

L.I.F.E. Guide for Young Men

Free Introduction and First Assignment

L.I.F.E. Ministries International – www.freedomeveryday.org

Letter to Parents

The sight of a workbook on sexual issues in the hands of your son might be somewhat frightening at first. As you discover that your son might be dealing with sexual integrity issues, my prayer is that you'll be supportive of him in this journey. Be proud of him. In acknowledging the reality of these issues and taking steps to cope with our sexually dominated culture, he is standing in the minority. Some of the questions you might be raising are:

1. "What has my child done?"
A--It could be a variety of things.
2. "Is he ruined for life?"
A--Not if he gets help.
3. "Is it safe for him to be around younger siblings?"
A--Probably yes.
4. "Will he end up being another Ted Bundy?"
A--Highly unlikely.
5. "Will he become a sex offender of some sort?"
A--Highly unlikely.

The purpose of this book is to help your son in a battle that is taking the hearts and souls of millions of teenagers: the battle with Internet pornography and sexual acting out. The exercises are designed to help him in making wise choices, cultivating sexual purity, coping with culture and addictive sexuality, and developing a vision for a life of sexual wholeness in a covenant marriage relationship. Navigating these waters isn't easy. Don't shame him over his activities. He already feels enough guilt without your adding to the cesspool. He will need your support, guidance, and acceptance.

There is another reason why finding out about your son's difficulty might be hard to accept. It's possible that your anxiety over your child may be coming from another source that might be very uncomfortable to deal with. Some young men are getting hooked on Internet pornography after finding the web sites or magazines that belong to a parent. Addiction is known to run in family trees. It could be that you or an extended family member has a problem with sexual integrity that may have impacted your son. Since the average age of first exposure to pornography in the United States is five years old, there is a strong possibility that your son could have been exposed at the home of a friend or family member. If you or your spouse has a struggle with sexual integrity, there is help available for the entire family. As part of this series there is a L.I.F.E. Guide for Men, by Dr. Mark Laaser. There is also a L.I.F.E. Guide for Women struggling with sexual addiction by Marnie Ferree. Additional resources for the entire family are listed in the back of this book.

This book is written with the hope of being an instrument of healing for the young men who will embark on this journey of living in freedom everyday. The impact on your son and your family will be powerful. May God bless you as you raise children in a sexually dominated culture.

INTRODUCTION

By Richard Blankenship, M.Ed., M.A.

Todd is a 17 year old high school junior who is very active in his school and church. At school, Todd is on the student council and participates in sports activities. At church, Todd leads Bible studies, devotionals, and works on the youth council. He has a desire to please God and his family. When the doors of the church building are open Todd and his family are actively involved in worship and Bible classes. Recently Todd participated in a ceremony where members of the youth group made commitments to maintain sexual purity until marriage. He was sincere in his commitment. From the day he signed the card and placed the ring on his finger, Todd wanted to honor his future bride with sexual purity. But Todd has a struggle that has not been revealed to his friends or family. For several years he has compulsively used Internet pornography. He experiences guilt and shame after viewing erotic web sites. Yet he continues with what feels like an uncontrollable habit. “I went through the commitment ceremony believing that if I made a promise to be pure that God would take the struggle away from me. Yet I have never been able to stop craving pornography.”

Can you relate to the struggle that Todd is going through? Maybe you’ve struggled and wondered why sexual purity seems so easy for some and impossible for you. Maybe you’ve dived into the latest fad program that will somehow magically take the desire for unhealthy sexuality out of your life. Perhaps you’ve dealt with guilt and shame over sexual activity, only to find yourself once again in a cycle that seems hopeless. At times it becomes easier to say “why bother.” You may have tried programs, praying, preaching, and at the end of the day still feel drawn to the enticing world of Internet erotica.

Good news: There is an explanation for why you might have this struggle and why it seems so unending. **Better news:** There is hope for breaking the cycle and healing the shame created from sexually acting out. This book will guide you through a process that can help in coping with the sexual insanity of our culture and becoming the sexual man of God that you were created to be.

