Welcome to our Insight Group. You have taken a positive step. We thank God for you. The front cover of this guide is subtitled: Discover the Path to Christian Character. We sometimes face roadblocks in our quest to become less isolated and move toward better relationships with each other and with God. These roadblocks or walls are what we refer to as life controlling issues or problems. Most of us face a struggle with some kind of life-controlling problem some time in our lives. We need God’s help—but we also need friends who care. Insight Group is a place to find those caring friends.

Self-Awareness: What Is an Insight Group?

An Insight Group is a small group (usually fewer than twelve people) who want to either get free or stay free from life-controlling problems, or who desire to learn more about the potential we all have for developing such a problem. There is hope! Discovering an insight into how these problems develop is the first step leading to how they can be overcome by building on qualities that strengthen us on the “path to Christian Character.”

We define a life-controlling problem as anything that masters (or controls) a person’s life. Many terms have been used to describe life-controlling problems. Someone may speak of a “dependency,” or of a “compulsive behavior,” or an “addiction.” In 2 Corinthians 10:4, the apostle Paul uses the word “stronghold” to describe an area of sin that has become a part of our life-style when he writes that there is “divine power to demolish strongholds.”

The easiest life-controlling problems to identify are harmful habits like drug or alcohol use, eating disorders, sexual addictions, gambling, tobacco use, and the like. But life-controlling problems also include harmful feelings—like anger and fear.

The word addiction or dependency can refer to the use of a substance (food, alcohol, legal and/or illegal drugs, and others). Or it can refer to the practice of a behavior (shoplifting, gambling, pornography use, compulsive spending, TV watching, and others). Or it can involve a relationship with another person—we call those “co-dependencies.”
The apostle Paul talks about life-controlling problems in terms of our being “slaves” to this behavior or dependency that masters us. He writes in Romans 6:14, “Sin shall not be your master.” Second Peter 2:19 says, “For a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.”

Anything that becomes the center of a life—if allowed to continue—will become master of that life.

The Insight Group is for everyone.
We live in a world today that can be described as an addictive society. Most people are affected in some way by a life-controlling problem—their own or someone else’s.

All people have the potential of being mastered by a life-controlling problem. No one plans for it to happen, but—without warning—individuals (and the people who care about them) can be pulled into the downward spiral of a life-controlling problem. Since most people are struggling in some area, this group can benefit any person who is open to the Lord’s working in his or her life.

What will we do in our sessions each week as we begin to deal with those life-controlling problems and their consequences?

Prayer—We will pray together. Prayer is always appropriate during an Insight Group meeting.

Sharing—We’ll spend time getting to know each other better. However, you should never feel pressured to talk. We want you to speak only when you feel comfortable talking.

Self-awareness is a time to discuss some of the practical issues involved in understanding and dealing with life-controlling problems. We’ll look at how they develop and how we can identify the spiritual and emotional issues that contribute to a problem’s taking root and growing in our lives and in the lives of the people around us. This part of our meeting is designed to help us discover more about ourselves.

Spiritual awareness is when we open our Bibles and spend some time working together on the qualities God wants to build into our lives. If you can picture a life-controlling problem as a downward spiral that keeps pulling us deeper and deeper, then the qualities that we’ll study from God’s Word are like a ladder that helps us climb out of the deep hole of a life-controlling problem.

Maybe this would be a good time to say that our ultimate purpose here is not simply to get our lives empty of a particular life-controlling problem we might be struggling with right now. We don’t want to leave the center of our lives open and undefended, because something—maybe an even worse problem—is going to fill them.
Meet With God

Don’t forget how important it is to spend time alone with God. Read from Psalm 31 and 1 Corinthians 6 and think about what God is saying to you. Invite God each day to work in your life.

Self-Awareness

You most likely agree with Paul, the writer of 1 Corinthians 6:12, when he announces, “‘Everything is permissible for me’—but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible for me’—but I will not be mastered by anything.” To paraphrase that verse—Paul says, “Although ‘anything goes,’ I will not let any of them control me.” Paul made a commitment.

All of us have the potential of having a life-controlling problem. You remember that a life-controlling problem is anything that masters our life. Some of us find ourselves already involved. It may be a dependence on a substance or an addiction to a destructive behavior.

Addictions and dependencies generally fall into three categories: substance addictions, behavior addictions, and relationship (interaction) addictions. (There are other kinds of life-controlling problems, and we may be talking about some of them later, but most fall into these three categories.)

