

THE **LIFE**
RECOVERY[®]

— WORKBOOK FOR —

Sexual Integrity

A Bible-Centered
Approach for Taking
Your Life Back

STEPHEN ARTERBURN
& DAVID STOOP

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The profiles in this workbook are composite characteristics of persons who have had the courage to work the steps on various issues in their lives and on their own addictive behaviors. Names, ages, and situations have been modified to protect their anonymity.

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This workbook is dedicated to every fellow struggler who has had the courage to face the truth about themselves, the humility to abandon their flawed attempts at living, and the willingness to find God's truth and live accordingly.

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The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our problems and that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our wills and our lives over to the care of God.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry it out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Steps used in *The Life Recovery Workbook* have been adapted with permission from the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

INTRODUCTION

*If you keep yourself pure . . . your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.
(2 Timothy 2:21)*

This workbook is about transformation from death to life, from sexual addiction to recovery. It's about walking humbly, righteously, and mercifully with God while accepting his will. In our compulsions and addictions, we have opposed God's will by hurting ourselves, our bodies, and our loved ones. We have been separated from God and from other people. The Twelve Steps are a path to finding that humble walk that leads us out of self-centeredness and closer to God's heart.

We will be examining the Twelve Steps individually to consider the challenging spiritual lessons that allow us to live free of bondage every day. Each step has a new task for us, but none of the steps is meant to stand alone. For successful recovery, they are meant to be worked in order. Each step prepares us for the next one, as we develop a greater sense of openness to God's plan and purpose in our lives.

Although the path of recovery involves hard and sometimes painful work, it is worth the effort. God will meet us on this path as we become willing to take each step toward new life. We see the Twelve Steps as a path and a process that makes us better disciples and more committed followers of Jesus Christ. Honesty, humility, and courage are vital components of faith that can move us beyond our sexual addictions to a vibrant way of living as a follower of Jesus. Welcome to the journey.

STARTING AND LEADING A GROUP

Recovery is best experienced in the context of a group. Two or more willing people can form a powerful bond as they study and work these steps together. With little effort on your part, your struggles, problems, and hang-ups become a blessing to the group. As you open up, everyone else will feel more free to share from their own lives.

Being the leader of a group is actually quite simple. You can find many books on how to lead a small group, but here's a simple and effective way to do it:

1. Find a location in your home, a church, a workplace, or school, and obtain permission (if necessary) to form the group.
2. Put up a few flyers announcing the time and place, calling it a support group for sexual addictions, recovery group, or Twelve Step group.
3. Show up early, arrange the chairs, make some coffee, and welcome people as they arrive.
4. Start when you say you will start by opening in prayer and by reading the Twelve Steps and the correlating Scriptures.
5. Ask if anyone would like to share for three or four minutes. Don't allow others to "fix" the speaker, and if he or she goes on too long, be sure to enforce the time limit.
6. Make sure everyone has a copy of the workbook. Ask them to study Step One for discussion at the next meeting.
7. End when you say you will end by reading the Lord's Prayer.
8. Be sure that everyone knows where to get a workbook and a *Life Recovery Bible*, if they don't already have one.
9. E-mail us—Stephen Arterburn at sarterburn@newlife.com; David Stoop at drstoop@cox.net—and tell us how it's going.
10. Feel good that you are allowing God to use you.

INTRODUCTION

Please remember that working the steps is an art, not a formula. Most often, it is an individualized process.

God be with you on this journey. We pray that you will find healing, serenity, and peace of mind.



STEP 1

PROFILE

Shame can drive your life to the point of unmanageability. It drove Daniel's life to the point of unmanageability and nearly committing suicide at the worst phase of his sexual addiction. No one knew he had a problem except for his wife (Carol), me, and possibly the Federal Bureau of Investigation. I would have never known about it, if not for a phone call from Carol that changed everything. Carol did not know Daniel was a sex addict. She did not know the extent of his problem. She just knew what he revealed to her, with his car keys in his hands, just before he was going to drive out into the country and kill himself. His gun was already in the car.

As his addiction had progressed, one of his greatest fears and the source of his enormous shame was Carol finding out. Part of Daniel's problem was his idealization of Carol, and he did not think someone so "good" could ever accept someone as "bad" as him. He had assumed that if she ever did find out, or if he ever came clean and confessed his double life to her, she would leave him immediately and tell the world what he was really like. His world was quite large, as he was one of the most respected Bible teachers in the evangelical Christian community.

There were times he came close to telling her, but then he would back down. When the FBI seemed to be about to enter the picture, he immediately shut down, sank into a deep

depression and started to obsess over how he would kill himself. He settled on the gun-in-the-middle-of-nowhere scenario as the best choice. He thought the headline would be all about his great life, his struggle with depression, and his sad ending. His plan was to drive across a bridge over a very large lake and toss his phone and laptop out the window to sink all of the evidence. Once his plan was in place, the only detail he couldn't control or manage was the FBI. His confusion and desperation led him to tell Carol the truth before he drove away. He screwed up the courage to tell her, rather than have people in suits show up at the door and shock her with the horrible truth.

