



Proactive Accountability

By Tim Geiger

None of us is intuitively in favor of true accountability. Perhaps that statement shocks you. But accountability, a quality of human relationship both to one another and to God, which existed perfectly prior to the Fall into sin, has, like all of life, since been redefined as something that threatens us and our relative autonomy.

The process didn't take long, either. Adam's and Eve's first three reactions to their sin were to sew together fig leaves to cover themselves, to hide from God, and to blame-shift to avoid owning their sin (Genesis 3:7-13). In doing so, they set the model for sin-covering that we all practice today: (1) they hid their sin; (2) they avoided real, intimate relationship from God and from one another; and (3) when confronted, they avoided blame.

Yet, accountability—and I would make the case for a biblical standard of *proactive accountability*—is something that we are called to in every relationship—with other humans, and with God. Biblical accountability is meant to protect us and others; it is meant as both a means of sanctification and a fruit of repentance. Through true, honest accountability, we invite the Spirit of our God to speak into our lives through the words of others. We lay our hearts on the line and honestly confess what we've done. But more than that, we make the heartfelt plea, "I don't want to sin again! Please *help me* keep my feet on the right path!"

This kind of proactive accountability is something that is difficult and threatening to do, because it requires great transparency and, perhaps even more demanding, great intimacy and brokenness. It requires us to lay aside all of our subterfuge, and like Adam and Eve prior to the Fall, to be unashamed in our spiritual nakedness before one another.

What is *proactive accountability*?

The Bible doesn't use the term as such, but proactive accountability is the standard that it upholds for our relationships with God and with one another. *Proactive accountability is complete honesty within the context of loving relationship, meant to point toward Christ and to prevent sin.*

We settle for counterfeit accountability.

As is the case in so many other areas of life, we settle for a cheap counterfeit in the area of accountability. Read the following descriptions and see if your experience has been anything like these.

Anemic Accountability. Jeff and Mark are accountability partners who meet at a restaurant near their homes at 6:30 am each Thursday. They've been friends for a number of years and only became accountability partners after Jeff's wife found that he'd been using internet pornography. Mark agreed to partner with Jeff, because he admitted that he "struggled sometimes, too."

Outside of Thursday mornings, neither friend talks about his sin—and even on Thursday mornings, it's a topic that is broached very sporadically. Family, sports, work and church are the topics that occupy 95% of their conversation. And usually, as their breakfast is winding up, this is the exchange that takes place:

Mark: "So how'd you do this week?"
Jeff: "Ahhh—I had a slip."
Mark: "How bad?"
Jeff: "Not bad. Same old stuff. But I stopped before it was too late. Keep praying for me. I need it. You?"
Mark: "I'm okay. Been an okay week. Been tempted once or twice, but nothing big. Pray for me too."
Jeff: "Okay—I will."

What characteristics can you note about this accountability relationship? Maybe the first you notice is that there's no genuine honesty regarding sin. Another feature is that there's no confrontation grounded in love, and no genuine encouragement. Both men simply acknowledge some indistinct "stuff" or temptation, but neither looks forward to anything different. Each seems to be kind of slogging through life and struggle, asking only for generic prayer. It's kind of an anemic—and hopeless—existence.

In fact, there's no real accountability—because accountability, in the biblical sense of the word, means that one submits to the sanctification of the Lord through another, and is committed to the hard work of repentance as a result. Yet, this anemic accountability predominates in the Church.

Dump Truck Accountability. A variation of anemic accountability is when people gather together and actually confess sin, but then simply accept that sin and move on without encouragement toward repentance. There's no real commitment on the part of the individual to change. Here, he/she merely "dumps" the record of his or her sin on someone else, and moves on. If two of the goals of biblical accountability are to point toward Christ and prevent sin, this type falls short on both.

Father Confessor Accountability. Yet another variant is the "father confessor" type of accountability, where an individual confesses sin, and this time, there *is* a response—but that response is legalistic, divorced from loving relationship. The individual may be given "steps" to perform to repent. Or, he/she may be given either advice or Scripture to read as a means to correct his/her behavior. While this seems better than the other two types of counterfeit accountability because it actually has an illusion of repentance attached to it, the "father confessor" entirely misses the individual's heart, and focuses entirely on substituting one behavior for another.

