

Understanding and Developing Christian Accountability

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What is accountability?

Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 24:6; 27:17; 2 Corinthians 12:19-13:6; Galatians 6: 1-10; Ephesians 5:21; Colossians 3:9-10; James 5:16

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the day approaching. Hebrews 10:25

A popular American TV show from the 1960's was *Dobie Gillis*. In this hit show, there was a character played by Bob Denver called Maynard G. Krebs, better known for later playing Gilligan on *Gilligan's Island*. Maynard was a "beatnik," a precursor to a "hippie" and a pioneer stereotype of the atypical "teenage slacker." He was the person who refused to work, was very lazy, and all of his energies were spent on conniving to get what he wanted without earning it. His catchphrase was "woooooork?!?" when confronted that he needed to work for something in order to receive something. He was very funny and was just listed in the top 100 memorable entertainers of the twentieth century. The TV episodes can still be seen today (I know this stuff because my church is near Hollywood and many people in that industry go there). Maynard represents a lot of Christian mindsets today-not the fear of work, but, rather "accountabilityyy?!?" We fear and hide from it as if it were an assault upon our lifestyle, fears, and plans. We do not want to hear about it nor be tied to it. Yet, it is essential in order for us to grow and produce godly character and fruit.

What is accountability? It is a check and balance system to protect us from harm from ourselves and others. We do this by being open to what we are thinking and doing so we can receive encouragement and reproof, when needed. Christian accountability is accounting for what we are up to. It is the realization that we are liable, responsible, and answerable for our actions in life to God (Matt. 12:36; Rom. 2:16; 14:2; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10), as well as to key Christians in our life (John 13:34 Gal. 6:1-2; Philip. 2:4; Heb. 10:23-24; James 5:16). Thus, we need to hold to our beliefs and keep in line with what we believe so it does not distract us from God's path for us or discourage others from their path.

Accountability allows us to be answerable to one another, focusing on key relationships such as with our spouse, close friends, colleagues, coworkers, a boss, small group members, and pastor. It is sharing, in confidence, our heartfelt Christian sojourn in an atmosphere of trust. Then, we can give an answer for what we do and understand where we need help in areas where we are weak and struggling, where and how we are growing, what we are learning, and to be encouraged. These precepts help us to stay on track, and get prayer, care, and support when we fail. We can also model guideposts for one another in order to keep going.

Accountability enables us to share our lives with one another in a deep, introspective way. This helps us to get to know ourselves and others in a deeper manner. Even though most of our relationships in life tend to be casual and superficial, we need deep connections; that is what God has made us for (Eccl. 4:10-12; Rom. 12:5; 14: 13-23; Eph. 5:21; Col. 3:9-10; 1 Peter 3:15). In this, we can have a place to open up, share, and be challenged beyond sports, weather, fashion, or makeup. The goal is our spiritual formation which is Christian maturity, growth, and character derived from God working in us and our working out our faith with one another.

Some Christians have seen accountability groups alone as a place to vent all of their frustrations in life. Yes, we need a place to vent, but if all we do is vent, we accomplish nothing. Real growth cannot take place, as the venting will be all consuming and will leave no time for instruction or feedback. The group will merely become a place to gossip. Accountability is also not a place to find our inner child or inner warrior, or warrior princess. Accountability is not about just complaining about how life has dumped on us or a place to put others down; rather, it is a "compact" (a deeper agreement beyond a contract) and system on how to become more Christ-like (Psalm 133:1). A good accountability group will have questions, Bible study, prayer, listening, and support at its core.

Accountability is not about confrontation. We may, at times, need to be confronted and to confront another, but accountability is more about challenging one another to grow in Christ, so there is no need to rebuke people. Accountability helps instill the warning precepts that God has given us, but it also has the necessary support, counsel, encouragement, and affirmation we all need. Accountability enables us to be ...in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others (Rom. 12:5). This enables our connectedness to lay aside the island mentality. We do not stand independent of one another. Because such interdependency exists within the Body of Christ, we are responsible to one another to do our part and to help others do theirs.

As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" . . . If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it (1 Cor. 12:20-21, 26).

Why Do We Need Accountability?