When Daniel told Carol why he had been so distraught and what his double life had been like, he was the one that was shocked. Rather than scream or throw things or insult him, Carol teared up and embraced him; they held each other and cried for a very long time. Her first words were of love, compassion, care, and sorrow for him and all he had been struggling with for so long by himself. Rather than put more shame on him, she requested that he hand her his phone and allow her to call me (Steve) for help.

I had not talked to Daniel in over a decade, but his information was still in my contacts and I answered the call with a smile. But it wasn't Daniel calling, and my smile faded quickly. Carol was weeping and difficult to understand. Within a few minutes I understood perfectly what was going on and why she sounded so desperate. She told me about throwing out the one small sliver of hope in the form of her request to call me. I affirmed her for getting him help before she allowed all of the natural reactions to come pouring out. When she handed the phone back to Daniel, he told me how his life had become unmanageable due to his addiction and how he had reached the point of powerlessness, desperation, and suicide.

It was difficult for Daniel to talk, but he did not ask Carol to

leave. He told me the story of how his addiction began when he was young and spiraled out of control as he grew older. Daniel had been exposed to pornography by his older brother when he was only seven years old, and it eventually became a daily habit. He thought his problem would end when he married Carol, but it didn't. Over the years, he increasingly sought out more extreme forms of pornography until he finally found himself seeking out child pornography.

When Daniel clicked onto the child porn site and started to look at the images, they shocked him. The real shock came when a message appeared on the screen displaying the FBI seal and claiming to know who he was, where he lived, and that he would be contacted by personnel from the FBI. It was that message that awakened Daniel to what he had been doing, how far it had gone, and how much shame was within him.

Daniel saw no way out but suicide. He was still acting on his own to control his life. He was still trying to manage things. It was quite fortunate that in a moment of confusion—or rather, a divine intervention—he confessed to his wife, and she responded in love rather than reacting in anger. That phone call put Daniel on a different trajectory that has led him to over a decade of victory for himself and a satisfying marriage for the two of them.

Daniel went to an Every Man's Battle intensive weekend with New Life, and that was where he was able to admit his powerlessness over the problem and see the complete and total unmanageability of his situation for the first time. His life had been out of control and unmanageable for years, but like so many of us, it takes a crisis to change our course and then find a path to hope and healing. The crisis for Daniel seemed like the worst thing that could happen to him, but the crisis was the gift that led him to take a look at the first of the Twelve Steps of Life Recovery.

STEP ONE

We admitted that we were powerless over our problems and that our lives had become unmanageable.

The recovery journey begins when we confront the very first word in Step One: *we*. This immediately challenges the isolationist in us. Although we would be more comfortable with the word *I* and would prefer to get better alone, only *we* can recover. The Twelve Step program guides us into community, where all involved are a part of each other's recovery. The Twelve Steps are worked and lived in a group; independence is deadly for any addict. Spiritual transformation always begins in community. When Jesus began his ministry, he created a group. When we look at the church in the book of Acts, we find groups meeting in homes. Living in open and honest community is necessary for spiritual growth—we have to accept help from others in order to recover from whatever addiction or codependency issues we have.

We admitted we were powerless. Admitting that something or someone is more powerful than our own will confronts our pride. So we keep on acting out with unhealthy sexual behaviors born out of our dependency and addiction, and we continue to attempt to control it. By attending meetings and listening to other people's stories, we become more open to the possibility of recovery. Our pride must be shattered, a little at a time, because we will not recover without an admission of powerlessness. Our very human nature rebels at the idea of powerlessness, which signifies our inability to escape our life of dependency and addiction on our own strength. We must let go of image seeking and pride and tell the truth about our demoralized condition.

Step One contains a potent paradox: By telling the truth about our complete powerlessness over addiction, we receive the power of choice in return. To jump into recovery waters with both feet, we must go even deeper. Not only must we

admit and accept our powerlessness over our dependencies and addiction, but we must also concede that our lives are unmanageable. This strikes a second blow to our pride and self-sufficiency. We have continued in the delusion that there should be something we can do on our own, especially to clean up our own lives. However, addiction leads to inefficiency in our jobs, to dissatisfaction in our relationships, and quite often, to a sense that life is not worth living.

Our emotional pain underscores the reality of our inability to manage our lives. Our loner mentality must give way to joining the “we” of recovery. We have to be rid of the “just Jesus and me” belief system that leads to more isolation and shame. When we realize that even God is in community (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), we become aware of the fact that human beings were created to be connected to others.

The meditations for Step One include some examples from Scripture of people struggling with powerlessness. Naaman had position and power in the military that blinded him to his powerlessness (see 2 Kings 5:1-15). He began to demand things from life, thinking that he was special because of his position. We may do this as well, both at work and at home. We may have an inflated sense of importance because of our ministry. We may demand things from our families or coworkers based on our way. Like Naaman, we will find that this type of pride that resists input and direction from others leads to isolation. Only God can deal with this rebellion in our hearts. The consequences of addiction are sometimes the only way by which God can break through to us.

