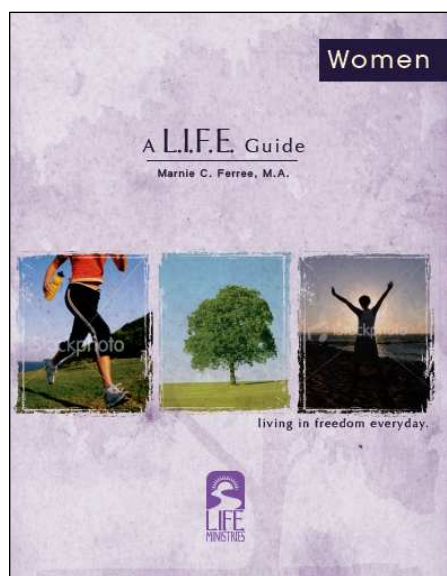


L.I.F.E. Guide for Women

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PRINCIPLE ONE

We admit that we have absolutely no control of our lives.

Sexual sin has become unmanageable.

Confronting Reality: I'm Shackled in My Own Prison

Congratulations! Despite long years of deceit, lies, denial, minimization, fears, shame, and manipulation, you have picked up this *L.I.F.E. Guide* or have come to a L.I.F.E. Group meeting. You have been wanting to, thinking that perhaps you should, pondering if it was the right thing. You have resisted, found excuses, wondered who would find out, and worried about the consequences of getting honest. You've thought that no one would really understand. You've either believed that you have done the worst things possible (things no one else has ever done) or you've thought your stuff is not so bad - that you really don't need to come to a meeting and admit you need help. Hear these words:

Welcome.

You're in the right place.

We're glad you're here.

Imagine what it must have been like for the Prodigal Son. He just wanted to be home. He didn't think he deserved to return to his earlier status as a son because his sins were so great. He hoped merely to be like one of his father's hired servants. Maybe you're like that: You're just glad to be alive and able to get to a meeting. You'd like to simply be quiet and belong. The Prodigal Son's father, however, rushed out to meet him and prepared a great feast. That is what it is like with God. We want to be "imitators of God, just like little children."

You probably feel like a Prodigal Daughter. And in the view of society (as well as the church), that's much worse than being a Prodigal Son. Only men are supposed to struggle with sexual sin.

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You can't believe other Christian women hide similar secrets. You're convinced you must be all alone. Like a fearful child, you expect to be ridiculed or shunned if you show up at a L.I.F.E. Group meeting. You imagine the meeting notice is actually a mistake and that no other women will be waiting.

Well, dear sister, your fears are unfounded. It may feel like you're a little girl who has just come on the bus or into the lunchroom or onto the playground and you're expecting to be rejected or at least ignored. Instead, we rush over to greet you! We've been where you've been. We understand your pain and your fears. We're glad you've come. We can't prepare a great feast, but we can go to coffee later.

Your first assignment is just to get honest. We know that the greatest enemy of sexual purity is silence. We also know how carefully you've guarded your sexual secrets. It's hard to imagine letting them out. There are demons in your mind telling you, "No! You can't talk about that. Someone will go running and screaming out of the room!" We encourage you to confront those demons. Those voices have kept you shackled in your pain for too long. We know, because we're on a similar journey of learning to live in freedom every day. We want you to tell us how bad it got and what it was like to feel powerless over your life. Chances are that others in your group have done some of the same things.

Though you feel like a Prodigal Daughter, there is nothing - certainly no sexual sin - that separates you from the love of God. No matter what you've thought or what you've done, it's time to come home to the heavenly Father who loves you and is longing for your freedom.

The assignment that you are about to undertake will take great courage. It will be a risk and a challenge. Don't turn back now. Keep putting one foot in front of the other and head for home. The freedom you'll experience is worth all it will take to get there.

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Assignment One - Admitting Our True Condition

As women, it's especially hard for us to admit we're sexually addicted. The label is so horrible! We cringe at the very thought. We'd much rather think of ourselves as love or relationship addicts, which sounds less offensive. Maybe we realize we have a problem with pornography or we've been involved in affairs, but to admit, "I'm a sex addict" is simply too much.

I hope it will help you to learn that the term "sexual addiction" is an umbrella term that describes a wide variety of behaviors. Just like we refer to a woman as an "alcoholic" without differentiating whether she's dependent on wine, vodka, or champagne, we use the term "sex addict" to refer to any of the various presentations of addictive behavior. Try not to get hung up on the label or let it keep you from the important task of healing. As you'll ultimately come to understand through your work in this *L.I.F.E. Guide*, "sexual" addiction isn't even about sex at all. Instead, it's about a desperate search for love and acceptance. You can surely relate to that definition, right?