We are accountable to God and to one another (2 Chron. 19:6-7; Ezek. 34:2-4; Matt. 12:36-37; 2 Pet. 2:10-11). We are all fallen creatures; as Christians, we are still fallen, but are saved by His grace. We are declared clean before God by our Lord's work; however, we are still full of sin. We all have items and thoughts in our lives that diminish our relationship with God and our effectiveness with others. There is still a process on which to embark to become cleaner (which I believe we never totally become); this is called sanctification. As Christians, we are in the process and practice of our faith, growth, learning, and maturity all the days of our lives. At the same time, we are still sinners and susceptible to temptation, spiritual warfare, and our misplaced desires. We have blind spots and need input from others to find them. If you really want to grow in faith and be effective in ministry, you must be held accountable; otherwise, you will fall, backslide, or be ineffective because of imbued pride. Sin will get you; maybe not today, but tomorrow is still coming. Accountability is essential for every Christian to help reach his or her full potential; it is a mandate to those in leadership and ministry!

Having other people around whom you can trust and get to know more deeply will enable you to know yourself—your strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities—more deeply. You will be able to see in the mirror to your inner being and desires and see if they line up to what God has for you. You will become more aware of issues, relationships, and life as life's purpose and God's call are unfolded before you. Because you see life and God's Word more deeply, your behaviors and response to others will also change for the better (Eccl. 4:8-12; Rom. 15:7; Eph. 4:9-13; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 10:24; James 5:16).

The pages of the Bible are filled with stories of people leaning on others for growth and personal and spiritual development. Deep connections help great leaders overcome their struggles and see what they cannot see on their own. Most prominently in the Old Testament are Moses and Aaron (Exodus), and David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18-20). In the New Testament are Paul and Barnabas, and then Paul with Titus, Silas, and Timothy (Acts 11-14; 2 Cor. 2:12). And, of course, our Lord Jesus, while He walked this earth, had His twelve with an extra connection to the inner three, Peter, James, and John.

Thus, we can surmise that accountability is not for just for those who are weak, needy, or for wimps; it is for the strong who want to be stronger and the unconnected who need to be connected. If you think, as a man, this is still just for the weak, consider that greatness and authenticity cannot come about without humility and connection (James 4:7-12; 1 Pet. 5: 1-11)! "Real men" will be accountable to other real men, and real godly women will be connected to other godly women (Prov. 31). There is no way around this vital call! God gives us the call to be deeply connected to one another because we need it. The leaders in the Bible knew this well, Jesus modeled this for us, and the only hindrance is our willingness to comply. Leaders and pastors who are not accountable will eventually fall, and, until then, be very ineffective! God has called you to be the iron that sharpens others' iron, as their iron will sharpen you (Prov. 27:17)!

Accountability is nothing new, although it seems it is by the topics of sermons and books or from some popular movements within the last ten years; however, it was practiced by pious Jewish teachers before Christ. Accountability was insisted on and practiced by Christ, Himself. Just observe how Jesus led the Disciples and how He modeled to the Disciples. This was picked up by the early church; the Reformers all had men in their lives who held them to account, in whom they trusted, took advice from, bounced ideas off of, and who prayed for them.

Calvin was especially a proponent of accountability and insisted all of His leaders be held in account, "believers (who) seriously testify, by honoring mutual righteousness among themselves, that they honor God." It was the system he established that became the model of the "check and balance" system of modern governments, first established in the U.S. in our Constitution. The Methodist movement, founded by John Wesley, was started as an accountability and prayer group. Every effective minister, leader, and growing Christian I have ever met was in some form of an accountability group, including Billy Graham and my mentor, Francis A. Schaeffer. In fact, I have never met an effective Christian, pastor, or leader who was not in an accountability group. For every bad and ineffective leader I have ever met, none of them believed in or practiced accountability! This should communicate to us loudly.

Thus, the bottom line of why we need accountability is, we will be tempted; and, unless we have a system to protect ourselves, we will fall to that temptation (Prov. 6:27; 1 Cor. 6:18, 10:14; 1 Tim. 6:9-11; 2 Tim. 2:22)! The world is rich in temptations and we can not fight against them effectively unless we allow the One who overcame the world to infuse us (John 5:4), and not love the world (1 John 2:15). It comes down to having trusting faith in Christ, and allowing His work in others to help keep us connected to Him. His empowerment will be synergized when we are connected with others whom we trust and who can warn us of coming dangers in our pursuits and thinking, encourage us when we are down, and who will hold us accountable. The love of God is often best reflected in the love and care of others. Allow that care to shield you from the wrong pursuits in life.