1. Substance addictions (the use of substances taking control of our lives)
   - Drugs/chemicals
   - Food (eating disorders)
   - Alcohol
   - Other addictive substances
2. **Behavior addictions** (the practice of behaviors taking control of our lives)
   - Gambling
   - Compulsive spending
   - Use of pornography/other sexual addictions
   - Love of money
   - Sports
   - Other addictive behavior

3. **Relationship** (interaction) addictions (You may have heard the term “co-dependency” used to describe these.)

These relationship problems—co-dependencies—are focused on in Turning Point’s Concerned Persons Group.

No one gets involved with a life-controlling problem thinking they will be trapped, yet it happens all the time.

**Are there any substances you think could create a dependency in your life? Describe.**

What kinds of behaviors are, or might become, addictive for you? Describe.
What appears to start as a harmless taste or an exciting experience can end up as a life-destroying addiction. Researchers have identified a pattern that follows some very predictable steps. We call it the Trap because it most often snare its victims before they realize what's really happening. It applies to all kinds of substance misuse, from drugs and alcohol to food and more. Addictive behaviors that follow this progression can include gambling, compulsive spending, sex addictions, love of money, and others.

Read and study these four phases of life-controlling problems:
Phases of Life-Controlling Problems

Phase One: Experimentation

- I learn that experimenting with the substance/behavior makes me feel good.
- I don’t really see any serious negative consequences.
- I learn to trust the substance/behavior—to make me feel good or help me escape every time I use it or do it.
- I learn how to use the substance/behavior to make myself feel great.

Phase Two: Social Use

- I begin to use or practice more regularly.
- This behavior or substance becomes a part of my social life.
- I use or practice in times and places that are socially acceptable.
- Daily lifestyle choices begin to be affected by my focus on this substance/behavior.
- I make rules for myself about my use/practice to make me feel “safe.”
- My use/behavior becomes a problem without warning.

Phase Three: Daily Preoccupation

- My use/practice becomes a harmful dependency.
- I begin to lose control over my use/practice.
- I violate my value system.
- I cannot block out the emotional pain.
- My life-style is centered on this compulsive behavior.
- Unresolved problems produce more stress and pain.
- I break my self-imposed “safe use/practice” rules.
- My life deteriorates in all areas, including health, spirituality, and relationships.

Phase Four: Using/Practicing Just to Feel Normal

- I lose touch with reality and experience delusions and paranoia.
- I may try to escape my problems by running away.
- I lose my desire to live.
- I have no desire for God—I am spiritually bankrupt.
- I lose control and dignity.
- My problems grow in a “snowball” effect.
- My family relationships are destroyed.

Have you experienced any of these phases or seen someone else who was caught in this trap? Explain.
When our human nature controls our actions, we have little hope of ever escaping from the trap of addictions and dependencies. But if we've experienced new life in Christ, we have a source of strength that enables us to break out of the trap that holds us.

The key is found in 2 Peter 1, beginning with verse 3. Look it up and read verses 3 and 4. Notice the promises they hold for the person who has come to faith in Christ.

Then in verse 5 we read, “Make every effort to add to your faith goodness.” Goodness is virtue, moral excellence, and resolution. It involves firm resolution that grows out of faith in Christ. The word virtue implies a firm commitment to shun corruption.

The performance of goodness may not always be there, but God puts the want-to there. We have to cultivate that desire and put it into action.

As you read these verses from God’s Word, think about what they tell us about ourselves and about our need to lead lives characterized by goodness and moral excellence. Make a note of any questions and bring them to our discussion.

✓ Reference

- Romans 8:12-13
- Ephesians 2:1-3
- Romans 8:11
- Philippians 2:12-13
- Psalm 37:5-6

Notes from the Reading


**Application**

Once we’ve come to Christ in saving faith, His Spirit in us can provide all the energy we need to stand firm in our commitment. That same Spirit is able to guide us, step by step, out of the patterns that hold us. We need only to listen, be willing to obey, and stay in fellowship with believers.

*Which of these areas is hardest for you to accept and act on?*

- Recognizing and understanding the fight against your own sin nature
- Making a firm resolution to shun corruption
- Relying on the Holy Spirit for guidance and strength

*What commitment have you made to add goodness to your faith?*

As you move through your daily routines this week, begin to test your actions and attitudes in line with goodness.