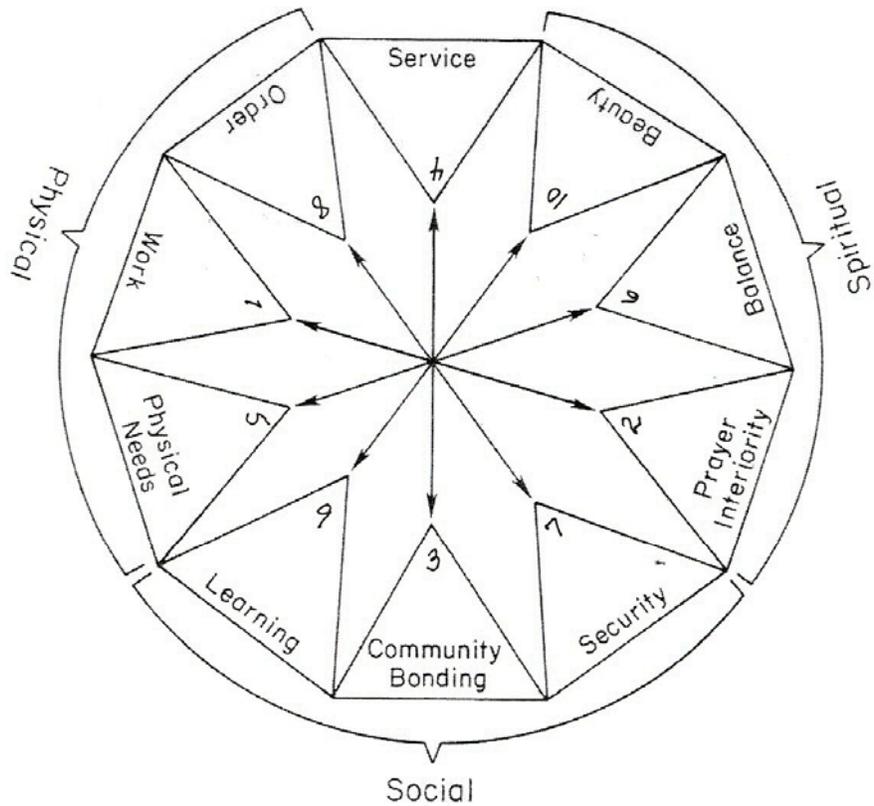


Model Structure for
Celibate Achievement



- 1 – Work**
- 2 – Prayer Interiority**
- 3 – Community Bonding**
- 4 – Service**
- 5 – Physical Needs**
- 6 – Balance**
- 7 – Security**
- 8 – Order**
- 9 – Learning**
- 10 - Beauty**

1 - Work

“What are you going to do when you grow up?” “What are you going to be?” are the kinds of questions that plague and inspire the young. Everyone has to do something; everyone has to be something. Everyone has to work. A man’s celibacy is bound us with work, with the fact of work as mastery—the productive use of one’s energies and time—rather than with a particular task.

The variety of work that can absorb the vitality of the celibate person is amazing. Many who are celibate are not satisfied, however, with their day-to-day jobs or professions; their interests can range from intensely intellectual to photography, fishing, gardening, or a host of other hobbies. Essentially, the work ethic (whether professional and one’s manner of earning a living to those things considered hobbies) is about knowing the value of time and productivity. In the end, if seen as important to the individual, these activities are the effective and respectful use of time.

1. How do you value the work you do as a living?
2. If you could choose, would you select the same job again? If not, what would you rather be doing and how realistic is this dream?
3. Name some hobbies that you have that make you feel good about yourself.
4. Using a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being “No Satisfaction” to 5 being “A great deal of satisfaction”), rate the following:

_____ Your current job
_____ Your favorite hobby

5. How often do you work to the point of exhaustion?

___ Never ___ Rarely ___ Sometimes ___ Often

6. If you have no hobbies that you enjoy, why is that?
7. If someone asks, “Tell me about yourself,” what is the first thing you say?
8. How would those you work with describe you?

2 – Prayer or Interiority*

A.W. Richard Sipe wrote: “I have never interviewed a man who has achieved celibacy without finding in him a rich and active prayer life. A celibate’s prayer life will reveal the capacity, quality, and nature of his relationships not just with the transcendent reality (God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit) but also with other significant human beings and his self-concept as well.”