Many Christians think, all I have to do is leave Satan alone and he will leave me alone so I do not need accountability. The response to that is no, he will go after you even more! We will be tempted by Satan and by his influences that seem enticing but will only hurt us. Satan seeks, not to give us what we want, but to steal from us all that which God has given. Thus, if we submit to God, then the devil flees; if we run to Satan and his ways, God is far off from us. We can try with all of our might and effort to have accountability, but unless others are there for us, and unless we are headed toward God, it just will not work! The only thing that can thwart Satan is God. So, be in Him and not in the world (Eph. 6:10; James 4:7-10; Rev. 12:11).

James is saying to first turn to God and surrender to His ways. If not, the ways of Satan and the world will gladly take up that role. We need others in our lives to point out to us the pitfalls before us, as we may not see them ourselves, blinded by desires and wanderlust. We cannot do this solely by our own efforts and strength; we need others, too. Others will see what we refuse to see, or what is blocked by our desires. It is about the insight of others and the power of the Spirit working in us all. It is not the strength of others; rather it is their eyes, words, and assistance, and our allowing God to be our strength. To remove Satan from our lives, we have to fell him-not just ignore him, but run away from him and to God, and allow others to help us in our scurry.

Objections to Accountability

Accountability may seem to go against our self-sufficient, individualistic mindsets and fear of conviction. Most cultures and individuals like to be "my own person," and thus do "my own thing." Most people do not like being told what to do or how to do it. But, we need godly people in our lives to do just that-with love and care. Thus, we have to learn to overcome our barriers of conviction so we can grow more in Christ and with one another.

Many Christians see accountability as meaningless because conviction is the role of the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; Acts 1:8; 4:31; 10:45; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 3:16-17; Heb. 13:5-6). Yes, they are correct about the conviction part, and wrong to say that it does not matter. Why? Galatians tells us to carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). The meaning refers to moral issues and guarding weakness (Rom. 15:1-3; 1 Cor. 9:21). Take heed, we are also responsible and answerable for our actions in life to God and to other key Christians. Thus, we need to be held to our beliefs and kept in line about what we believe so it does not distract us from God's path for us or discourage others from their own path.

The other typical objection believers give is that we are not under any kind of law, and now we have liberty and Grace, so it does not matter. A prominent Christian leader a few years back asked me, after I had done a workshop on accountability, Why is this important? Can't I just live my Christian life as I please? After all, I have liberty in Christ! I answered him to the best of my ability, but he just would not get it; shortly thereafter, he fell and fell hard. It turned out he did not like accountability because he has been having a long-term affair. He did not want

to be convicted! Our liberation is not to protect us from conviction; it is to enjoy our Lord so we can pursue His precepts as we realize our indebtedness to Him.

Liberation simply means Christ has set us free (John 8:32-36; Rom. 6:3-23; Gal. 5:1). Paul was overcome by his liberation in and by Christ (Mark 7:18-19). He stressed that we must behave and be responsible in the correct manner. We many enjoy our freedom, but freedom does not entitle one to do anything one wants, just as living in a "free" county like the U.S. does not, as we cannot steal or murder or not pay taxes. What about free will? Yes, we have "free will;" Calvin spent most of his writings discussing this fact. He taught that we have responsibility, and duty to faith and prayer, three areas that require free will. We are still to allow His work to continue in us; the Holy Spirit will lift our sin and our will out of the way. If you truly give up your will to God, will you be liberated or would you be obligated as a servant/slave with no real life as you would see it? The fact is that you are free in Christ! The question is how will you live your life of freedom?

The liberty of the Christian life is by surrender. It gives us:

1. Freedom from law. (Rom. 3:19; 6:14; -15; Gal. 2:20-21; 3:23-25)
2. Forgiveness, acceptance, and access to His presence. (Rom. 5:1-2)
3. Freedom from having to base our acceptance on our performance. (Rom. 7: 7-11; 10:3)
4. Freedom from sin, and declared cleaned! (John 8:34-36; Rom 3:19; 6: 3-23; 1 Cor.15: 16; Gal. 3:10-20; 4:21-31)
5. Freedom from our own faulty thinking and superstitions. (1 Cor. 6:12-13; 8:7-13; 1 Tim. 4:1-5)

