

## Thieves that Rob Devotion to Christ

### A. Root Sins.

1. Pride (Jam 4:6-10; Prov 6:16-17; Ez 28; Isa 14).
2. Ungodliness (Jerry Bridges: Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate).
3. Unbelief (Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.: Not the Way It's Supposed to Be).
4. Ungratefulness & Dishonor (Rom 1:21-32).
5. Idolatry (Augustine; Tim Keller).

### B. Common Idol "Clusters" (John Bettler of WTS)

1. Fear of man, acceptance, approval (Prov 29:25; John 12:42-43; Gal 2:11-13 Peter; Heb 11:27 Moses; 1 Peter).
2. Success, power, control (1 Sam 13:8-14 Saul impatient; offers sacrifices; Luke 22:24-27 disciples dispute regarding greatest; 3 John 1:9-10 Diotrephes; Isa 30:1-2).
3. Comfort, convenience, tranquility, ease (Luke 9:23-24,57-62 Deny self; follow Me; not bury father, not say goodbye to family). Easy life, without interruptions and complications.
4. Money, possessions (Matt 6:19-24 serve Mammon; Luke 12:15 conflict brothers; Lk 16:13-15 Pharisees were lovers of money; 1 Tim 6:9-10,17; 2 Tim 3:2).
5. Sensual pleasure (2 Samuel 11:2-4 David adultery; 13:1-14; Phil 3:19; Gn 39:9-10; 1 Thes 4:3-6 control body because we know God!).

Whatever controls us is lord: *"What does it mean, then, to allow Jesus to be Lord of our lives? What does it mean that anything is the lord of our life? Just this: Whatever controls us is lord. The person who seeks acceptance is controlled by the people he or she wants to please. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our life. If Jesus is our Lord, then he is the one who controls, he has the ultimate power."* (Rebecca Pippert, Out of the Saltshaker, p. 53)

C. Spiritual Battle: Battle of Principalities and Powers (Eph 6:12-20), Satan seeking to devour (1 Pet 5:8-9).

D. Trials & Failures: Crisis, Job Loss, Struggles, Sickness, Death, Murder, Rape, Abuse, Divorce, Leaders falling into Sin, Christianity on the Decline.

### E. Distractions for the Young

Tinker Generation (Kevin DeYoung: Just Do Something).

Many options: Life, Career, Dating/Marriage, Entertainment, Time robbing distractions.

Escapism and Isolationism: Media, TV, Internet (Twitter, Facebook), Music (iPods).

F. Fervor Waning with Age: as we grow in knowledge and experience, endure hardship, face suffering and discouragements . . . eventually our hearts can grow cold. We no longer see this world with eyes of idealism, excitement, love, and joy.

## **Watch Over Your Hearts**

(Richard Baxter from *The Reformed Pastor*)

Content not yourselves with being in a state of grace, but be also careful that your graces are kept in vigorous and lively exercise, and that you preach to yourselves the sermons which you study, before you preach them to others. If you did this for your own sakes, it would not be lost labour; but I am speaking to you upon the public account, that you would do it for the sake of the Church. When your minds are in a holy, heavenly frame, your people are likely to partake of the fruits of it. Your prayers, and praises, and doctrine will be sweet and heavenly to them. They will likely feel when you have been much with God: that which is most on your hearts, is like to be most in their ears.

I confess I must speak it by lamentable experience, that I publish to my flock the distempers of my own soul. When I let my heart grow cold, my preaching is cold; and when it is confused, my preaching is confused; and so I can oft observe also in the best of my hearers, that when I have grown cold in preaching. We are the nurses of Christ's little ones. If we forbear taking food ourselves, we shall famish them; it will soon be visible in their leanness, and dull discharge of their several duties. If we let our love decline, we are not like to raise up theirs. If we abate our holy care and fear, it will appear in our preaching: if the matter show it not, the manner will. If we feed on unwholesome food, either errors or fruitless controversies, our hearers are like to fare the worse for it. Whereas, if we abound in faith, and love, and zeal, how would it overflow to the refreshing of our congregations, and how would it appear in the increase of the same graces in them!

O brethren, watch therefore over your own hearts: keep out lusts and passions, and worldly inclinations; keep up the life of faith, and love, and zeal: be much at home, and be much with God. If it be not your daily business to study your own hearts, and to subdue corruption, and to walk with God – if you make not this a work to which you constantly attend, all will go wrong, and you will starve your hearers; or, if you have an affected fervency, you cannot expect a blessing to attend it from on high.

Above all, be much in secret prayer and meditation. Thence you must fetch the heavenly fire that must kindle your sacrifices: remember, you cannot decline and neglect your duty, to your own hurt alone; many will be losers by it as well as you. For your people's sakes, therefore, look to your hearts.

### **7 Accountability Questions from Chuck Swindoll and a small group of pastors.**

(Source: *The Body* by Charles Colson, Thomas Nelson, 1994)

1. Have you been with a woman anywhere this past week that might be seen as compromising?
2. Have any of your financial dealings lacked integrity?
3. Have you exposed yourself to any sexually explicit material?
4. Have you spent adequate time in Bible study and prayer?
5. Have you given priority time to your family?
6. Have you fulfilled the mandates of your calling?
7. Have you just lied to me?

**John Piper Sermon: How to Deal with the Guilt of Failure for the Glory of Christ and His Global Cause**  
<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/how-to-deal-with-the-guilt-of-sexual-failure-for-the-glory-of-christ-and-his-global-cause>

*Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication. (Micah 7:8-9)*

**Rescuing Ambition**  
**A Summary of Chapter 8 (Ambition's Failure) with Discussion Questions**

Key Question: Where is God when our highest ambition leads to our greatest defeat?

Failure finds everyone: Adam & Eve, Babel, Abram, Samson, David & Bathsheba, Peter, etc.

If God is truly sovereign, there must be a place for our failure in his plan. The sovereign God is Lord over our failures. In fact, he works through them. God doesn't waste anything. The Lord even uses sin for His glory and His purposes.

Failure is an experience where we can discover God's love, his irresistible grace, and the true potency of the gospel.

- In what ways does failure help us find these?
- What does it mean if I fail yet don't discover these things?
- In the midst of hardship, how can I distinguish between trials and discipline for sin?

Three sources of failure:

1. We make mistakes... because we are not God, do not have perfect judgment, cannot see the future, etc.
  2. We sin... by stealing God's glory, being proud, failing to listen to God's leading.
  3. God wants to redirect us.
- Are there other sources of failure that Harvey misses?

The results of failure:

1. Humility (breaking, piercing, uprooting pride)
2. Holiness (growth, submission, obedience)
3. New direction (better plan)

If we're not perfect, then our goals aren't perfect either. Sometimes we confuse our goals with God's will. Our souls should be anchored not to our dreams but to our hope in God. The Lord desires that we become confident decision-makers who walk in wisdom and humility with open hands to His will. *"In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps"* (Proverbs 16:9 NIV).

Lessons learned in failure:

1. God controls all situations.
  2. We can trust God's wisdom.
  3. God can display his glory despite our failure.
  4. Failure does not define us.
  5. Failure teaches us to be kind towards others who fail.
- What lessons have you learned in failure?

Conclusion: In the shadow of failure we find humbling grace. We learn that we're limited. We discover that God is more interested in who we're becoming than in what we're achieving. We find our definition not in our failures or successes but in Christ.