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Chapter

1

One

# WHY GREAT MEN FALL

LET HIM WHO THINKS HE STANDS  
TAKE HEED LEST HE FALL

(1 COR. 10:12; NASB).

**W**hat do you think of when you  
hear the following names:

- Kobe Bryant (NBA player)
- Jimmy Swaggart (television evangelist)
- Gary Condit (congressman)
- Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky

You may also have heard of:

- Andrew Fastow, Ken Lay, and Jeff Skilling (ex-CFO and CEOs of Enron)
- Ben Glisan (Enron's "whiz kid," now serving five years in prison)
- Dennis Kozlowski (former Tyco International chief executive)
- Mark Swartz (Tyco's ex-CFO)
- Bernie Ebbers (CEO of WorldCom)
- Scott Sullivan (WorldCom ex-CFO)
- Paul Patton (Kentucky Governor)
- Sampson and Delilah
- David and Bathsheba

What do you think of when you hear the occupation of “Catholic priest”? My thoughts, and I’m sure the thoughts of millions of others, are:

- How in the world could these people let themselves do this?
- Why did they give up so much for so little?
- They worked hard for what they had — why did they give it up for that?
- What would make them compromise their dreams?

In reality we are asking, “What was the cause of this great man’s fall?”

Many who ask “why” fear that the same thing could happen to them. They should be concerned . . . because it could. All of us are vulnerable. We have feet of clay and successful people have fallen since the beginning of mankind. Adam did. Cain did. Abraham lied; his son Isaac did the same. At all levels, among all genders, ages, cultures, occupations, and positions, people have made decisions that cost them too much.

Some ask “why” because they fear for their organization, university, company, or church. When a leader falls, it is expensive. It can take months, years, and possibly decades to rebuild confidence and trust. Productivity and fruitfulness are lost.

Others ask “why” with a cynical “I told you so.” They don’t trust leadership — never have — and likely never will. They have been hurt, set up, disappointed, and have watched or experienced this kind of thing before. Their attitude is:

All leaders are basically manipulators — that’s how they got there.

Leaders don’t care about us little guys and if they do — they do it for their own benefit.

That professional athlete (or CEO) can buy his success.

Debby Then, L.A. psychologist and author, said, “Every week, you see somebody in your friendship circle or at work or in the popular media who has committed adultery. This topic just never goes away.”<sup>1</sup> Adultery, lying, “moving the numbers,” manipulation, and under-the-table decisions can be part of any office or family.

In researching her book, *Not Just Friends*, Shirley Glass found that 25 percent of wives and 44 percent of husbands have had extramarital intercourse.<sup>2</sup> Many of their affairs began at work. She found that from 1982 to 1990, 38 percent of unfaithful wives in her clinical practice were involved with someone from work. From 1991 to 2000, the number of women’s work affairs increased to 50 percent. Men also are having most of their affairs with people from their

workplace. Among the 350 couples she has treated, approximately 62 percent of unfaithful men met their affair partners at work.<sup>3</sup> Seeing the same people for legitimate reasons frequently helps friendship develop.

There are reasons people make bad choices, and it doesn't happen overnight. There is an evolution — one thought, decision, or move at a time. They decided to go to the wrong place, ask the wrong question, look at illegal or immoral materials, or have a conversation with someone they knew was compromising. The behavior began somewhere. When their lives are analyzed, there are hints, oversights, and road bumps. The thought process had been going on, but the decision wasn't made until the opportunity presented itself.

I don't believe this kind of "life altering" failure just hits like a brick on some particular day. There is a process — sometimes it can be short lived — sometimes it works on a person for years. Some call it temptation, others call it a hazard of success.

Some men who have begun walking on the precipice of compromise call it a perk of their position and believe that they have rights that others do not have. Their thoughts may be, *I've earned this and I deserve it because of who I am.*

Some actually have the ability to do something morally wrong, and then walk into another room and conduct business in a professional way. For instance, a minister that I once talked with met ladies in the bar of whatever hotel he was staying in (the hotel that was near the church he was speaking in on Sunday). He would lie about his career, get her to his room, and do his thing. Then, somehow, he would isolate that behavior in a "mental room" and go to sleep, wake up in the morning, and preach about righteousness. That doesn't make sense to most of us, but some have become really good at compartmentalization.

Others expect their peers and subordinates to keep quiet about what they see or hear. Executives, CEOs, CFOs, politicians, pastors, priests, etc. can all begin to rationalize. I believe that people with tremendous responsibility and powerful influence within their company or community should be well compensated, but how much is too much? What behavior crosses the line? There is a line. How far is too far?

Regardless of how long it took before they were caught or why they thought they could do it — the end result was the same. Incredible loss — shock to those who admire them — distrust in the organization — hundreds leave the church. Many of us put the newspaper down and ask ourselves, "Are there any leaders out there that we can trust?"

There are and you can be one of them.

You know it and I know it. Life is full of hazards — temptations and situations where we can compromise. People will challenge us, question us, and try

to subtly and not so subtly get us off track. Some have watched our mentor, leader, or even father or mother get to their position by “bending the rules” or getting away with . . . (you fill in the blank).

As we aim for our target and walk down the road (or the fast-moving highway) to reach our goals, we can spot the hazards. If we look hard and think about it, we can see the “mines” just below the surface of this minefield called life. We will recognize when we are operating under the radar of what is safe, right, true, and legal.

If we avoid life’s hazards, we will save ourselves an incredible amount of money, relationships, trust, and time. Many successful men have walked away from compromise. There are plenty of examples of leaders who made tough decisions and held their moral ground.

Ethical and moral compromise certainly does not have to be part of the process or the perks of becoming a leader. You *can* win, lead, direct, set goals, and do the right thing.

The mines in this battlefield are words, concepts, truths, and patterns.

There are at least 14 possibilities for failure. Yours might look a little different from mine. The thought might come to you in the middle of a meeting or you could begin thinking that “he is getting away with it, so should I.” Great men fall for a variety of reasons. Ask yourself these questions as you build a protective fence around your life:

- Do I feel a sense of entitlement? — “I deserve this because of who I am or what I do.”
- Am I a gifted entrepreneur — but my life is out of balance?
- Do I have the ability to compartmentalize my moral choices? Can I do something wrong and then mentally put it aside while I do something right?
- Do I expect my employees and peers to keep quiet when I do questionable things?
- Am I a “high risk” man who loves the adrenaline rush of danger or compromise?
- Am I a magnet for women? Do they love my power, money, influence, and personality?
- Is my integrity in check?
- Am I surrounded with “yes men” with very little accountability?
- Do I compromise my conscience?

- Who is my mentor? Who am I a mentor to?
- Do I play by my own rules? Do I have an ethical code?
- Do I handle stress in a healthy way?
- What do I do with my money? Integrity includes both my physical and my financial self.
- Are my moods under control?
- Have I found a balance with money, sex, and power?

The following chapters will speak to all of these issues as we remember that men who are stronger than you and me have made very bad decisions. Men who are weaker — have made good decisions. The gift of choice can be the greatest blessing you have and it can be the *choice* that can severely damage you. Sometimes we avoid failure, but other times our action costs us everything.

But remember that *the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience*. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from being so strong that you can't stand up against it. *When you are tempted, he will show you a way out* so that you will not give in to it (1 Cor. 10:13;NLT, emphasis added).

### Endnotes

1. "She Stayed with a President Who Strayed," *USA Today* (June 10, 2003): p. 8D.
2. Shirley Glass, *Not Just Friends* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 2003), p. 3.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 2.