Because of these five reasons, we respond with obedience-not out of obligation (as a slave does), but out of gratitude and love. This new obedience is because of a changed heart and will. We are enabled to respond and continue in our new life by the Holy Spirit. Accountability helps us in our freedom in Christ, because we give up on our self will and focus on His. Like driving a car in a strange unfamiliar area and making Christ a passenger, we, as human beings, spend most of the time arguing, complaining, and debating the destination. Yet, we do not have a clue to where we are going. If we would allow Christ to get into the driver's seat, He would be able to take us where we could never have gone before. In addition, if we sign over the "pink slip" to our Lord Jesus Christ, then He will take us to places that, even in our wildest imaginations, we could never fathom. Then, perhaps the love we are to receive and exhibit will flow ever so much more freely! The bottom line is: accountability is letting Christ drive! Accountability becomes the map to keep us moving on His road to His destination; if we throw away the map, then we go in the wrong direction; we will never get to the destination, and perhaps, even crash. It begins when we stop to ask for directions, His Directions!

We are not to allow our liberation and freedom in Grace to cause people to stumble by our actions or inactions. Our faith and actions are monitored closely by God as well as by other people, and we must realize that our actions are more influential than our words. We will either lift people up or bring them down! Hypocrisy is perhaps the most deadly threat to new or weak Christians who fall victim to it, and is a heinous sin against Christ and His children by those who cause it! We, as a body of Christ, must seek to show right actions to one another, to be cautious, and to act with charity, humility, and self-denial within our Christian liberty. We are still called to be responsible in the correct manner. We may enjoy our freedom, but freedom does not entitle us to do anything we want. A true Christian will never destroy another person's faith so he can have his own way! Our freedom must not bring dishonor, division, or disrepute to the church.

The first two objections are from theological standpoints, but what most of us struggle with is emotional-our fears and cultural hesitations. Connecting with others and exposing our feelings may be much easier for most women; but, for men, this is sometimes a seemingly impenetrable barrier. It can be a scary business to share your feelings and be open and introspective, as people may betray us, belittle us, or ignore or step on our heart. And to tell you the truth, yes, that can happen. It has happed to me several times, as close accountability partners have betrayed confidences and spread rumors. However, the benefits have far outweighed the few times I have been wronged.

Women tend to be better at opening up than men, especially generations born before 1965. We were brought up to think that a man is to show no emotion or share feelings-the John Wayne type. This makes a good movie character but is not good biblical character. So, we become fearful of sharing our lives with our spouse, coworkers, or even a trusted friend. These fears debilitate relational connections and the support we need in life and in ministry as well as hamper trust (Rom. 8:15). Another factor that ties in with this is shame. We feel embarrassed

or that we are the only one going through this. We may feel they will reject me when they get to know me. Or, we feel no one will understand or they will think less of me. The fact is, as growing Christians in Christ, when we get to know one another, we get to know ourselves as well; love supersedes judgment and care overpowers fear. This leads to forgiveness and openness. If we let our shame and fear rule our emotions and ability to be held accountable, we will not be able to share or receive godly instruction. Thus, sin will rain upon us. When we start to realize that the love and care we send and receive is far better than the isolation we build, it will allow us to grow more in maturity and faith because we will be open and honest. As a result, all of our relationships and our ministry will vastly improve.

We need to realize we are already accepted by Christ. He no longer condemns us, as, there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus... nothing can separate me from the love of God (Rom. 8). Thus, to be in a Christian accountability group, you are in a group with sinners who all have been wounded, all who fear, all who are saved by grace, and who all are together exercising the faith. We are all in the same boat here. We learn of one another's battles which helps us with ours, and ours helps with theirs. Insights are gained and shared, and the transformation from fear to maturity commences. Together, we are not to be ashamed of who we are in Christ, living out our faith with passion and conviction. The real shame is a Christian who does not seek help from God and others. Being accountable will promote healing and growth in all aspects of your life!

Remember, people will hurt you, because people who hurt are usually hurting themselves and they do not know how to relate (which an accountability group can help with). What can we do to overcome this obstacle? Be vulnerable, yet discerning. Only allow people whom you already know and trust to be a part of your support group, and advance slowly. Start off with a few of the simple questions and prayer; as you get to know one another, you will build the trust. (I did not do this with the people who betrayed me!) When we feel safe, we are more apt to share; this goes for both men and women. When we feel safe, we better receive essential positive feedback, listen to constructive criticism, and have a longer and deeper prayer time.