So what's the problem?

These types of counterfeit accountability have behavior modification as their focus. What I mean by that is that the goal is simply to abstain from a particular pattern of behavior. Instead of holiness, the aim becomes, "If only I can stay clean until next week..." or, "I've just sinned. If only I can stay 'clean' for a while, that's what matters."

Biblical Accountability—The Real Thing

Biblical accountability is different from the counterfeits. Where they are aimed at behavior modification, it is aimed first and foremost at the heart. It is oriented toward repentance. And this is what the Bible means by repentance. What Jesus is after in the lives of his brothers and sisters is that *our hearts, and then our behavior*, would be oriented toward him. He doesn't merely want men and women who are law-keepers. He wants men and women who worship God in Spirit and in truth, who keep the law out of gratitude because they know that their God loves them tremendously!

What Does the Bible Say About Accountability?

The Bible talks about proactive accountability. Again, Scripture doesn't use that language, but throughout Scripture, we see that it is the standard God sets before His people. We are formally introduced to the concept of truth-telling in the giving of the Law, when God tells his people through Moses to not lie to one another (Exodus 20:16). Likewise, we are called to intentionally be in transparent community with one another, for "whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment" (Proverbs 18:1).

Under the new covenant, Paul, in particular, tells us that proactive truth-telling is God's objective standard for his Church. In Ephesians 4 and 5, Paul makes numerous statements about how Christians are to act with regard to their relationships with others in the Body of Christ. Within this larger standard of relationship as a whole, we see that honesty, transparency, accountability and confrontation are all essential aspects of Body life.

Ephesians 4:1-2. The ultimate "call" Paul mentions in these opening verses is the call to holiness (becoming like Jesus) and to community within the Body—community which is a fitting dwelling place for God's glory (2:21-22). The immediate "call" would therefore be to work in submission to God and in cooperation with others in the Body to be mutually sanctified. The way we work this out is to be humble before each other, gentle, patient, and to "bear with one another" (in weakness and suffering) within the context of loving and encouraging relationship.

Ephesians 4:15. It is through "speaking the truth in love" with one another that we mature spiritually. The complementary aspect of that action is "receiving the truth in love," in humility. It is through such speaking and receiving that we are no longer fooled and entrapped by the deceptiveness of sin (see 4:14).

Ephesians 4:20-24. Paul argues that the natural consequence of growing in the knowledge, love and fear of Christ is that we would walk in repentance ("put off the old self" ...and "be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and...put on the new self". Through the "therefore" in verse 25, Paul links the concept of being truthful and transparent to putting on the new self, which is "created after the likeness of God." God is honest and always truthful. We were created and redeemed to become like him in our thoughts, desires and actions.

Ephesians 4:25. Paul says to "put away falsehood" and "speak the truth." The Greek word in the original text which is here translated "falsehood" is *pseudos*, which has a connotation of anything which is not completely accurate. The implication here is that we can sometimes "spin" the truth to make ourselves look not so bad—and Paul is saying that we should avoid anything that is the least bit untrue about ourselves—whether it be a half-truth, or a bald-faced lie. In other words, don't try to present a good-looking façade that will deceive others, and don't spin the truth.

The reason why is simple—we are members one of another, and one with Christ in the Body. Any deceit has repercussions that impact our relationships with fellow Christians and with the Lord himself. There's no such thing as a "little white lie." We'll have to cover that lie with another in order to protect ourselves, and once we've started that process, it's impossible to stop.

Ephesians 4:29. "No corrupting talk" can refer both to lies about our own thoughts and behavior, and to facades that we construct to keep others off our trail. The talk that we should engage in, "such as is good for building up," doesn't refer to praising

and encouraging someone else, so much as it pertains to the process of building up the Church into a holy temple (2:19-22). In other words, only within a climate of honest, transparent intimacy can the Church grow and prosper—and only within this context can the Church’s individual members do likewise.

Ephesians 5:3-7. As he often does, here Paul singles out sexual sin as a problem for the Church. This is not, as it might seem on the surface, a call to refrain from discussing sexual sin. Rather, there seems to be a call here to deal with sexual sin in an especially serious and intentional way, perhaps because it is so secretive, so shame-based, so deceptive, and so destructive. The call to “let no one deceive you with empty words” seems to be a specific challenge to pursue people (proactively) who are stuck in patterns of sin and to disassociate yourself from individuals who are continually intent upon resisting transparency, and who return again and again to deceitful words and ways.