Sexual acting out in women typically is more relational than it often is with male sex addicts. That's one reason we usually think of ourselves as love or relationship addicts. The most common presentation of sex addiction in women is a pattern of affairs or relationships. Females, though, engage in a wide range of problematic sexual behaviors. More and more women are struggling with on-line pornography and other kinds of Internet sexual activity. I've described these categories extensively in my book *No Stones: Women Redeemed from Sexual Shame*. It might help you to refer there to Chapter 4 if you need a more detailed explanation of the different presentations.

As you look at the following categories, note the ones you have done and indicate when your involvement in this activity started, even if it was only once. Try to remember how many times you have done each of these behaviors. (You may have to estimate. No one remembers, for example, how many times she has masturbated.) State how often you routinely engage in these behaviors (once a day or more, once a week, and so on).

Understand that these aren't necessarily discrete categories - that is, behaviors may overlap or cross categories. This division is meant to help you identify your patterns of behaviors, not to provide a "diagnosis" of a certain flavor of sexual addiction.

Typical Presentations of Sexual Addiction in Women

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Relationship addiction

Began

How Often

One relationship right after another (never being without a man, or at least looking for a man)

Intense, emotional involvements, with or without sex

Most significant relationships become sexual

Simultaneous relationships, with or without sex

Affairs (*sexual or non-sexual, long term with emotional involvement, short term and non-emotional, one night stands*)

Romance addiction

Began

How Often

Fantasizing about people or relationships, real or imagined (if married, these fantasies are not about your spouse)

Fantasizing about sexual activities, real or imagined (*if married, may use fantasy to enhance sex with spouse*)

Intense, short-term relationships, with or without sex

Interested in the “chase,” not in maintaining a relationship

Reading romance novels, including “Christian” ones

Pornography and/or cybersex addiction

Began

How Often

Viewing pornography (Internet, magazines, videos, books)

Participating in sexual chat rooms

E-mail or cybersex relationships

Engaging in cybersex activities

Stereotypical “sex” addiction

Began

How Often

Compulsive masturbation, with or without pornography

Exhibiting yourself (*even if “only” through provocative clothing*)

One-night stands or sexual activity with someone you’ve just met (*often alcohol use is a contributing factor*)

Visiting strip clubs or other voyeuristic activities

Bestiality

Sado-masochism (S&M) or pain exchange sexual activities

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Partnering with another sex addict

Began

How Often

Choosing a sex addict for acting out partner (there may be a fine line between sex addiction and co-sex addiction)

Selling/buying/trading sex (prostitution, stripping, using sex manipulatively to get what you want)

Sexual anorexic

Began

How Often

Totally shut down sexually

Compulsively avoids sex

Writing Exercise: Your Sexual History

Plot a timeline of your life. One easy way is to draw a vertical line down the left side of a page (about an inch from the left of the paper), with your age marked to the left of the line at different intervals (beginning with your earliest years and continuing to your present age). This timeline, then, could be several pages long depending on the amount of history you have to record. In the space to the right of each age, record your sexual and relationship behaviors. (To accommodate the next exercise, leave some space after each notation in your sexual history.) The following questions can provide a beginning point, but add anything else relevant that comes to mind. One result of preparing this history is that you'll probably see how your sexual addiction developed over time.

1. What is your earliest memory of being sexual? How old were you? What happened? Was there anyone else involved?
2. Note the times when the frequency of certain sexual behaviors increased and when new forms of sexual acting out occurred.
3. Addicts act out when they are tired, lonely, angry, anxious, sad, afraid, or bored. Often these emotions work in combinations. Can you recognize times when these feelings prompted your acting out? If so, indicate on your timeline when this was true.
4. Every addict has made various promises and attempts to stop. List some of the times and actions you have taken to stop your sexual or relationship behaviors. Make sure to list your most recent efforts.

One of the clearest signs of an addiction is when we continue in a behavior even though we experience negative consequences. It's obvious to those around us that we're paying a high price for our behavior, yet we keep doing the same thing. What consequences have you experienced

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due to your sexual acting out? The next exercise guide you in plotting the results of your sexual and relational behavior.