As a teenager, I remember attending church camp year after year. On Thursday night we had what was called a “Gallileean” service. The pastor would come across the lake in a boat with a cross lit up while singing some of those great hymns of the faith (otherwise known as the “Kum Ba Yah” moment of church camp). The pastor would preach a heart-wrenching sermon from behind the cross on the boat. The sermon always included an altar call in which all of the preachers and youth ministers would stand along the lake and call for rededication of your life to the Lord. After six thousand verses of “Just As I Am” the preachers would make that last ditch effort to wring all of the emotion out of us that they could. We would end the night by writing a “sin list” and placing it in the campfire, believing that God would remove whatever sin we had written down. Most of us wrote

L.I.F.E. Guide for Young Men

Free Introduction and First Assignment

L.I.F.E. Ministries International – www.freedomeveryday.org

words like “lust,” “sex,” and “pornography” on that paper. Then I would return home to a culture filled with sexual innuendo and would find myself right back where I started. The questions would start going through my mind that neither I, nor anyone else, dared ask out loud. Why was I still struggling? Was I really sincere when I threw the paper on the fire? Did God not keep his promises? After all, the pastor said that God would take the struggle away. Could I trust God? Did He even exist at all? My hope today is that there are safe people in your life that can help with the difficult questions and struggles that arise from living in a culture of unhealthy sexuality.

Living in a Sexually Saturated World

Sexuality has become the language of American culture. In past decades, music has been the language in which we communicate. In the seventies if you could get your message into a good song it would be communicated loud and clear. It did not matter if the message was of any quality; if the song was right then the message was sent. Sex has taken the place of music in America. The billboards on highways, music videos, movies, humor, television shows, even the names of the characters on shows such as “Will and Grace” reveal how sexuality **is** our culture. From movie stars to presidents, issues involving sexual integrity abound. Add to this list the easily accessible sexual material via the Internet, franchised adult novelty stores, strip clubs, and chat rooms, and we begin to see how the language of sexuality has become the dominant form of communication in our world. Thanks to the availability of Internet pornography, the average age of first exposure to pornography (in the United States) is now five years.

Escape from being tempted by sexual material is impossible because our culture is filled with sexual triggers. Maybe you’ve felt that shutting down sexually would solve the problem of coping with temptation. As you’ll find in this book, sexuality isn’t something you can run from because it’s inherent to the way God has created you from birth. One of my mentors used to say that “sex isn’t something you do; sex is something you are.” People have tried everything from cutting off electricity, isolating themselves on islands, and running from their families in desperate attempts to achieve sexual wholeness. Some have even tried mutilating themselves in an attempt to escape the hopelessness of sexual acting out.

Awards shows such as the Grammy’s or the Emmy’s reveal that our culture is growing more sexually explicit each year. Men and women are dressing in ways that are attention-seeking and exhibitionistic. Humor is often sexualized. Super bowl commercials are becoming more sexually explicit. “Wardrobe malfunctions” offer primetime viewing of women’s breasts. Last year my daughter (age 11) was searching for a Halloween costume on the Internet. She noticed the low-cut necklines on a variety of costumes and commented on how they seemed sexually explicit.

Exposure to sexually explicit material is no longer optional. You cannot walk out of your house without viewing or hearing something sexual. Sexual materials are invading homes through the television, telephone, and computer. Radio, mp3 players and other forms of media encourage people to be focused on sex in an obsessive way. Cartoons in

L.I.F.E. Guide for Young Men

Free Introduction and First Assignment

L.I.F.E. Ministries International – www.freedomeveryday.org

newspapers and television are now filled with sexual material. As I write these words I'm sitting in a hotel room. As soon as I walked in the door, advertisements for XXX movies were positioned to catch my attention. Before work can begin, the ads have to be removed from view. Hotels love Christian gatherings. Pornography sales dramatically increase when church groups visit hotels for different events.

God didn't create your sexuality and then decide later that he made a mistake. From the dawn of creation to our modern age, people have functioned as sexual beings. Your struggle with sexual purity has been in existence since the days of Adam and Eve. The feeling of shame was a critical part of the fall of man back in the garden. Shame may be fueling your struggle with sexual integrity. Part of this book will address healing from shame and breaking the cycle of sexual acting out.

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.

