

PRINCIPLE SIX

In fellowship with others we develop honest, intimate relationships, where we celebrate our progress and continue to address our weaknesses.

Living in Fellowship: I Cannot Succeed Alone

Congratulations on getting this far in your journey to maintain sexual integrity. I know it's taken courage, perseverance, and commitment. In many ways it may have been harder than you anticipated. You've experienced many feelings that may be new to you. You've had to humble yourself in admitting the full truth about your history, your thoughts, and your offenses. But with God's help, you've done it. You've told your story of sexual sin. You've decided you want to get well and have surrendered your life to Christ. You've accepted accountability from a sponsor and perhaps have begun working with a counselor. You're willing to make amends to those you have harmed. I pray you're beginning to have a deeper sense of God's power and presence in your life.

Principle Six guides you into a way of living that involves genuine connection with others, instead of the isolation you've probably known. The foundation for this work comes from one of my core teaching principles:

Fellowship is equal to freedom from lust.

It's probably hard for you to believe this promise. You may have been alone for years as you've hidden your sexual secrets from others. You've never known the joy of a supportive community. Your shame kept you from connecting with others, while it continued to fuel your lust and sexual sin. (You also probably can't imagine a life free from fantasy and lust, which have felt like your constant companions for as long as you can remember.) Principle Six offers a path out of your isolation, which, in turn, is the road to sexual integrity.

Hopefully, you're already enjoying some of the benefits of fellowship through your L.I.F.E. Recovery Group. You're bonding with other Christian men who've faced similar struggles and seek to live in sexual freedom and purity. You're beginning to experience both the grace of God and the grace of other Christians who will love you despite your mistakes.

Assignment Three – Growing In Spirituality

The main activity of this assignment is a matter of “**conversion.**” No, it's probably not what you're thinking. I don't mean the kind of conversion that changes a person from a non-Christian to a Christian. You've hopefully already done that. The conversion I'm proposing is about converting all the energy you used to pursue *sex* into energy that you use to pursue *God*.

You know, of course, that the key to this conversion will be **discipline** – an ongoing discipline necessary to make ongoing change in your life. Note how the word “discipline” is from the same root word as “disciple.” This word is rarely used in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament, it's used to refer to a follower of Jesus. Does that description fit you? If so, you must be a man of discipline.

You already have some of the characteristics of a disciple. For example, you have the *energy* to follow Christ. Think again of how much energy you spent being a follower of sex and relationships. (If you can't remember, go back and review Principle One.) If you can't seem to find the energy for a spiritual walk, you may be experiencing some level of shame and depression.

You have the *plan* to follow Christ. Do you remember the category of ritual in the cycle of addiction? Ritual isn't a bad word; it can be a spiritual one. You'll need rituals to pursue your spiritual path.

For this assignment you'll also need “**enthusiasm.**” Enthusiasm is a Greek word that literally means “God (Theos) is in us.” *God is in you.* Did you know that?

Read the entire fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of John. Jesus says that He will be in you if you are in Him. He says a lot of other things, doesn't He? He describes the vine and the branches and how the Master Gardener prunes the branches that don't produce fruit. Are you feeling rather pruned? As you learn to abide in Christ, you'll draw nourishment from Him, and you'll bear more fruit.

In Assignment One of Principle Six, you started keeping a daily inventory. One of the categories you were asked to assess was spirituality. In this assignment, I want you to be much more aggressive in your thinking about this area.

Sometimes when we think about spiritual discipline, we mean that we need to have a “quiet time.” My experience suggests that many addicts aren't very good at that practice. We're

impatient by nature and we don't like doing anything "quietly." For the restless among us, increasing our spirituality may be a matter of doing something more active, such as going somewhere to participate in Bible study or corporate prayer or corporate meditation. It may mean going to concerts or Christian seminars. It may be putting a cassette or CD into your car stereo and listening to praise music or inspirational teaching while you're driving. (We addicts like to multi-task.) There are many different kinds of workbooks that might help you grow in spiritual discipline. I think of Henry Blackaby's *Experiencing God*, for example. Be creative in planning how you can better connect with God, just as you were creative in your addiction.

Another way of describing what we're after is "quest." We're on a religious quest to get closer to God. For some, the quest may involve many active behaviors designed to help find Him. I have known men, for example, who actually travel to places of religious significance, like the Holy Lands, as a way of "experiencing God." This kind of quest may not be something that many of you can afford, but it's an example of something active. A spiritual retreat or dedicated time away from your daily responsibilities is another activity that could be part of a spiritual quest.

For some of us, discipline or quest may mean doing some act of service. It could be working in the soup kitchen, volunteering at church, visiting in the nursing home, or planning a mission trip. We might volunteer for work or participate in a church activity. We might teach a Sunday School class. (There's nothing quite like teaching to help you study yourself.)

Are you getting the idea? To be spiritually disciplined, you need to *do* something. It will probably be something you've never done before – perhaps even a practice far outside your comfort zone. You may need encouragement to get it done, which you can request from your L.I.F.E. Recovery Group.

In some church traditions there's a role for "spiritual director," who is one who directs your prayer life, Bible study, and meditations. Has there ever been such a person in your life? In this recovery program, you might originally think of your sponsor as one who directs you in spiritual discipline. In this assignment, you may want to think of another person who can fill this role.

I encourage you to think "outside the box." Your spiritual director may not be from your own tradition or denomination. The key to this role of "spiritual director" is to hold you accountable to those things that you have agreed to do. Your pastor may suggest some men in your church who are willing to take on such a role.

Maybe you don't have a regular church where you attend. It could be time to "shop" for one until you discover the fellowship where you feel both comfortable and challenged.

Finally, here is one last thought. In John 15, Jesus says that there is no greater gift than to lay down your life for another. Addicts are terrible at practicing self-sacrifice. *Our lust has been selfish.* As we grow in spirituality, we'll be transformed into *selflessness*. Think

about the theme of sacrifice as you consider what you should do to have more discipline. Whatever the activity, it should involve some sacrifice of your time, energy, resources, or money.

Journaling Exercise: Growing in Spirituality

1. *Write the name of a person(s) who will hold you accountable to having more spiritual discipline in your life.*
2. *What is one act of service you're willing to do?*
3. *Name a section of Scripture you commit to studying.*
4. *Who is a spiritual teacher you enjoy? What books are you reading or tapes are you listening to?*
5. *What is your favorite kind of spiritual music?*
6. *If you're participating in a Bible study or similar class, note that.*
7. *Have you attended any workshops or seminars recently?*
8. *Where are you attending worship services? Does this church feel like home? Why or why not?*

These are just some suggestions to help you begin practicing spiritual disciplines. Remember, there's no such thing as the perfect spiritual program. This growth is a journey for life. If you've accepted Christ as your savior, you've already received salvation, so spiritual discipline isn't about your effort to win favor with God. It's about your time with God and your attempt to know Him more intimately.

God's blessings to you in this quest.