Writing Exercise: Your Consequences

Make a list of your consequences and note when they occurred on your timeline. (Consider using a different color pen for your consequences.) Perhaps it will help you remember if you think of various categories:

Physical – Have you gotten pregnant when you didn't intend to? If so, what choice did you make about that pregnancy? Have you contracted any STDs? Or AIDs? Have you been sick in any way that is the result of the stress of your addiction? Do you experience any sexual dysfunctions (lack of desire, pain during intercourse)?

Financial – How much money have you spent? (Count the money you spent on clothes, grooming, and social activities that were part of your acting out.)

Social – Have you been divorced or lost a relationship? Is anyone really angry with you? Have you had to move from a certain place? Leave a team, club, or activity because of your sexual behavior? Has your sexual behavior caused problems with your parents or siblings? What about with your husband or children?

Vocational – Has your acting out affected your productivity at work? If so, has it cost you a promotion or some other career advancement? Have you lost a job or lost time at work? Are you underemployed or not able to work in the career of your choice?

Legal – Have you ever been arrested, spent time in jail, or been sued?

Some of you may turn to other resources to work through this material. Assignment One parallels the work of the Faithful and True Workbook, Unit 7: Lessons 1-3, and Unit 8: Lesson 1. You may also find similar inventories in the other workbooks listed in the resource section of this L.I.F.E. Guide. For this assignment you would include any work that you have done around Step One.

I applaud your courage in completing these writing exercises! You've done a tremendous amount of work. Don't worry if you realize you've left out some things. Outlining the truth about your experiences is an on-going process as you continue this journey. You've made a great start.

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However, writing all of this information in your journal is a step toward being honest, but it is not the final step. The next crucial move is to share this information with others. I know that thought may be terrifying. But how long have you kept this information to yourself? Has it helped you to carry this burden alone? What lies have you told to cover up this story? It *is* a story, isn't it? It is a part of who you are. It doesn't define you, but it does belong to you. For years you've been thinking, "If people knew this part of my story, they would hate me and leave me. They wouldn't want to be around me."

Your feelings of fear have kept you hostage. They've been your oppressor. Your solitude of spirit has been the result. Silence has been your companion, and lies have guarded your silence. Loneliness has become all too familiar. You have had two lives: the one that others know, and the one that only you know. The public one may have many friends, but the silent one has none. Your silent self pervades your existence and overwhelms all else in the darkness of your loneliness. It is time for your two selves to unite.

The only way to emerge from the darkness is to break the silence. That is what your L.I.F.E. Group is for. They are the sisters who will stand with you. They won't go running and screaming out of the room. They've probably done many of the same things you have. They will understand. Confront your fears. Be of good courage. Share the story. During a L.I.F.E. Group meeting you'll have the chance to tell your story to some safe sisters. (You may want to practice first with one or two members of the group.) You may not tell all of it the first time, but eventually you will. And you'll find tremendous relief in releasing the secrets.

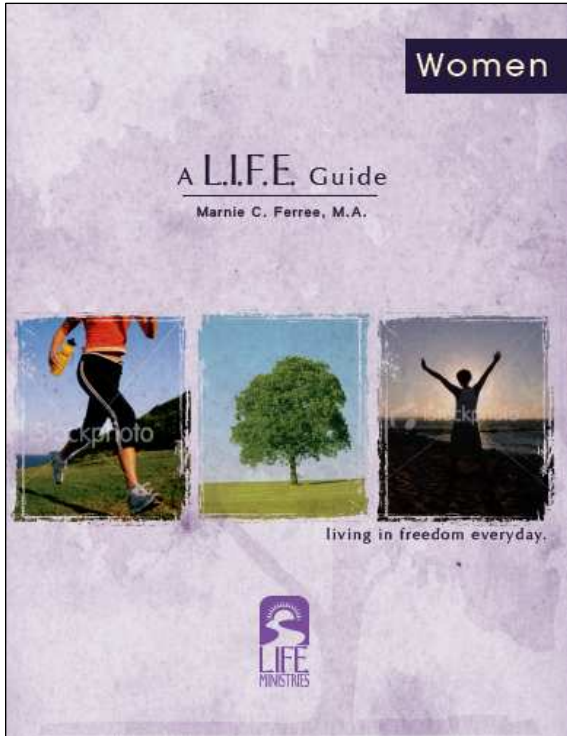
(Please take note of this word of caution: **Don't be graphic in describing your sexual behaviors, especially not when sharing with your group.** You don't want to trigger other group members if you can avoid it. You also don't want to educate your sisters about other forms of sexual acting out.)

Congratulations! You are beginning the journey of transformation into L.I.F.E. - living in freedom everyday.

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