

# Before You Fail, Discipline Yourself in Christ

Each Friday I meet a number of new men at the TGIF Men's Bible Study visitor's table. Each week the comments are remarkably similar. Here is a sample from last week:

- "I always wanted to give 30 percent to Christ and the 70 percent I ran. In the end I lost everything."
- "My career is advancing, but I feel my time with God evaporating."
- "I need organized religion I need to get back in the fold."

No man ever fails on purpose. No man wakes up in the morning and thinks, "Well, I guess I'll see what I can do to mess up my life today." Yet, every day we do see men fail morally, financially, relationally, and spiritually. How can a man keep his life on the right track?

## Five Goals

The Bible says . . .

- Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2).
- We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Our ministry has adopted five spiritual goals we want to encourage every man to build into his life to help him be 'fully committed to the Lord.' None of these is a requirement to be a Christian. A man doesn't do these five 'disciplines' to gain the cross. Rather, because a man has the cross he willingly, even enthusiastically, performs these five

disciplines to walk more closely with Christ to make Him Lord to keep himself on track.

## **1. Consistent Quiet Time (Mat 14:23; Jos 1:8)**

Bill said, "I'm drifting." He was asked, "Are you doing daily devotions?" He replied, "No, I've just been so busy lately." Nothing else will keep a man close to God like a time of consistent private devotions.

If you don't already have a consistent quiet time, set aside five minutes daily to read a chapter in the Bible and say a prayer. Start by reading a chapter in the New Testament. Underline passages that capture your attention. Memorize passages for strength, courage, and faith.

Next, use the acronym "ACTS" to help you pray. 'A' is for adoration. Worship God for His attributes His holiness, power, majesty, beauty, kindness, mercy, and goodness. 'C' is for confession. Confess and ask God to forgive all known sin keep 'short accounts' with God. 'T' is for thanksgiving. Express gratitude to God for His blessings and mercies especially things we ordinarily take for granted like a good night's rest, daily provision, health, family, and so on. 'S' is for supplication. Nothing is too big or insignificant to bring to God in prayer.

Lorne Sanny, former President of the Navigators, suggests we pray backwards through yesterday step by step, and forward through today. Praying backwards will lead to prayers of thanksgiving and confession, while praying forward will lead to prayers of supplication.

## **2. Organized Bible Study (Prov. 4:23, 2 Tim. 2:15-17)**

Someone once asked Billy Graham, "If you were a pastor of a large church in a principle city, what would be your plan of action?"

I would have imagined that Mr. Graham would outline a mass evangelistic plan to take the city by storm. Instead, in The Master Plan of Evangelism, it is reported that he answered, "One of the first things I would do would be to get a small group of eight or ten or twelve men around me that would meet a few hours a week and pay the price! It would cost them something in time and effort. I would share with them everything I have, over a period of years. Then I would actually have twelve ministers ... who in turn could take eight or ten or twelve more and teach them." Not a bad idea. It's been done before with some success (smile).

Personally, I have never known a man whose life has changed in any significant way apart from the regular study of God's Word. We can do nothing more concrete to get to know God than to study the Bible.

Most men do not have the aptitude, interest, or time to do the 'close work' to study Bible passages in depth. That's why it's valuable to attend a Bible study in which a teacher takes Scripture, helps you discover what it means, and shows how you can apply it to your life.

It will work best for everyone to pursue Bible studies offered by your church. Attend a couples study or meet with men. Try a Bible study with your wife. If that doesn't work out, there are often community-based Bible studies offered by independent Christian ministries. Examples include the Christian Businessmen's Committee, PriorityOne Associates (Campus Crusade for Christ), and Bible Study Fellowship.

### **3. Accountability Group (Gal 6:1-2, Jam 5:16)**

Most of our lives are lived at the cliché level. The accountable relationship is a tool to get past 'news, sports, and weather'.

Most men are not accountable. They have no one who knows how they are really doing. Accountability means to be regularly

answerable for each of the key areas in our lives to qualified people. Let's briefly look at the four parts of accountability:

- Answerable—To be willing to give an answer, or an 'account', for the goals you have set for yourself and the standards of God's Word.
- Regularly—Why do we wash our cars, mow our lawns, and clean our glasses regularly? Because if we don't they will deteriorate. In the same way we must regularly examine the different areas of our lives or they, too, will deteriorate.
- Key Areas—Key areas include relationships with God, wife, children, financial decisions, career, integrity, and temptation.
- Qualified People—Find three other men in similar situations, men of wisdom and skill you believe can help keep you on track. Look for co-pilgrims. Find men who will be transparent and vulnerable, especially as your trust in each other goes up. Be sure to not only find someone who will be confidential, but be that way yourself. No women, except your wife. She would make a great accountability partner in areas like child raising, family budget, and spiritual walk.

#### **4. Active Church Involvement (Hebrews 10:24-25)**

There is no such thing as a 'Lone Ranger Christian'; you can't be a Christian by yourself. Hebrews 10:25 says, *"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another."*

Notice the goal is active church involvement, not attendance. I'm constantly amazed at how many men think they can be Christians without the fellowship, encouragement, and mutual worship of God among fellow believers in the ministry of a local church. The church is God's New Community a group of people living out what it means to have a relationship with

Jesus Christ.

## 5. Personal Ministry (1 Pet 4:10-11, 2 Tim 2:2)

Once you have been practicing the four spiritual disciplines just discussed you will begin to notice that you are developing a close, personal, love relationship with Jesus Christ.

Your heart will be filled to the overflow with gratitude for all Christ is doing in your life, and the hope of what He will do in the future. You will long to do something to express your faith in acts of service.

God wants every believer to have a personal ministry. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10).

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