tool of working your program. *Boundaries remain critical to your sexual sobriety.* Review your work on boundaries from Principle One. Are you practicing good boundaries in the physical area? Mental? Emotional? Spiritual? Relational? Don't let down your guard.

A second major part of practicing living amends is following the Golden Rule: treating others the way you'd like to be treated. This goal requires maturity and self-sacrifice. It doesn't come naturally, especially to addicts who have a long history of focusing on their own gratification. A key way this objective relates to Principle Five is in learning to forgive others, just as you hoped they would forgive you when you offered your amends.

Your work this far through this text and with your L.I.F.E. Recovery Group has put you in touch with some profound areas of your own woundedness. You've identified ways you've been deeply hurt by others, perhaps even some in your own family. You've allowed yourself to feel your feelings of loss, grief, hurt, anger, sadness, and loneliness. You understand the ways you've been abused or abandoned.

Principle Five challenges you to forgive those who have harmed you, as well as to humbly make amends to those you have harmed. For some of us, this undertaking is more difficult. Maybe you'd like to nurse your resentments a little longer. Perhaps you've become comfortable in your victim role. Holding on to a grudge lets you ignore any part you may have contributed to the relationship problems.

A clear sign of a changed life course is when you're willing to let go of the dues others owe you. Whether or not the offender expresses sorrow at the pain he or she has caused, you choose to forgive and move forward. You allow God to be the judge and the punisher for wrongs. Paul issues this challenge:

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil.... If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed; if he is thirsty, give something to drink.... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12: 17-21)

Don't be discouraged by how difficult it is to make amends to others and to extend grace to others. This will be a life-long process as you grow in your relationship with a forgiving God. You won't do either of these recovery tasks perfectly. Sometimes you won't have the maturity or judgment to even try. Because you're human, you will continue to cause harm occasionally.

Remember our Lord's promise: *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12: 9).

Journaling Exercise: Your Tasks

Take two specific actions:

- 1. Make one direct amend to someone you've harmed*
- 2. Make one form of indirect amend*

Record what you did in your journal, along with how you felt. Be prepared to share your actions and feelings with your L.I.F.E. Recovery Group.

Journaling Exercise: Forgiving

Share the names and situations with your sponsor. Pray together for willingness and help in letting go of your right to avenge the wrongs you've suffered.

Five People I Need to Forgive:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Ask your group for affirmation about how far you've come in your journey of Living in Freedom Everyday.