Sipe goes on to say: “I have not come across one man who has achieved celibacy who has not devoted at least one and a half to two hours daily to prayer.” The danger in this statement is to suggest that only those who live monastic lives or are separated from the “real” world can achieve celibacy because of the time required for this kind of prayer commitment. There is also a danger in suggesting that all who pray for this amount of time each day are automatically celibate. The point made Sipe makes is that *an active and absorbed prayer life is part of every celibate’s daily existence.*

Prayer allows us to eventually get past a reciting of our needs to eventually arrive at a type of prayer that is both listening prayer and recognition prayer— understanding the reality of God’s actual presence in daily living.

* Being in touch with reality beyond self

1. Describe your daily prayer life.
2. Does your daily prayer routine repeat itself from one day to the next? If yes, how might that be a good thing? A bad thing?
3. Most people are somewhere on the continuum shown here:

Petition<----->Praise

On this kind of scale, prayer is either asking for something or offering adoration. As such, this continuum does not seem to allow much room for coming to know the heart of God for our lives—or as some would say, for listening. How could you incorporate this into your prayer life?

4. Why is prayer so difficult for most people? Is it difficult for you? Why?
5. Does your faith community foster time for prayer? Does your faith community encourage intercessory prayer? Contemplative prayer?

3 – Community

A.W. Richard Sipe wrote: “The importance of interiority (focusing on God) leads quite naturally to the third element found among men who have achieved celibacy: *a sense of themselves as part of a community*. They seem to know the answer to the Gospel question: ‘Who is my mother and brothers and sisters?’”

This consciousness of neighbor and of being one with humanity as part of God’s creative design is not theoretical. It implies a deep commitment to people as well as an ability to recognize others upon whom we can rely. In some ways, this sense of community confirms the adage *No man is an island*.

It should be pointed out that having a sense of community does not necessarily imply a joyous relationship with all people—just an ability to exist as *part* of this world and not independent of it.

1. Rate yourself on a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being poor and with 5 being excellent):
 - _____ Your ability to make friends
 - _____ Your ability to work with others (friends or not)
 - _____ How you would evaluate your attitude in terms of community

2. Rate yourself on a scale of 1-5 (with 1 being unimportant and 5 being extremely important):
 - _____ The need for friends
 - _____ The need for community

3. What does God’s Word say on this subject? How would you find out?

4. How does service to others fit the model of community?

4 – Service

A.W. Richard Sipe wrote: “All of these three elements—work, prayer, and community—are united in the awareness of service as a meaningful existence. In other words, all is ‘on account of the kingdom.’ Whatever the work, the prayer form, or the community for the particular celibate, the effort is *beyond* the self.”

Some of those interviewed for Sipe’s book shared that it was not always easy to be conscious of this reality. They pointed out that at times it was tempting to be the “served” and special one, receiving or directing the service of others. Such a shift, however, could be dangerous as it would go against “whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant.”

1. How does one serve others without taking appropriate care of one’s self?
2. When you think of the word serve, what is the first image that comes to mind?
3. How much of a servant are you? (Rate 1-5 with 5 being a good and faithful servant)

4. Can directing the service of others ever be seen as service? How?
5. Does your faith community encourage service? If yes, how? Are you involved? If yes, how?
6. What do you think you need to do to be a better servant?

5 – Physical Needs

A.W. Richard Sipe wrote: “Many adults think of sexual gratification as a primary physical need along with those of home, food, and clothing. They accordingly spend a great deal of their time and effort taking care of these necessities.”

Individual tastes and needs determine the extent to which men respond. Some like expensive foods while others are happy with a fast food restaurant. Some like fine wine while others like a beer. It should be noted, though, that no addictive alcoholic was represented in the group of celibate achievers; Sipe believes that active alcoholism is incompatible with the achievement of celibacy.

Some people can also be individuals with weight and diet problems but these problems would not of themselves exclude an individual from celibacy. Such people often know themselves, their limits and needs, and generally try to fulfill them appropriately. One man stated, “If I don’t assure myself of enough legitimate pleasure, I am liable to seek the illegitimate.”