Bob writes, "I can't break free from pornography. I found it on the Internet four years ago when I was 12. At first I just looked occasionally. Now I pretend I am asleep, and when everyone else goes to bed I get on the computer. I get little sleep because I now spend several hours each night looking at pornographic web sites. I have to make myself get out of bed in the morning and pretend that I really slept all night. I feel like I'm chained up in a prison from which there is no escape."

Congratulations! You've made the decision to come to a group, class, meeting with a youth leader, or maybe you've picked up this book desperately seeking help. You may have resisted dealing with this problem because you didn't have the tools to break free. Or you might have believed that no one would understand. Have you been making excuses and rationalizing the years of deceit and lies? Or maybe you're overcome with fear and shame. Maybe you've been caught and encouraged to seek help, or perhaps you've come to this place knowing you're enslaved to sexual sin. Is your story like Bob's? Whatever the reason, please hear these words:

Welcome.

You've come to the right place.

You're safe.

L.I.F.E. Guide for Young Men

Free Introduction and First Assignment

L.I.F.E. Ministries International – www.freedomeveryday.org

We are glad you're here.

Put yourself in the place of the Prodigal Son. Do you just want to come home to the arms of a loving father? In this story found in Luke 15 notice that the arms of the father were wide open and ready to accept him back. The father in this story has no idea why the son is returning home. He doesn't interrogate him, check out his motives, wonder if he is being honest, or check his ID. The father accepts him completely because he is his son. In this group, pain and fear are the norm. We all know the feelings of fear, shame, and rejection and simply want a place to belong. We're glad you're here.

There is no sexual sin - or anything else - that separates you from the love of God. It doesn't matter what you've done. The Father in heaven wants you to come home and experience the love and acceptance that you've longed for. He wants you to have the freedom that Jesus died for - freedom from being enslaved to sin, including sexual sin.

Nothing fuels an addiction like keeping secrets. Secrecy is the gasoline that fuels the engine of your sexual addiction. Consider again the story of Bob. All of his acting out was done under the cover of darkness. His secrecy kept the cycle of addiction alive and well. We'll learn more about the cycle of addiction in a later section of this book.

For now, we want to start getting honest with ourselves and the group. The first assignment is designed to help you get honest about your sexual history. We'll look at the reality of the situation in which you find yourself, coping with consequences, and understanding the cycle of addictive sexuality.

L.I.F.E. Guide for Young Men
 Free Introduction and First Assignment
 L.I.F.E. Ministries International – www.freedomeveryday.org

Assignment One - Getting Real About Sexual Truth

What constitutes unhealthy sexual behavior? There are various behaviors that can contribute to the development of addictive sexuality. Please note that we're examining these behaviors in the context of addiction as a progressive disease. That means that if these behaviors become compulsive and out of control, addictive sexuality will probably be the final result. Try and identify how many of these behaviors have been a part of your life. Also try and identify when they started and how often they take place. You might want to reflect in your journal on when these behaviors started. Ask yourself questions like; "What was going on in my life during that time?" Another question might be, "Was there a major event in my life or in my family that might have had an emotional or traumatic impact on me?" As you answer the questions on the below table you may not remember specific dates or numbers. That's ok. Do the best you can in answering the questions.

Basic or Building Block Behaviors*	Began	How Often
Fantasy	_____	_____
Compulsive Masturbation	_____	_____
Pornography (magazines, videos, Internet, TV, books, movies, music)	_____	_____
Prostitution (on the street, in massage parlors, escort services, on the Internet)	_____	_____
Phone Sex (with people you know or strangers)	_____	_____
Multiple sexual partners (being sexual with a number of people)	_____	_____
Anonymous Sex (the name of your sexual partner isn't known)	_____	_____

*The table above is adapted from Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction by Dr. Mark Laaser and Out of the Shadows by Dr. Patrick Carnes.

L.I.F.E. Guide for Young Men

Free Introduction and First Assignment

L.I.F.E. Ministries International – www.freedomeveryday.org

Understanding Your Sexual History

Sexual History

Draw a timeline of your life. One way to do this would be to write your age in the left margin of a sheet of notebook paper. Begin with your earliest memories and continue down the page until you reach your current age. This timeline could be several pages long. In the space to the right of your age record your sexual and relationship history. The following questions can help jog your memory. They're intended to help you begin the process of telling your story. You may want to include other things that aren't listed in these questions. This can help you begin to understand how the sexual addiction started and developed over time.