The key to effective accountability is to allow our pride to yield to the necessity of being accountable to one another. Our justification in Christ is no escape from bad things happening, because the world is still full of sin. It is a starting point to build and develop character, patience, and dependence on God's grace, as Abraham did by faith; we are accountable for our choices. God approves when we are walking in Him! God does not approve when we are walking by ourselves, comfortable in our own petty presumptions, and ignoring His love and truth!

Accountability Can Help Prevent Burnout

Burnout occurs when our spiritual energies are totally exhausted, and we have no will or vitality to make relationships, or whatever our task is, work. We are completely worn-out and spent. Thus, if we stay in our position without being refueled, we will just be throwing a monkey wrench into vital components, causing them to break. If you are a leader, your burnout is especially devastating to others because you will be the monkey wrench that sabotages the machine of ministry. We may not desire or be willing to do so, but because of our lack of availability due to the fact that there is nothing left of us, we are of no service, and are, in fact, endangering the vitality and ministry of others.

The stresses of life and the hassles of family will get us down and test our limits; even the best-run family will have this problem from time to time. So, how can we tell if we're just tired or are experiencing burnout? First, we need to ask ourselves the accountability questions. If we are operating in His precepts, it is probably just exhaustion. However, if we find ourselves being apathetic and detached from our families, we have a problem. We have to be on guard against the most destructive force, pride! Pride and arrogance will produce a superiority complex. Then, we become careless towards others and lose our perspective of what God has called us to do. We can hurt our family, our friends, and if we are married, cause intense harm to our spouse. Either the pride, the refusal to set boundaries, the refusal to be accountable, or a combination of the three will cause us to fall into burnout and lead us into sin. We have to be willing to determine if we need an overhaul or just a good night's sleep. A mentor or accountability partner will help us see the warning signs.

Accountability Can Help Prevent Stress

You can expect that people at home, church, and work, in addition to your loved ones, friends, pets, and acquaintances will ask you for favors as in your time, resources, talents, or attention. This is good and you should do what you can, but there will be times when they will deplete you, causing you stress. You cannot be everywhere nor do everything! So, you have to learn how to build a fence that says I love you, but can you leave me alone for now! The most important aspect in preventing stress is saying NO in a firm yet kind way with an explanation of why. That way, you can be better prepared. People deserve a reason; don't just say no! Be honest, even if you just need time alone. Do not feel guilty; you have to take care of yourself first before you can care for others!

Be aware of stress with family outings and projects, especially during holidays. They are stressful for many people, so take a look at why it is that way with you. Why does something cause you stress? Is it your time? Is it fear? Remember, you are not indispensable; if you were, you would need help from a good counselor or pastor! To help prevent many of the stresses of life, learn to plan ahead! For big events, make sure you plan them out ahead of time and delegate! Do not try to do too many things or take on too many projects, especially if they are new to you. If you are a procrastinator (like I am), then force yourself to do it early. Once you figure out that life is easier and less stressful when you do things early, you will make it a habit of it. Do not allow people to force things on you just because you have done them before. They need to respect you and your time. Assertiveness is biblical when it is operated within the parameters of biblical character and the fruit of the Spirit!

Accountability helps make us aware of intrusions and stress, but it may take others to see and to tell us to take breaks away from people so we can have more time with family and God. Accountably will help refocus our spiritual awareness and even help our physical energy. Prayer is our big ally to help set boundaries and prevent stress amongst the spiritual and maturity implications! Do not feel guilty! Also, accountability helps us be aware of anxiety, phobias, and mental disorders that contribute to stress; those can keep us from our relationships and functions with family and church. If accountability is not enough, that is OK. Just make sure you seek help from a good counselor or trained pastor!

Becoming Accountable

Accountability is often associated with a place to be helped with some kind of problem or addiction such as drinking, drugs, smoking, pornography, or some other recovery issue. Yes, this is can be a principle venue; however, the emphasis should be our spiritual growth which infuses our thinking and behaviors and helps in overcoming addictions. It is not about just overcoming addictions; it is being overcome with Christ as Lord of our lives. We can always wrestle with our temptations through our own efforts, but we might as well be Jacob wrestling with God (Gen. 32). We will succeed as long as God allows and as long as Satan allows. Thus, we must flee from him to be in Him (James 4:7-10)!