The person who has found balance (although not necessarily perfection) in meeting the needs of his body will also have a better chance at compassion and understanding for others that do not. This person is able to say with all honesty, “There but for the grace of God go I.”

1. How well do you take care of your body’s needs?
2. Do you practice self-discipline when it comes to denying self? If yes, how?
3. In what ways would you say you are addicted? Which behavior brings you the greatest concern?
4. How are you able to determine legitimate from illegitimate response to your body’s needs?
5. How does God fit into your addictive thinking patterns with respect to your behavioral choices?
- 6.

6 – Balance

One of the significant qualities found in people who wrote widely on spiritual issues and also possessing celibacy is balance. In the celibate person, balance is the ability to juggle inner and outer daily demands on both a spiritual and psychological level. The spiritual facet of celibacy is significant because celibacy is not really much of a matter for concern in those not possessing a spiritual life.

Balance is the ability to determine when the world has to be put on hold for a moment or two in order to allow for a time of quiet to assure prayer and meditation—both of which allow an individual to determine what is important and what is not.

Growth in the understanding of balance normally is the result of periods of deep stress and inner turmoil, times of inner confusion and disorganization. There is a process, however, that most people surviving their own inner chaos have gone through. Briefly stated, it happens this way:

- A. Those who find success in change manage to drop whatever in them they felt was a source of conflict or whatever encouraged the negative.
- B. In the words of Scripture, the old man must be put off and the new man put on. This demands a period where the safety net of the old is no longer available and this could be disturbing or frightening to an individual.
- C. When the new is decided upon, all actions and choices must come from this new interior image. The old man is indeed dead.

1. Indicate on the lines provided the percentages of time you feel you have balance in your life.
 - a. Each day _____
 - b. Each week _____
 - c. Each month _____What does this tell you?
2. In order to be able to put the world on hold, one must be able to recognize times in internal stress and confusion. Offer a suggestion as to how this technique can be learned.
3. While giving in to sexual desire is definitely a legitimate biological issue, it is not the thing that defines us. As sexual response is often a substitute, what would you suggest could be something you need to drop from your life?
4. If someone described you as a “new man,” would you be able to accept that portrayal? If yes, what could you accept? If not, why not?

5. Repetition can make for addictive behavior, but not all addictive behavior is bad or sinful. How would point C above fit this statement?

7 – Security

In order to achieve growth and development skills in coping mechanisms, a sense of security is most necessary. As A.W. Richard Sipe wrote: “The sense of stability (*balance*), enduring circumstances (*putting up with stuff*), rootedness in interpersonal relationships (*getting along with others*), with bonds to time, place, and practical realities (*schedules and responsibilities*), are fundamental to personal growth and development.”

All of these things are woven into the vow of celibacy. The prayer, work, community alliance, and service so essential to celibate practice are sealed by the internal commitment expressed in a vow. This internal commitment establishes the inner security *and* the allegiance that manifest themselves in relatedness.

The foundation for security is laid down in early childhood in attachment and separation—especially to and from the mother. If things are as they should be, there is a constancy and solidification of identification and relationships. In other words, even though situations change, the child believes everything will be as it should be. The child learns how to cope through these changes and develops problem-solving skills in the face of challenges to his or her identity.

As the child matures, the values and problem-solving skills are fine tuned or altered to fit circumstances. At some point, however, men speak of meeting their test of “faith.” It was not a test of faith in the traditional sense of doubt about the existence of God, but rather in the value and meaning of the relationship upon which they had built.

Security is based on the interaction of trust, self-disclosure, and shared pleasure. In speaking about priests, Sipe wrote “I am frequently struck by their references to loneliness. In many histories of those who have failed in the celibate practice are accounts of backfired attempts at legitimate intimacy. Overeager, misplaced trust and indiscriminate self-disclosure led to frustration or sexual acting out.”

ALL celibate achievers had someone to whom they felt they had confided the essence of themselves, and most of them had been recipients of such disclosures. Above all, celibate achievers maintained self-respect and the respect of others.

Security also means the discovery of places to be oneself within the circle of relationships involving mutual interdependence. The problem is how to be celibate when spending time with those who are not. Being successful in celibacy is the ability to enhance one’s celibacy without imposing on it clerical trappings. In other words, celibacy is not something for clerics/ministers alone.

