

PRINCIPLE SEVEN

As we live in sexual integrity, we carry the message of Christ's healing to those who still struggle, and we pursue a vision of God's purpose for our lives.

Finding a Purpose: I Have a Vision

When Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Life* was first published in 2002, it quickly became a best seller. In its first two years almost 19 million copies were sold. People hunger for the answer to the book's sub-title, "*What On Earth Am I Here For?*" We are likely to ask, "Why on earth did I do everything I did?" "What was God's purpose for my life?" or "How did I get so off track from God's purpose?" There are no easy answers to these questions, but understand this:

You cannot undo what is done.

And

You must go forward from here.

As you work through our last principle, you will learn how to go forward and use what you are doing now to carry the message of Christ's healing to those who still suffer.

In the first assignment you will prepare your story, which will become your testimony. You will begin sharing your testimony in the second assignment, first with your trusted L.I.F.E. Recovery Group; then, as you become stronger, with others. When you work on the third assignment, you will be developing your vision, your "mission statement" for how you want to conduct your life.

Assignment Three: Discovering Your Vision

Having a vision is a familiar biblical concept. Both the Old and New Testaments recount the stories of countless people who acted according to their visions. Today, a “vision” is a popular term to describe an inspiring or motivating mental image of the future.

In Assignment Three, you’ll work on having that kind of positive mental image of where God wants you to go. Do you remember the earlier work around understanding your fantasies that was part of Principle One? I expressed my hope that you’d be able to replace the fantasies in your life with a vision.

Here’s the comparison:

*A **fantasy** is an image of a preferred future in which all of your wounds are healed.*

*A **vision** is an image of a preferred future in which you pursue God’s plan for your life.*

From your work in Assignment Two of this Principle, “Sharing Your Pain,” you saw how your wounds can be your guides, your teachers, about connecting with God and with others. Your wounds may also become your strengths, in that you’re a stronger person for having gone through your experiences in life.

The first task of this assignment is to figure out how you become a person of vision.

First, you must discover and accept your true gifts. You might be surprised to find that for years you’ve been pursuing what others, such as your parents, identified as your gifts. They may or may not have had your best interests at heart. Reflect on the messages your family gave you about what you were supposed to do in life. My father, for example, never actually told me to be a minister, but he so valued that role that all of his modeling and encouragement was in that direction. Since part of my job was to take care of him, it was also apparent that I was to have care-giving skills. In order to please him, I think, I went into ministry. Don’t get me wrong. I now believe that I am truly called to ministry, but it is something I had to claim for myself, not something to do to please Dad. One of my pastor friends says, “I was ordained by my mother and not by God.”

Think of your family’s messages, its modeling, and its values. How were you encouraged or discouraged? What was your role(s) in your family? Were some jobs or careers valued more than others?

Journaling Exercise: Your Family’s Mission for You

Write the “mission statement” you internalized from your family.

For example, my mission statement would be simple: “Become a minister and take care of everyone else and not yourself.”

It is possible for others to encourage you about your true gifts. First, think of those people in your life who were truly affirming and positive. Maybe it was a teacher, a coach, a pastor, or a friend. These supporters believed in you and encouraged your interests. What skills, talents, and abilities did they affirm in you?

Journaling Exercise: Your Encouragers

Write the names of supportive people and their affirmations:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Now, reflect on those times when you’ve felt truly passionate about what you were doing. These will be times when you’re “in the zone” and are certain you’re doing exactly the right thing. What do you relish? What brings you a sense of fulfillment? What do you do that lights others’ faces with joy? For what things have others thanked you?

Journaling Exercise: Your Passions

Describe some of the times you felt passionate, energetic, and fulfilled. What were you doing? How did others respond? What were the results?

Next, reflect on your education and your life experiences. What's been your training? What jobs have you held? What volunteer work have you done? Do you have hobbies? Have you been involved with sports?

Journaling Exercise: Your Experience

Prepare or review your “resume” of education, employment, hobbies, and critical life experiences.

Finally, and this is a hard one, reflect again on what you've learned through painful experiences in your life, including the ones related to your sex addiction. Pain can be a great teacher and guide. God often speaks through hardship. James 1:2 says, “*Count it all joy when you experience various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.*”

Journaling Exercise: Your Lessons

Make a list of all the lessons you've learned through your own pain. Remember, this pain could be about loss, failure, hardship, or crisis.

You now have several lists and sets of reflections. Read back over them until a picture emerges of your true gifts.

If you've never seen the movie *Chariots of Fire*, you might want to rent it. It's a wonderful comparison of two men who pursue their gifts and talents for two different reasons. The main characters in this true story are Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams, who each are preparing for the 1924 Olympic games. Both are fast and gifted runners. They're the best in the United Kingdom in the 100-meter dash, and they both have a dream of winning the Olympic gold medal.

Harold Abrahams is the son of a Jewish businessman. He knows his family has never been fully accepted in English society, and he longs to be accepted. The pain of ethnic prejudice burns inside him and fuels anger. He concludes that the way to be accepted is to be the world's fastest man and to “run all of his opponents into the ground.” He even hires a coach and trains incessantly. Harold Abrahams does win the gold medal in the 100-meter dash, but the end of the movie shows that it doesn't bring joy. The accomplishment he'd dreamed about is almost a disappointment.