Effective accountability has the emphasis on building quality and deep relationships that will help us with the following (1 Thess. 5:14 Col. 3:16 Heb. 3:13 Prov. 25:12; 27:17):

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17

- Adhering ourselves to God's Word and call!
- Learning to commune with God more deeply so we can respond to His precepts more rapidly and thoroughly.
- Prayer that is not just about our personal needs but also with the needs of others!
- Reigniting our passion for Christ!
- Becoming teachable, and our thinking and behaviors examined!
- Being willing to recognize sin both in our lives and in the lives of others, too!
- Being willing to learn about ourselves!
- Being willing to have healing in our lives!
- Being willing to see the needs of others!
- Being willing to overcome, and to be on guard concerning weaknesses and strengths.
- Being able to trust, share, and commune with another person in depth.
- Being willing to overcome issues that are bad for us.
- Knowing that we need others to keep us on track!
- A willingness to be challenged, convicted, molded, and sharpened so we can change and grow.

- Help to develop better and deeper fellowship and unity with others!
- A platform to be transformed and renewed in Christ!
- Becoming more sensitive and discerning!
- Learning to develop the fruit of the Spirit and exercise it.
- Being willing to confess and hear others in love and confidentiality-without judgment.
- Being encouraged and encouraging others!
- Developing godly, Christ-like character!
- Learning to take risks, be vulnerable, and overcome rejection and betrayal.
- Learning that God has called us to be involved in the lives of others and that we are not to be lone ranger Christians!
- Learning that we are to be patient, because accountability is built over time!
- Learning that deep connections do not just happen between services of the church; we have to work at them in community.
- Learning that we are at our best when we are being real and authentic.
- Learning about Christ's redemption and our ability to change.
- Learning we can be used by God to be change agents in the lives of others.
- Learning that relationships require effort and commitment.
- Developing harmony with others so we can communicate, and being transparent without being defensive.
- Developing maturity and spiritual growth!
- Learning to be humble and wise!
- Allowing the work of the Holy Spirit within us and being used by Him in the lives of others as well!
- The ability to bust the noise of our will and desires, as we need a godly perspective we can hear over that noise!
- A reminder that God is in control, even in times of dire stress and confusion!
- Trusting in God and keeping His standards because they are best for us; there is no better way than His Way!
- Understanding that accountability takes place in the crucible (a refractory made of porcelain, used for melting and purifying materials such as gold at high temperatures, that also refers to the confluence of powerful influences such as intellectual, social, economic, or political) of community with other growing Christians!
- Knowing we need accountability for our support, faith development, and growth!
- Knowing that accountability takes our initiative, commitment, and continuance in it!
- We have no need to hide our sins from those who are entrusted to help us deal with them.

Leading a lawless, indifferent, irreverent life while having a faith that is just fire insurance from Hell may save you-may; however, you will reap dire consequences for this mindset (Deut. 18:15; Matt. 22:13-14; 23; 1 Cor. 10:11-13; 2 Cor. 5:11)!

God designed the church as the body of Christ. Thus, we are called to utility and cooperation so we can be there for one another in times of fun as well as stress. We are called to encourage and equip as well as hold each other responsible to the commitment we have made in Christ as Lord.

But exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:13

What to Look for In an Accountability Partner or Group

To get involved in an accountability group, first look for an existing one you can join such as a small group through your church or a neighboring church if your church does not have one. Make sure it is gender specific-men to men and women to women. Most of these groups are found under men's or women's ministries. If none are available or you are not led to one, hook up with another two or three people and start your own. You can find people through a church leader or pastor. In this process, make sure you are in prayer, asking God to lead you in the right direction! The substance of why and what you are doing is more important than the form of how you do it. See our small group channel for ideas, as an accountability group is just a small group with more emphasis on accountability (Small Groups). The key to making this work is for you and the other participants to be open, submissive, listening, and authentic so you can confess your sins in a safe, confidential environment.

What a Good Accountability Program/Person Will Have:

- Look for confidentiality as paramount.
- Look for people whom you already know or have a connection with such as a common interest or season in life.