Sometimes we arrive at powerlessness and unmanageability by losing everything, as Job did (see Job 6:2-13). Being in recovery and trying to walk a spiritual path does not mean that we will be spared our share of snags and obstacles. In these times, recovery can appear to be hopeless and not worth the work. The rebel in us that wants control will counsel, “This is just too hard. Your troubles must mean that God doesn’t like you.” At

this point, we need a group of people to continue pointing us to God no matter what happens. We need people who will nurture hope even in the most difficult places. As we hit bottom and face our powerlessness over all of life, we need encouragers. We need to be reminded of Jesus' saying that "if you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it" (Luke 9:24). This is another way of describing powerlessness.

By exploring our powerlessness, we will have to confront and oppose negative ideas that tell us that being powerless means being a victim. By coming to the end of our own power, we develop enough humility to hear the voice of God and do his will.

The apostle Paul—before his conversion and transformation, when he was still known as Saul—could not explore powerlessness at all. He was intoxicated by the power he wielded, even if it placed him in opposition to God's plan for his life. Yet, God pursued Saul, despite his power-hungry, murderous state of mind, to call him to a new direction, a totally transformed purpose. So that he could stop persecuting the gospel and start preaching it, God made him totally blind and dependent on others to lead, feed, and shelter him. He had to accept powerlessness and unmanageability in order to be used by God in powerful and amazing ways.

We must also first accept our powerlessness and inability to manage before we can be freed from addiction and become a channel for God in ways we could never imagine. We are so schooled in the thought that we can do anything we put our minds to that it is almost impossible to envision the power of God in us, doing what we have not been able to do to this point. God in us, shining through human vessels, gives us the ability to recover, to accept powerlessness, and to accept unmanageability. We are then opened to a life powered by God rather than by our dependencies, our addictions, or our fallible selves.

When God's power lives in us, we can be pressed by troubles, perplexed by life, and haunted by our addictions or dependencies, and at the same time experience peace in trouble, hope in perplexing situations, and a lifting of the compulsion to act out. When we admit our powerlessness, God's power flows in to fill us and accomplish what we could never do on our own.

QUESTIONS FOR STEP ONE

No-Win Situations *Genesis 16:1-15*

1. What feelings do I have toward people in my life who are in the position of power (such as a supervisor, spouse, religious leader, or sponsor)?

2. Who is the person from my childhood who is most likely tied to this reaction?

3. What do I try to escape from? What do I feel trapped by?

LIFE RECOVERY: SEXUAL INTEGRITY

4. How do I use sex to escape my feelings, such as anger, boredom, fatigue, insecurity, or loneliness?

5. When things are out of control or when I am in a no-win situation, what is my reaction (to relationships, work, promotions, kids who question or rebel, daily frustrations, financial difficulties, people who hurt or disappoint me, or God, who seems to be silent)?

6. If I could, how would I change my response?

Dangerous Self-Deception *Judges 16:1-31*

1. What is the longest time I have been able to stop acting out sexually?

2. What are some of the lies and excuses I tell myself when I start acting out again?

3. What are the things I think I can control? How do I lie to myself and about what?

4. What is so scary about telling the truth?

5. As I explore powerlessness, what blind spots have I discovered?

6. How has pride affected my recovery process?

A Humble Beginning *2 Kings 5:1-15*

1. What are the differences between humiliation and humility in my life?

LIFE RECOVERY: SEXUAL INTEGRITY

2. How do I regard myself as being a little more important than other people?

3. What makes me think I am in control of my sexual addiction?

4. How do I keep God at arm's length and disregard those who follow him?

5. When have I placed unrealistic expectations on other people or God?

6. When have my attitudes shown that I believe I know better than God?

7. Why is it difficult for me to follow instructions?

Hope amid Suffering *Job 6:2-13*

1. What kind of people do I hang around with and trust? Are they people who criticize or people who encourage truth? Why do I choose to be around people like that?

2. What emotions and behaviors do I associate with my hitting bottom?

3. What have I done in the past to deal with pain, sadness, and loneliness?

Like Little Children *Mark 10:13-16*

1. What happened to me in the past that provokes this behavior in me today?

LIFE RECOVERY: SEXUAL INTEGRITY

2. When do I feel the most cared for?

3. What do I see in my life that reveals God's care for me?

4. How could I replace sexual encounters with true caring and intimacy?

A Time to Choose Acts 9:1-9

1. When I continue to pursue my own agenda without asking God for direction, what happens in my life?

2. Are there areas of my life in which God may have to use extreme measures before I will listen for direction? Which areas in the past? Which areas today?

3. What will it take for me to listen to God?

The Paradox of Powerlessness *2 Corinthians 4:7-10*

1. Describe some instances in which you have demonstrated acceptance of your own powerlessness and God's powerlessness.

2. How do I respond when I am in trouble?

3. How do I respond to change?

4. What do I do when it seems that God or someone else has abandoned me?

LIFE RECOVERY: SEXUAL INTEGRITY

5. How has trying to control my sexual impulses and desires on my own made my life more unmanageable?

Prayer for Step One

Dear God,

Help me to be open to who you are and what you have for my life.

Help me to forget about who I thought you were and find you as you really are.

Amen.