Eric Liddell is the son of missionaries to China. He's back in Scotland studying to be in ministry and to go back to China himself as a missionary. Eric Liddell knows that his athletic gift is from God. His sister, though, grows concerned that his athletic training for the Olympics is distracting him from his "true" work of studying and preparing to return to China. In a powerful scene, Eric takes his sister out on the hills overlooking Edinburgh, Scotland, and he says, "Jenny, I know that the Lord made me for China, but He also made me fast. *And when I run, I feel God's pleasure.*"

During the Olympic games, Eric Liddell refuses to run the 100-meter dash because one of the qualifying races is scheduled on a Sunday. He switches to the 400-meter dash instead, and he wins the gold medal. He's elated and knows a true sense of joy.

An interesting detail accurately depicted in *Chariots of Fire* is Eric's unusual running style. In the middle of the race, he would throw back his head and close his eyes. He literally couldn't see where he was going. Eric was a man running with God's help. He understood that when God was in control, he didn't need to see where he was going.

What are you doing when you feel God's pleasure - when you don't need to see where you're going? Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Church says that Christians will know they hear the voice of the Holy Spirit by the joy and excitement they feel about what they're thinking or doing.

Journaling Exercise: God's Pleasure

Make a list of times when you've felt that you were doing something that brought you pure joy – when you could feel "God's pleasure."

You now have some lists to think and pray about. They encompass your own perception and the perception of others about your talents and gifts. How does this information match up with the expectations you brought from your family of origin? How does it match with what you're currently doing? Don't just think about these questions vocationally, but in the totality of your life.

Consider your work in Principle Four around developing character traits, which was based on the fruits of the Spirit described in Galatians 5. What do you think determines character? Is it a matter of pure will power, or is it a matter of **vision**? Think about it this way. You know that your fantasy life drove your behaviors for years, which led you into traits of character that resulted in despair. *Fantasy is actually a form of a vision*, because it's a mental image of an outcome you desire. If that kind of vision is capable of driving

behavior and of driving character, wouldn't you also think that a godly vision would drive behavior and character?

My friend and colleague in ministry, Eli Machen, is fond of talking about buzzards. Much to our distaste, buzzards have a huge appetite for dead animals. God made them that way. He also gave them the sight (or vision capability) to see dead animals miles away from hundreds of feet in the air. Because of their vision, these birds can fly around and see things that we don't see. *Buzzards have a buzzard's character and behavior.* And they teach us an important lesson:

Appetite can drive a vision.

What is your appetite? Remember the story of Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well of Samaria. She was thirsty for "living water," but she confused it with relationships with men. Her "appetite" for connecting with men drove her into five marriages and a sixth live-in partner.

What, again, are you thirsty for? In your old life, you were thirsty for sex. Some of that is God-given instinctual biology. That appetite drives you to be attracted to women and to produce children. Spiritually, however, we also have an appetite for God. Our problem as sex addicts is that we've confused these two appetites. We've merged our appetite for God with our appetite for sex. The great English writer G. K. Chesterton wrote, "A man who knocks at the door of a brothel is looking for God."

We've been thirsty for love, nurture, touch, affirmation, and fellowship. We've thought that we could get these normal desires met through sex, but we've been wrong. (For some of us, nearly dead wrong.) We can only get these things from God. This confused appetite has driven our character and our behavior: We've had a sex addict's behavior born from a flawed character created by a faulty appetite. It's time to get reoriented.

A vision pursues your appetite for God. If you allow yourself to see that truth, it will drive your character and your behavior. It will inform your discipline.

Imagine what it would be like to pursue God with the same energy you've pursued sex.

The next step in understanding your vision is to understand the legacy you hope to create. A legacy is how you'll be remembered and the influence you'll leave on others after you die. Here are some questions to consider, assuming you die before some important people in your life:

1. How would you like your wife to remember you? What will she say about you after you're gone?
2. How also would you like your children to remember you? What will they say about

- Dad at future family gatherings? What stories will they tell about you, your character, and your behavior?
3. Who else will remember you when you die? Who'll want to attend your funeral and why will they want to be there? What will be said at your memorial service? What will be highlighted in your obituary?
 4. What contributions and acts of service will you be remembered for?

Journaling Exercise: Your Legacy

Journal your answers to the questions above. Humbly ask God to show you the truth about your current legacy. If you doubt your ability to see yourself clearly, ask a trusted friend to share his honest impressions.

Tough questions, aren't they? I suggest that if you can answer them courageously, you'll have a vision of what your true heart desires. Strangely enough, I believe it will be consistent with what God desires for you, too.

When you've worked through all of the suggested writing exercises, you're ready for the last part of this assignment: articulating your personal vision.

Journaling Exercise: Your Vision

As an example, here is mine: "I am to write, teach, speak, and counsel for the purpose of educating the Church about sexual health and integrity." This brief statement incorporates my gifts, talents, and passion, and expresses what brings me joy. It also describes what I'd like to be remembered for after I'm gone.

Men of integrity are men of vision. They know where they're going and what they want to do. They follow their passions with purity and fervor. If you continue to develop and honor your vision, you'll find that your behaviors will follow. Remember, again, how your sexual and relationship behaviors followed your fantasies. As you're transformed into the man God intends you to be, your vision will direct your decisions.

Before you finish, go back and look at the healthy cycle I created that's presented in Principle Six, Assignment Two. It shows the progression from connection with God and His family, to vision, to healthy disciplines, to healthy choices, to joy. My guess is that you've changed a great deal already. My expectation is that the integrity of your behavior blesses you with serenity and joy. And my ongoing prayer is that you'll continue to grow in strength and faith as you allow God to transform you into a man who lives in freedom everyday.