

WHY MEN FAIL

It was January, 1980, when I stepped off the train into the frigid air of Vienna, Austria. I was filled with anticipation-the beginning of my first missionary assignment. It took a few days to get settled, and then I began preparation for my first trip into Romania.

Jimmy Carter was president and had made a connection between human rights and Favored Nations Status with communist countries in Eastern Europe. If word got out that Christians were being persecuted, it could derail a country's status as a Favored Nation and affect their ability to get dollars or badly needed technology from the West. Only a few of our missionaries traveling as tourists had been detained, strip-searched, or barred at the border. But we knew there was always a risk.

One group of American pastors brought some U.S. lawyers to Romania. After preaching in a few churches, the pastors with their lawyers made complaints about the treatment of Christians. In the middle of the night they were hauled from their beds by the secret police, slapped around, and promptly put on an airplane back to America. We wanted to operate differently. We bought Romanian clothes and kept our mouths shut to avoid being noticed.

A year earlier, our first U.S. Navigator staff member had obtained a visa to study in Romania. John was an art major, twenty-seven years old, with a gift for languages. His visa permitted him to live in the country and study beautiful religious paintings in Greek Orthodox churches. With his access to cathedrals, it was natural for him to meet with me covertly in one of the most significant tourist attractions of the country-an unused 200-year-old Greek Orthodox cathedral.

During my first trip, John and I traveled the country, meeting with our Christian contacts in six cities. We were training the city leaders in discipleship, and they were secretly leading some 200 Romanian Christians to study the Bible, have Quiet Times, and memorize the Word. Except for being with the believers, it was a sobering trip. We saw men and women weeping on the street because of food shortages. We observed firsthand the hopelessness of the communist system. In January, the cities of Romania seemed gray, drab, and cold.

The Christian men living in a communist country faced amazing challenges. It was against the law for Romanians to meet with foreigners, study the Bible together, or share their faith. They risked being sent to prison every time we met. One man had his house constantly watched by the secret police; others had their phones tapped. Still, they were willing to take the risk and were eager to meet with us. They developed a system of code words to communicate when it was safe to meet in their homes.

When we met in a believer's home they always wanted to serve us a meal. They divided the meat so that we got the largest portions. Sometimes they spent their whole month's ration of meat, about two pounds per person, on us. These believers were the most amazing example of love and self-sacrifice I had ever seen.

What's hard to absorb is that Christian men in America do not face extraordinary pressures, yet they have affairs, abandon their families, use pornography, or generally do nothing for God. According to George Barna, a leading U.S. researcher, Christian men in America get divorced just as often as men with no church background. His studies also show that 50% of men who call themselves Christians regularly use pornography. *Why do so many American Christian men fail?*

In 2009 at a men's conference in Omaha, Nebraska, conference speaker Steve Farrar shared this shocking research. He had interviewed more than 200 pastors who had fallen into disgrace by having affairs with women in their church. In doing the analysis, he discovered three deadly mistakes that virtually every man had made. They each admitted that in the twelve months before the affair started:

1. *They had stopped having their Quiet Times.*
2. *They had stopped being accountable to other men for their Quiet Time.*
3. *They had counseled women behind closed doors.*

A man's Quiet Time is perhaps the best barometer of the condition of his walk with God. When he is regular and consistent in feeding his soul and communing with God, his spiritual life is full of vitality. He's also protected. But when his time alone with God stops, he becomes spiritually anemic, vulnerable, and an easy target for the Enemy.

There is a relationship between a man's Quiet Time and his ability to handle stress, face a crisis, or do what's right when relationship challenges surface.

Why do you think Christian men in America struggle in the Christian life? List at least two ideas.

There are many reasons a man does not have a consistent Quiet Time. But after thirty years of discipling, I have concluded there are three key reasons that impact the process of discipleship. They are applicable to Quiet Time, evangelism, discipleship, prayer, Scripture memory, fruitfulness, and many other aspects of the Christian life. We will first apply these reasons to our Quiet Time. If these issues are not effectively addressed in the *discipleship process*, the program will most likely fail.

THREE REASONS- MEN FAIL IN THEIR QUIET TIME

Reason 1: No one ever taught them how to have a Quiet Time. It is a skill that needs to be taught, developed, and maintained.

In Lesson 2 we learned the ABCs of Quiet Time and practiced writing down our thoughts. Later we will learn about the art of meditation, asking questions, and translating verses into your own words. *Each method is a skill. The sharper your skills, the more effective your Quiet Time will become.*

If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success.

-Ecclesiastes 10:10 (emphasis added)

Reason 2: Satan does not want you to have a successful Quiet Time.

Too many Christian men are ignorant of the daily war they are in. They get bushwhacked by the Enemy. Men know they need to develop disciplines to grow closer to God. They want to have a regular Quiet Time. But it is hard to develop new habits and it doesn't happen.

I've heard this statement a hundred times: *"When I'm having my Quiet Time, it seems like all hell breaks loose in our house. The kids start crying, the phone rings, or my mind is flooded with details about things I need to do at the office."* Satan always tries to destroy your love relationship with the Lord. This is why a well-thought-out place and time for your Quiet Time is so important.

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

-2 Corinthians 11:3

Reason 3: Men have no one to hold them accountable in their Quiet Times.

Since we are at war, and the key to winning in the Christian life is the development of our time alone with God, accountability is absolutely essential. Many groups have no accountability standards. Some do not even ask that you do the lesson beforehand. If we are going to start a new lifelong habit that the Enemy is committed to defeat, we must have brothers who hold us accountable and gently pick us up when we fall.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!

-Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Review the *Three Reasons Men Fail*, pages 40-41 and answer the following questions from the verses on these pages.

Reason 1: Do you think that Quiet Time is a skill? Why?

What principle is taught in Ecclesiastes 10:10?

Reason 2: What are ways that the Enemy tries to defeat us?

According to 2 Corinthians 11:3, from what does the Devil try to lead us astray? How does this connect with the first building block of discipleship?

Reason 3: According to Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, why is accountability important in starting a new skill?

If your walk with Christ begins to decline, do you want a brother to help you back up? What happens when a man stumbles spiritually and has no one to pick him up?

What do you think of the statement: *"There is a relationship between a man's Quiet Time and his ability to handle stress, face a crisis, or do what's right when relationship challenges surface."* Record your thoughts. Be prepared to share with the group.

Take some time to do the ABCs of Quiet Time on the following passage. Review pages 29-30 if needed. Then answer the questions and be ready to discuss. Your version may use the word remain in the place of *abide*. Abide means "to dwell or live in." It can also mean "to hold fast to."

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.

-John 15:4-8 RSV

What is the relationship between a vine and its branches?

How does the relationship between the vine and branch affect fruitfulness?

What does this passage teach about your relationship with Jesus?

Do you want to have a fruitful life? According to this passage what must you do to accomplish this objective?

Points to Remember

To develop a successful lifetime habit of a Quiet Time you need to:

1. Develop competent skills.
2. Know that you have an enemy who will try to stop you.
3. Keep yourself in an environment of accountability for your Quiet Time.
4. Fruitfulness grows out of our intimacy and connectedness to Christ. If we stay closely connected, drawing our sustenance from Him, we will bear fruit. This glorifies God. If we don't stay closely connected, we don't bear fruit. It's that simple!