

LivingIntegrated®

FIFTEEN PRACTICES FOR LIVING THE LIFE YOU WANT

3

DO AN HONEST SELF-EVALUATION

IN THIS PRACTICE:

- Six Important Considerations
- Some Specific Guidelines
- The Self-Evaluation Exercise
- Some Final Thoughts to Keep in Mind

Go to <https://youtu.be/zw4NdnEsQWo> now and watch the introductory video for this Practice.

I know, I know: we faced reality in the First Practice, right? Wasn't that work an honest self-evaluation?

Yes it was. But something happens in the minds of addicts. We compartmentalize. We box up and store memories of some of our difficult behaviors, the ones with negative consequences or shameful aspects. We gloss over, yeah, I did this, right that was a bad year.

So why poke back through the rubble? *Because there is a distinctly therapeutic value to becoming honest with ourselves about just where addiction has taken us.*

Addicts—even and especially when they're trying to live a better life, let go of the past, turn the corner, whatever phrase you want to employ—tend to alternate between struggling with the past and fear, anxiety or speculation about the future. Those of us who are addicts are particularly challenged at living in the present.

To live a life in the present, you have to deal appropriately with the past.

So this in an important Practice and it will take some time. It's a personal inventory of sixteen questions to think about and answer. You might want to set aside several periods to work on it. You want to give it the effort it will take to do it well.

Before you go any further, I want you to take to heart a few very important things.

SIX IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

FIRST, this Practice can be really intense. How could it not? When we've been using sex compulsively, we've been avoiding feelings and dodging reality. This Practice is going to bring us face-to-face with what our reality actually has been. For many of us this can be jarring because we've compartmentalized many of these experiences.

SECOND, for some practitioners, this Practice will expose a lot of feelings, and possibly feelings of deep shame. I want you to be honest with yourself, but also careful with yourself. Pay close attention to *what you're thinking and how you're feeling* as you work through the questions.

Remember that you're only doing this because there is a better life for you and you are worth having it.

THIRD, this Practice is not intended to make you feel bad about yourself. Quite the contrary. It is intended to help you find the freedom and wholeness that addiction has taken from you.

It takes courage to do this sort of self-evaluation. It's a necessary part of the path to healing. But if you feel overwhelmed emotionally, or awash in shame, put this down and come back to it later. This Practice is not about shaming you; it's about freeing you, because you are worth being freed!

FOURTH, it's vital that you recognize and remember that whatever you put down in your answers to these questions is *not a definition of who you are*. The answers are only partial descriptions of some things you have done.

You are a child of God, a valued member of the human family. Your very participation in this work of recovery speaks to the goodness at work in your soul.

FIFTH, it is essential that you understand and repeat this to yourself: *the answers you assemble to these questions are a picture of where you have been, not where you are going and not who you are*.

The whole reason you're engaging the Fifteen Practices is so you can change your life. And the reason you can change your life is that within you is a genuine, wonderful, worthy essence—who you were created to be.

Things have cluttered up your living. The behaviors of addiction have obfuscated your genuine soul.

“ Spiritual growth and recovery is uncluttering your living so that you can incrementally free yourself to live in a way that expresses the faith, hope and love of your genuine self. ”

FINALLY, the downside of incorporating this Practice in an online format is that you're doing it alone. And in isolation we are vulnerable to letting negative thoughts run wild. There's no one to bounce our thoughts off of, to help us stay grounded. So, I want you carefully to monitor the effect this Practice has on you.

The Big Book of AA (p. 86), regarding reflecting on our life, cautions about drifting into “worry, remorse or morbid reflection....” It is this “morbid reflection” I’m concerned about.

It’s important for us to have caring, safe people in our lives with whom we can talk about how we’re feeling. This helps us stay grounded to reality. We explore this more in Practice Five, developing a community of support.

So, unless you have someone you can talk with who is completely and absolutely safe, if you do find yourself falling into “morbid reflection,” shame, depression or despair while working through the questions, I want you to set this Practice aside for now.

You can come back to it when you’ve made progress on cultivating supportive relationships.

