

The First Principle and Foundation

St. Ignatius of Loyola begins his work, the Spiritual Exercises, with this First Principle and Foundation. It defines what St. Ignatius sees as the purpose to life itself. It offers us God's vision for our life.

The goal of our life is to live with God forever.
God who loves us, gave us life.
Our own response of love allows God's life to flow into us without limit.

All the things in this world are gifts from God,
presented to us so that we can know God more easily
and make a return of love more readily.

As a result, we appreciate and use all these gifts of God
insofar as they help us develop as loving persons.
But if any of these gifts become the center of our lives,
they displace God and so hinder our growth toward our goal.

In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance
before all of these created gifts insofar as we have a choice
and are not bound by some obligation.
We should not fix our desires on health or sickness,
wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or short one.
For everything has the potential of calling forth in us
a deeper response to our life in God.

Our only desire and our one choice should be this:
I want and I choose what better
leads to the deepening of God's life in me.

- St. Ignatius as paraphrased by David L. Fleming, S.J. from the beginning of the Spiritual Exercises