1. What is your earliest memory of being sexual? How old were you? What happened? Was there anyone else involved? Did you tell anybody (parent, teacher, friend, etc...)?
2. Note the times when the frequency of sexual behaviors increased and new forms of sexual acting out began.
3. Addicts often act out when they are hungry, angry, lonely, and tired. They also act out when they are fearful, anxious, sad, and bored. Can you recognize times when these feelings prompted sexual behavior? If so, indicate on your timeline when this was true.
4. Every addict has tried to control behavior on his own. He makes promises and does various things in an attempt to not act out. What are some of the things that you've tried to do in order to control your sexual behavior? Include your most recent efforts.

One of the most common qualities of an addiction is that behavior continues despite negative consequences. In other words, we keep acting out even though we know better. Some consequences are more obvious than others. Most people who struggle with addiction deny or minimize consequences for a long time before coming to grips with reality. Reality is that the addict's sexual history has negatively impacted himself and others. What are some of the consequences you've experienced in sexual acting out? The next exercise guides you in plotting the results of your sexual behavior and your actions in relationships with others.

Consequences

Make a list of your consequences and note when they occurred on your timeline. You might want to use a different color pen for your consequences.

Physical - Have you been responsible for a pregnancy that you had no intention of creating? If so, what choices did you make about that pregnancy? Have you contracted any sexually transmitted diseases like herpes, chlamydia, genital warts (HPV)? Do you need to go to a doctor or the health department to be tested for any diseases including AIDS?

Emotional - What is your stress level like? Have you been losing sleep due to the guilt and shame that goes along with acting out sexually? Are you having difficulty concentrating in school? Have you been able to fulfill responsibilities at home?

Social - Have you been through the breakup of a dating relationship over your addiction? Are people angry with you because of things you've done to them? Have you been removed from a club or a team at school because of your sexual behavior? Is your sexual acting out causing problems in the family with your parents or siblings? Or perhaps with extended family members?

Vocational - Perhaps you work a part-time job after school. Are you using work time to be sexual? Have you lost a job due to sexual acting out on the job or with another employee?

Legal - Have you been arrested or spent time in jail? Have you or your family experienced any other legal consequences as a result of your sexual behavior?

I admire your courage in completing this written assignment. Addressing the reality of your sexual history and the consequences of that history can be frightening and intimidating. It may also make you feel somewhat overwhelmed and hopeless as you see the scope of the damage. This is only the beginning of the journey. You're off to a great start.

The next move is where this process may get harder. It's now time to share with someone else. As we said earlier in the book, the people you share with must be safe people. L.I.F.E. Groups are designed with safety guidelines, but it's up to each group to follow these principles. It may be that you share with an accountability partner, a sponsor, or a pastor. You've been carrying a burden by yourself for a long period of time. As frightening as it may be to share, once you take this step, you'll find that a burden has been lifted.

L.I.F.E. Guide for Young Men

Free Introduction and First Assignment

L.I.F.E. Ministries International – www.freedomeveryday.org

Silence has kept the lies alive in your life. Unfortunately, silence also breeds loneliness. To emerge from the darkness of sin and addiction, the silence must be broken. There is a fear that if someone knows this part of your story, you'll be abandoned and shamed. There is a fear that you'll be hated and that people won't want to be around you if they know the truth. Confront your fears and share your story. During a L.I.F.E. Group meeting, you can share your story in a safe setting.

(A word of caution: **Don't be graphic in describing your sexual behaviors to a group.** You don't want to trigger other group members if you can avoid it. You also don't want to educate other group members about other forms of sexual acting out.)

Congratulations! You're beginning the journey of transformation into L.I.F.E. - Living In Freedom Everyday.

Continue working in the L.I.F.E. Guide for Young Men

Visit www.freedomeveryday.org to get your L.I.F.E. Guide for Young Men, find local groups, and read free articles and information about sexual addiction recovery.