SOME GUIDELINES FOR DOING THE SELF-EVALUATION

This Practice does not have an “Assignment” section because this Practice is primarily working through sixteen questions, and then recording your thoughts and feelings about your answers. A few specifics:

- Think carefully.
- Give this time.
- Write down your answers.
- Come back to it.
- Set your mind to think about this when you’re not actually working on it.
- Ask the Spirit to help you remember accurately and to give you what you need to be honest with yourself.
- Here is a prayer I recommend you pray each day you’re working on this Practice:

*Spirit of my Creator, you know my heart, my thoughts, everything about me.
Open my mind to see my life as it truly is. Help me to be honest and thorough.
And please help me to walk in your light. Amen*

Because this is so important I want to repeat this: *there is no place for shame here!* This is not about making you feel badly about yourself. What we’re doing here is trying to be fully honest about diagnosing what has been going on because your life truly matters! You are worth recovering and it takes serious work to recover. So be both gentle and thoroughly honest with yourself.

Make notes—write these things down. I said that already; but we have a tendency—especially when ashamed or uncomfortable—to read over, think we’ve got the point, skip a bit. It’s taking a short cut. People who are impulsive love shortcuts. I know you’re thinking, “I just need to go over this in my head; I get the point.” But no, you don’t.

It’s not just you. It’s all of us. Those of us who are compulsive have a very serious challenge of not being fully in touch with reality. Writing these answers out helps us get back in touch with what is real. This exercise is for you and your wellbeing!

THE SELF-EVALUATION EXERCISE

Some questions may not apply to you. Whatever answers you write down are for yourself and your use only. Keep your notes in a safe place. They are not for anyone else.

1. What were your first sexual experiences (age, behavior, with whom, your feelings during and after)?
2. List all significant sexual encounters with people in person, that is, actual sexual encounters you have had.
3. If your compulsion is with Internet pornography, when did you first access it? How old were you?
4. When you first began viewing Internet porn, what sort of porn did you watch? What sort of porn created the strongest response in you? (Remember this info is for you and your eyes only!)
5. How long (weeks, months or years) have you been regularly using Internet porn?
6. Are you now looking at/looking for types of porn that are different than what you started off with?
7. Have you looked at certain porn images/genre that earlier you would not have thought arousing or even may have thought revolting?
8. How do you feel about how your porn appetite has developed?
9. How much time (think carefully here, review honestly, this is for your benefit) do you spend looking at porn?
10. List all your sexual partners.
11. What sexual experiences/encounters have you had that were a stretch for you—meaning earlier in your life you would not have anticipated or desired?
12. When have you had sexual experiences you regretted afterwards? List all of them. Again, think carefully.
13. List all sexual experiences that left you afraid of potential consequences (sexually transmitted infections, AIDS, legal, relational, reputation or other consequences). Write out the encounter, the potential consequences, what actually happened and how it impacted you (i.e. did you not ever repeat it or did you repeat that experience? Do you think the event and consequences caused you to change for better or did it further your compulsion?)
14. Think through and try to calculate all costs of your sexual experiences:
 - Financial
 - Reputation
 - Relationships—friends
 - Relationships—family
 - Relationship—spouse, partner, dating relationships
 - Time/attention taken from activities or professional pursuits
15. Have you attempted to stop sexual behaviors (or porn viewing) and maybe been successful for periods of time—only to reengage them again? Can you remember how you felt when you resumed sexual activity you tried to stop?
16. Does your sexual history accurately (or mostly) reflect your own personal convictions of what you truly want your life to look like?

Now, thoughtfully look back over your answers.

How do you *feel*? What do you *think*?

Write down your thoughts and feelings in a journal or somewhere else where you can keep them and refer to them in the future. You will benefit by looking back on the thoughts and feelings you had after completing this practice. It is important that you keep them safe, where no one else can see them. If you can't, you may need to destroy them.

FINALLY, KEEP THESE THOUGHTS IN MIND

Remember, this Practice is not about shame or condemnation. Jesus said, “*You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.*” In knowing what is really true about ourselves, we find freedom from the lies we’ve lived.

And the reason recovery is available to us is love. Christian mystic Julian of Norwich said, “*First there is the fall, and then there is the recovery from the fall. But both are the mercy of God.*”

This Practice will help you face truth. May God’s Spirit hold you in love.

TWO BIBLE TEXTS FOR MEDITATING ON LIVING THE LIFE YOU WANT

“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

Psalm 139:23-24

“Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.”

Luke 12:2-3

PRAYER

I have this in the above material but here I offer again this prayer to use as you work through this Practice:

Spirit of my Creator, you know my heart, my thoughts, everything about me. Open my mind to see my life as it truly is. Help me to be honest and thorough. And please help me to walk in your light.

Amen

IN THE NEXT PRACTICE,
we will explore paths to recovery.