- Look for people whom you respect, trust, are mature in their faith and character, and from whom you can learn so you can develop closeness and share shortcomings!
- Look for people who maintain a loving and respectful attitude!
- Make sure you use God's Word; it is your standard for faith and practice!
- Make sure no one dominates unless it is a teacher teaching. Have equal airtime so all can be involved. Thus, the number of people to have depends on the length of time you meet. If you meet for an hour, have no more than four people. If you meet for two hours, have no more than seven. If you are in a larger group, have a teaching time, then break down into sub groups for accountability questions and prayer.
- Be willing to be flexible and surrender your time when another person needs extra time and care.
- Participants need to respect the feelings and time of others, and to speak the truth in love.
- Communicate ground rules or a code of conduct, clearly emphasizing confidentiality and equal time.
- Make sure prayer is the focus!
- Seek guidance from others who can shepherd you, who have been there, done that-who have "weathered the storms" and are able to share it. Look for people you can shepherd and guide faithfully.
- Seek those who can help you adhere to God's standards rather than to the world's standards.
- Seek faithfulness and constancy!
- Use humor, but not at the expense of others!
- Be committed, and encourage others to be so, too!
- Remember, the primary purpose is to get yourself aligned with God's love, call, and precepts over all else.
- The more mature people must disciple the immature-not the other way around.
- Be aware of your pride, and never allow your maturity and growth to be a source of pride or use it to put others down!
- What you do not want is people disciplining you who are prideful, who only care about themselves, or who are irritable, presumptive, "too busy," and neglectful of others! Make sure you are not this way to others!

There is no best way or program to "do" accountability. It can be a "one-on-one" mentorship or a large group that is subdivided into smaller ones; it can meet for one hour or two, once a week or every other week. The important thing is to do it, remain committed, and to follow Christ and not yourself. If you do not "click" with the people in your group or feel you do not have a level of trust, that is OK; this may not be the group or person for you. Look for or start another one.

How can we do this? By seeing others with the eyes of Christ-to see love, compassion, and forgiveness. Take the one another passages to heart (One Another Passages), and when we do instruct, warn, or even chastise, do it in the parameters of the fruit of the Spirit, without judgment or commendation (as there is no such thing in Christ!). Then, we can be open and honest with one another. God gives us the faith, the strength, and the empowerment to do this, and when we are with others, it is synergized! It is not about our weakness, it is about His strength! When we rely on God and build one another up, we grow in faith and maturity and become more effective to one another. This is reciprocal, and will replicate and continue.

So, what is the final obstacle remaining? The commitment to make it continual. Accountability is not just for a time, it is for all times, and requires our discipline and dedication to keep at it. If we stop, we soon go back to our fears and complacency. When this happens, sin that before was of no consequence has now grown big and is knocking on your door. Commitment is essential to making anything that is precious work, from a friendship to marriage to being a member of a church. We must be committed and continual. Commitment brings about hope and growth through sacrifice, as we pour ourselves into it while being fueled by our Lord.

The structure is up to you and your group. How do you lead an effective accountability group? The same way you would a small group.

Take it slow and easy. Don't try, or even expect, to immediately delve into the deepest, darkest corners of your life. Begin by having your close friends hold you accountable for things like praying regularly and integrity issues. As you see the results and benefits of this, you will also be building up trust, which is necessary for accountability in more personal and private areas. If you need further help in this area, seek a qualified and trusted pastor or

Christian counselor. Also, seek someone to whom you can be accountable. Do not just trust yourself; have a small group or mentor ask you these questions on a regular basis!

Remember that Christian maturity and character is "Christ-likeness," becoming more like our Lord by living out His precepts. This is not a destination until we are called home to eternity; meanwhile we who are on this journey must make the most of our opportunities. We can learn and grow deeper and closer or we can rebel and become worldlier. This journey and the road you will take is your choice and in God's providence (James 4:13-17)! So, go and be sharpened, and be a sharpener to others as well! In His Word and in prayer, watch your life grow and be transformed and triumphant!

Being a disciple of Christ and making disciples requires devotion, nurturing, commitment to the Word, and worship. Most mature Christians would agree on these basics, but other things required include discipline, the ability to be studious, and to be accountable. Our basis and starting point is God's character. Peter tells us "we are to be holy because God is holy." (1 Peter 1:16), and the way we can respond to this call is by being accountable in our personal lives as believers and as a church. So, we need to realize that one of our calls is to participate in conflict management so the wickedness of our nature does not get out of hand and so our relationships and opportunities do not fail. God's Word gives us the guidelines and focus for proper confrontation and the management of problems so we can be more effective in His service.

Do not allow accountability in your Christian life or in your church to become a forgotten call!

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