1. Sipe suggests that security comes from commitment (sometimes a vow). How might that be like knowing and observing traffic laws when driving?
2. Attachment and separation are critical parts of child development. What do think would happen if the child were *always* connected with the mother? Always separated? How is security derived from a balance between those two?
3. The test of “faith” that Sipe writes of is really a question of whether or not the coping skills we have learned are sufficient to the task of living as an adult.
 - a. Name something that you feel *has* worked well.
 - b. Name something that has *not* worked well.
4. As men who have struggled with and in some cases have experienced a backfire in the search for legitimate intimacy. Sipe implies that those who fail have not learned how to find legitimate intimacy and therefore grasp at whatever they can get. How do you think this applies to the homosexual condition?
5. Friendship with a capital “F” seems important in the scheme of finding security in relational connectedness and disclosure seems a common link in those relationships. How can you tell when it is appropriate to share something really personal and when it isn’t?
6. How do you maintain self-respect and how can you expect/receive it from others.
7. Security is sometimes seen as protection from the outside. Should you expect the security you develop within yourself to be fail-safe? If yes, why? If no, why?

8 – Order

“I never met a celibate achiever who lacked a sense of order in his daily and seasonal life.” (A.W. Richard Sipe)

In the section on balance (No.6), balance is described mostly in a spiritual context—the ability to regulate inner competing needs. Order focuses on the regulation of time and energy, whether in prayer, work, study, hobbies, or recreation. Sipe suggests that a failure to organize time and energy usually results in an individual who is deprived of “the satisfaction of mastery and achievement—those very elements of productivity which make the sacrifice of sexual gratification possible.”

Question: The closing sentence of this paragraph seems very important. How would you interpret it?

Monastic communities where contact with the outside world often have their days arranged around prayer. Some follow what is referred to as “The Hours” – usually a prayer gathering that occurs every 3-4 hours during the day followed by six hours of sleep and then the routine begins over again.

The periods of time between the prayer gatherings normally allows for work, recreation, study, etc. In other words, care is taken to give equal attention to the normal day-to-day aspects of living. This means that the mind, body, and spirit have a balanced rhythm.

Sipe maintains that celibacy that is frequently assaulted by human desire and battered by a hostile culture can only maintain itself a day or a season at a time. A strong sense of order through the conscious regulation of one’s time and energies, he adds, helps an individual anticipate and block unnecessary challenges to his values and intentions.

Question: It almost sounds as though we are being asked to develop some type of rigid daily schedule. How would you argue that the above would not result in an inflexibility that could be just as negative as no schedule?

Monday of this week will not necessarily look like Monday of next week or the week after. The celibate who sees change in schedule as a threat to his internal sense of order will most likely fail to maintain both balance *and* order. The shifts from the outside reflect what is called external order because no individual can control every shift or every demand. Sipe points to a positive internal sense of order as being the solution.

Question: How would you describe and evaluate your own internal sense of order?

9 – Learning

In the study Sipe used as the foundation for his book “A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy,” he found that although not all men who achieved celibacy were scholars, they were highly represented in this group. Scholar should not, I think, be taken to mean someone who is necessarily brilliant, but rather scholars are individuals who seek learning.

Learning involves stretching the mind to accept new ideas, systems, and general information. Some who enjoy fishing also enjoy reading books on fishing, attending fishing demonstrations at outdoor sports shows, and just passing on as well as receiving information related to fishing with a friend or neighbor.

Using my example, Sipe would probably say that a man who studies books and magazines on fishing without ever actually fishing falls a bit short of the full enjoyment that would be connected with this sport. In other words, there is a need for a certain achievement based on the theoretical (studying/reading) and practical (fishing).

Question: Learning focuses primarily on mind activity that can be carried out in some real way—using math calculations, for example, to build a cabinet. You can’t build something without preparation. What would you say to these comments? “I don’t have time to study anything. Besides, I know everything I need to know.”

The balanced and ordered mind will seek learning because it is a positive occupation of one’s time and normally results in a positive outcome. An appropriate decision to deny one’s self sexual pleasure does not lead to intellectual achievement, but the search for knowledge and intellectual achievement can be an effective and satisfactory option.

