

Exploring Primary Issue

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We begin by defining the terms:

Primary: of chief importance; principal; not derived from, caused by, or based on anything else; essential; foundational; underlying.

Issue: an important topic or problem for debate or discussion; a personal problem or difficulty.

The Primary Issue has been described in many ways, but it often leads to crime. Bama Battle, an Exodus Founder, described it quite simply, “It is that thing that if you don’t deal with it, it will bring you back to prison.” It is an underlying personality trait, character flaw, persistent thought, or psychological mechanism that will trigger negative thoughts, illogical justifications, and/or disastrous behaviors. It can also give us unrealistic expectations and a world view that is skewed. One of the pitfalls of Primary Issue is that whenever we forget it, or think it’s in the past, or become complacent, it will reemerge wreaking havoc on our progress and stability. We struggle to strictly identify our personal Primary Issue so that we can develop strategies to deal with it before it deals with us, again and again and again.

The Exodus Methods along with education, self-examination, and critical analysis of our lives and the world around us can help us to isolate and come to terms with our Primary Issue, which will improve our chances for long term success. Uncovering the Primary Issue can be a lengthy process. It is easy to think we’ve got it figured out, only to find we have to dig deeper, then dig again. It resists detection and definition. We have to continue to peel away the multiple layers of defense until we reveal the ultimate truth at the core of our struggle. Achieving this, we

can then create our unique method of coping. Rev. Edwin Muller explained that, “If a problem is properly identified, the solution is self-evident.”.

The Primary Issue is inherently self-destructive when it is unrecognized and allowed to control our destiny. Sometimes we get a glimpse, or even a clear view of what it is, but do not want to admit it (a state of denial). Sometimes we gaze through a glass darkly, its clarity obscured by self-doubt, imagery, denial, or the inability to witness and describe what we are seeing. We need to give this thing a meaningful name. Again Rev. Muller confirms for us; “When we give something a name, we can deal with it.” When we determine that the Primary Issue is this, or is not that, then we can begin that inner struggle to be free from its influence.

One set of clues that can help identify our Primary Issue is “The Seven Deadly Sins.” Consideration of these, or one of these, can set us on a path to discovery:

Pride ~ excessive belief in one’s own abilities, sometimes called the sin from which all others arise or what St. Augustine called “...the love of one’s own excellence.” Also known as vanity.

Envy ~ the desire for others’ property, traits, status, abilities, or situation or that they lacked it, jealousy.

Gluttony ~ inordinate desire to consume more than that which one requires: food, drink, intoxicants, etc., to the point of waste.

Lust ~ inordinate craving for the pleasures of the body; uncontrolled sexual appetite; lechery.

Wrath ~ resentful indignation, spurning love and opting for fury; vengeful, punishing anger.

Greed ~ desire for material wealth or gain while ignoring ethics or the realm of the spiritual; a sin of excess; disloyalty or betrayal for personal gain.

Sloth ~ disinclination to work or exert one’s self; apathy; inactivity in the practice of virtue.

Another avenue to discovering the Primary Issue may be found by examining definitions put forth in 1989 by Glenn D. Waters & Thomas W. White in their article “The Thinking Criminal: A Cognitive Model of Lifestyle Criminality”. Their research at Leavenworth examined eight lifestyle postures which they identified through interviews with “lifestyle criminals”. Any one of these postures could be a suitable name for one’s crippling Primary Issue. Each of them is its own trap, they are excerpted below and listed in no particular order:

Mollification ~ is the process whereby lifestyle criminals attempt to justify and rationalize their criminal behavior by pointing to various external considerations. [“I beat you because you gave me a dirty look,” or “I would not have robbed you if you protected your property,” or “I am not to blame if you can’t protect yourself.”]

Super-optimism ~ is an extreme form of optimism or self-confidence in which lifestyle criminals are sure they can do and get away with just about anything. With super-optimism criminals come to believe that they are invincible, invulnerable, and impervious to injury

Discontinuity ~ is the fluctuation observed in lifestyle criminals’ mental state which arises in response to environmental change. In other words, criminals are readily distracted by events occurring around them and have difficulty carrying intentions over time. [“How can I keep a job when there are so many distractions?” or “I want what I want, now!”]

Power Orientation ~ While non-criminals conceptualize themselves and others along multiple dimensions: e.g., good-bad, emotional-cold, hard-soft, simple-complex, effective-ineffective, criminals characteristically focus on a single dimension (i.e., strong-weak). This is because the lifestyle criminal is oriented towards gaining a sense of power and control over others

Cutoff ~ We have all been deterred from engaging in certain activities through consideration of the ultimate consequences of these behaviors...criminals do learn from their experiences and are more than capable of considering the consequences of their actions...criminals have simply developed cognitive strategies which eliminate or cutoff the types of deterrents which keep most of us from engaging in crime. [“I don’t care what you think,” or “I won’t get caught and if I do, fuck-it!” or “Danger is my middle name.”]

Entitlement ~ it is the criminals' sense of entitlement that tell them they have a right to take whatever they want from whoever has what they desire. ["Because of what I am, or who I am, you have no right to deny me, and if you do I will simply take what I perceive I am owed."]

Cognitive Indolence ~ [Lifestyle criminals may be] lazy in both action and thought...[exerting] little effort towards critically evaluating their own thinking. Consequently, they spend an inordinate amount of time engaging in behaviors which most people would view as clearly self-defeating. Cognitive indolence encompasses the criminal's habitual style of thinking: lazy, easily bored, and overly accepting of his/her own ideas.

Sentimentality ~ We all have a need to view ourselves in a positive light and may sometimes go so far as to deceive ourselves in the process. Lifestyle criminals are no exception, although they must often exert more effort in this regard since their behavior is frequently negative by any objective standard. This tendency to express tender feelings and aesthetic interests in a fickle, self-serving manner is what is referred to as sentimentality. Criminals will use sentimentality to deceive themselves into believing that they are basically good persons, despite their interpersonally intrusive actions."

It is a courageous thing to mine for our Primary Issue. Along the way there are "false positives", which under further examination we discover. The use of the EXODUS Meeting to discuss and examine our discoveries will shed light on how closely we may have come to the "name" of our Primary Issue.

The descriptions above are not the only names for Primary Issues. For some it has been a fault in perceptions of certain things or a struggle that began with childhood. Whatever the Primary Issue turns out to be, it is pure when subjected to the crucible of critical thinking and honest introspection. While it may defy description, once discovered, once named, its influence is easily seen. Knowing our Primary Issue is an essential achievement we hope for in EXODUS. Be brave, explore, struggle, live!