

LivingIntegrated®

FOUR TASKS FOR GETTING YOUR LIFE BACK

WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

As you're working through these tasks, I want you to know I think what you're doing is heroic. It's important you recognize that. Not everyone is willing to do the hard work of living their best possible life.

Watch the companion video at <https://youtu.be/xi02fNnC8Pw> now.

LET'S THINK ABOUT THE NATURE OF PORNOGRAPHY

There are differing views on the usefulness or appropriateness of pornography, even in the Christian community. But setting aside issues of abuse, trafficking and morality—all of which are terrifically important!—remember this: viewing pornography is a one-sided activity.

When you use porn you are being a voyeur. There is no mutual exchange of love, appreciation or enjoyment. If you think about it, pornography is basically a lie. Those people you're viewing don't know you or have a relationship with you. You are consuming for your own gratification an intimate view of their bodies. But you are not engaging with them in genuine intimacy. It's false intimacy.

If you're aroused by an image of another person and you engage in fantasy, lust and masturbation, your sexual experience is entirely with your own sexuality. You're using another person's image and/or an activity to have a closed experience with yourself. That is isolating behavior. It doesn't connect you with anyone. The essence of why you are a sexual person is for intimacy, for genuine connection.

MONITOR YOUR AROUSAL TEMPLATE

Whether you're using pornography or other sexual experiences, when the activity becomes habitual and is not an element of a stable, committed relationship with one other person, your own sexual experience is the only goal. When that's the case, the satisfaction of your viewing or your behaviors diminishes. You don't get the same level of arousal. You will want more, and you will want different.

Our arousal templates—when they're not in the service of a healthy, committed relationship—become quite flexible. They expand.

A person in the early stages of using porn to become aroused and masturbate will usually be satisfied with basic, vanilla porn. After some time those images won't have the same impact. They'll have to look for something different to achieve the same level of arousal. Their arousal template will expand to more varied and extreme depictions.

The same is true for someone who engages in the same sexual activity but it's not activity intended to build mutual experience, love and trust in a committed relationship. After awhile the same activity doesn't have the same arousal. The template expands to more varied and extreme behaviors.

Finally, when your sexual expression is dominated by porn, or by other self-oriented sexual behaviors, it severely inhibits your ability to genuinely connect with another person in mutually fulfilling ways. Your soul has been contoured to a one-sided stimulation that you control. That is not how real relationships work.

The good news is that we can heal our arousal templates. By changing old habits, defining healthy sexuality and engaging in nurturing behaviors, we can change our arousal templates to serve sexual expression we feel good about. This doesn't happen quickly or easily, but it does happen for those who will work for it.

WHAT IF THESE FOUR TASKS AREN'T ENOUGH? ---

Maybe you have faithfully worked through these four tasks but find you keep returning to the behaviors that brought you here. Do not panic. And do not stop.

You've taken a very important first few steps. You really are on your way to a better life. It's just that your problem is going to require more to solve it.

Download "***The Fifteen Practices***" resource package from the LivingIntegrated website and work through it.

This is a much more involved set of assignments and will take you further down the road of addressing the behaviors that are bothering you.

HEALTHY HABITS AND FINDING YOUR PURPOSE ---

The great challenge and opportunity for each of us is to consider and determine our purpose. It does not have to be grandiose or even profound. But we are each here for a purpose. You were made with personal intention.

You are not here on your own. And you are not here merely for yourself. We really do belong to each other.

So it's most necessary that you develop a clear sense of what you are here for.

This is an ongoing work, by the way. Few of us get real clarity about our purpose early in our lives. And most of us revisit our notion of purpose and test it, modify it and make sure it fits our growing sense of whom we truly are.

This is really important because as you are replacing problematic habits with healthy ones, new good habits need to serve your greater purpose in life. This is what helps you stay motivated to make the changes. And there is great reward in seeing your life habits serve something that is truly important to you.

DEVELOPING YOUR COMMUNITY

This is really important, even though I'm tucking it in here at the conclusion. I realize the irony of talking about friendships in an online resource that's designed for you to engage on your own.

But we need each other. We can't go it alone. And even though most of us have some challenges making good friends, and being good friends, it's important to recognize our need and commit ourselves to it.

A good start is to look at your current friendships and try to identify someone you know you could talk with about how you've been working through these tasks.

I wanted to make this material as accessible as possible. So they're designed to be accessed individually. But ultimately you need to incorporate friendships and honest conversations with others to grow a healthy life.

YOUR PURPOSE AND YOUR BETTER LIFE

Remember in Task Three when we talked about how we need to replace our habits, rather than simply try to break them?

Jesus told a short story about an unclean spirit leaving a man and passing through the spheres but finding no rest. So it decides to return to the "house" where it formerly resided. Finding the house "swept and in order" it goes and brings "seven other spirits more evil than itself" and they stay there. "The last state of that person," said Jesus, "is worse than the first."

What does this mean for us? Breaking a bad habit—even an addictive practice—is not enough. It's not enough to sweep our house and put it in order. We have to fill it with something better.



*We need a sense of why we are here, what our purpose is.
And we need life-nurturing habits.*

If we just turn away from bad habits but don't then turn towards genuine purposefulness and healthy habits, we are vulnerable to slipping back to even worse behaviors.

Your life matters. It's important for you, and for all of us, that you keep going and growing!

NOW, FOUR THINGS WE'D LIKE YOU TO DO TO HELP US

FIRST—read the book *Ashamed No More: A Pastor's Journey through Sex Addiction* (InterVarsity Press, 2012; ivpress.com/ashamed-no-more). This is an important read for beginning your journey of living a more integrated life.

SECOND—we'd really like your feedback. Have these tasks been helpful? Write us and tell us, please. And let us know what could make them more useful. Your input matters to us. Write us with your feedback at connect@livingintegrated.org.

THIRD—and this is really important—please pass along to others contact info to the LivingIntegrated website and resources. We depend on relational networking to maximize our usefulness to others.

FOURTH—consider making a donation to support the ongoing work of LivingIntegrated. There are a couple of ways you can do that—just go to livingintegrated.org and click on the “Donate” tab. You can mail in a check or make a contribution online.

Thank you!

BIBLE TEXTS FOR THINKING ABOUT WHERE YOU GO FROM HERE

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first.”

Luke 11:24-26

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

John 15:1-5

PRAYER

Prayer is a conversation with your Father in Heaven over matters that concern you and him. A really good prayer to pray—for all of us and for all times—is the complete **Serenity Prayer**.

*God, grant me serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time,
enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardship as a pathway to peace;*

*taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it;
trusting that You will make all things right
if I surrender to Your will;
so that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with You
forever in the next.
Amen*