Question: One might argue that reading a book or watching a documentary would not be the first thing to come to mind when assaulted by inappropriate desires. What do you think is a more reasoned approach to the idea of learning as being one of the traits needed toward successful celibacy?

10 – Beauty

There is a legitimate need for pleasure that takes the form of beauty in the lives of many celibates. Sipe wrote:

A love for beauty seems to flow naturally from the conditions provided by those in monastic living. The order and balance in day-to-day living, their reverence for learning, and their attention to simple human needs in themselves and in others gives rise to a number of expressions. For example, liturgical prayer led to the development of musical expression; living in community demanded practical yet aesthetic architecture; and the early practice of copying manuscripts led to the art of embellishment and illumination. In short, the true monastic spirit cannot be indulged in without a natural acceptance of beautiful as well as practical forms.

Question: It would seem that those in a monastic setting have a distinct advantage over those of us not in such a setting. Describe some ways in which the lay person might find proof of the possibilities in our daily walk. In other words, there **are** ways in which your lives have connection with these same things. But how?

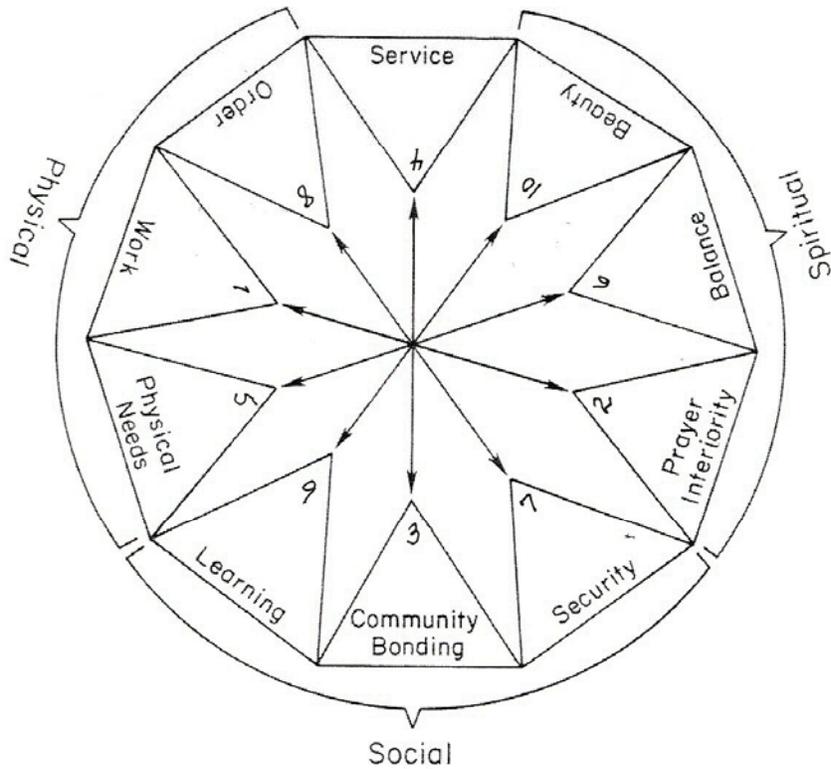
Question: Sipe wrote, “Celibate achievers tend to be more culturally literate than not.” Can you make an argument for celibacy among those who are not?

Closing Comments: The structure of the 10 points we have looked at is found in the lives of those who are celibate. They created it and were, in turn, created by it. Some of the men in Sipe’s study felt that they had a same-sex orientation “although they lacked experience.”

Sipe asked those in his study if they would write more personally about their achievement of celibacy. His requests were met with some laughter but not accepted the challenge of writing in a way that would encourage others on the path.

Your observations:

Model Structure for
Celibate Achievement



How's your balance? If you score yourself 7 for work, the 3 missing points must show up somewhere else.

- _____ – **Work**
- _____ – **Prayer Interiority**
- _____ – **Community Bonding**
- _____ – **Service**
- _____ – **Physical Needs**
- _____ – **Balance**
- _____ – **Security**
- _____ – **Order**
- _____ – **Learning**
- _____ – **Beauty**

100 points