Ephesians 5:11-13. Paul exhorts us to expose sin, to “bring it into the light.” The call here is to both expose (honestly confess) our own sin, and to expose (through loving confrontation) the sin of another. An inherent call here would be to expose a brother’s or sister’s own deception and intent to sin, as we observe them walking down a road toward temptation and sin (a “Proverbs 7 road”, as we’ll see in the following section).

What are the key elements of biblical accountability?

How then do we live out biblical, proactive accountability within the Church? Here are some attempts to identify key themes in the passages above and flesh them out a bit.

Biblical accountability is rooted in honesty. True, biblical accountability that glorifies God must provide the context for us to grow in holiness. As such, the individual must be completely honest in what he/she says. What is offered must be a *complete description of what happened* (i.e., without any details “edited out” in order to make the offence or circumstances seem less sinful), and it must be *completely truthful*.

Paul Tripp says we must “commit ourselves to the *courage of honesty*.”¹ What he’s talking about here is the fact that it takes boldness to be completely honest—boldness, because concealing the truth, in whole or in part, enables us to hold onto some of the benefits of our sin.

The honesty must be complete in a *historic sense* (what I’ve already done) and in a *current sense* (this is what I’m feeling; this is what I want to do). Why? Because you can be completely honest about something you’ve already done, without asking for true accountability for current desires and future actions. But this kind of accountability is just one of the counterfeits described above—merely spilling your guts about something that’s already happened, without being prepared to walk away from future sin.

As a matter of fact, if we fail to be completely honest, in fact, we’re just setting the stage for future sin. We’re taking the path of the fool in Proverbs 7:

For at the window of my house
I have looked out through my lattice,
and I have seen among the simple,
I have perceived among the youths,
a young man lacking sense,

¹ Tripp, Paul, *War of Words: Getting To the Heart Of Your Communication Struggles*, P&R Publishers, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2000. Page 131

passing along the street near her corner,
taking the road to her house
in the twilight, in the evening,
at the time of night and darkness.
And behold, the woman meets him,
dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart.
With much seductive speech she persuades him;
With her smooth talk she compels him.
All at once he followed he follows her,
As an ox goes to the slaughter...

Proverbs 7:6-10, 21-22

The fool in this story doesn't intend to sin *per se*—but neither has he avoided the road to sin. As a matter of fact, he walks right down the street where the prostitute lives, and then when temptation inevitably comes, he gives in—in a moment, without a second thought.

Being completely honest, however, cuts off that open path to the prostitute's house. Complete honesty says, "This is what I've done. And this is how I'm feeling right now, and this is what I may want to do next. I'm laying all of my life out in the open for you to examine and comment on. Please help me. I don't want to sin this way today."

Biblical accountability is rooted in gentleness, patience and love, seeking to draw the other into the unity of the knowledge and the fear of God. We can only minister with these qualities as we have ourselves experienced them in our own relationship with God, and then reflect them with prayer and gravity into the lives of others. This is holy work we're called to do!

But take note—gentleness and patience will be two aspects of biblical accountability which accountability partners will likely need in extra measure. People who struggle with any pattern of sin are often self-deceived and have difficulty in rightly discerning the truth. This is why the Lord has given us each other in the Body—to build each other up (Ephesians 4:16)—to help one another rightly interpret our circumstances, our motives, and our lives. *Persons who struggle with sexual sin in particular may find it difficult to trust an accountability partner with the truth, for shame and fear of rejection.*

So pray for patience, and wisdom, and grace. Perhaps complete truthfulness won't come at first. It may take months (or years) before someone is wholly committed to transparency and biblical accountability. But even a sliver of truth today, where none existed yesterday, is something to celebrate. God can work with that. Above all, as Paul tells us in Colossians 3:14, "And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Our desire for true accountability and true repentance must be rooted in a sincere love, a sincere longing for God. The result of our obedience, after all, is that we would enjoy intimacy of relationship with Him (James 4:8). Our desire to pursue a brother or sister when we suspect they're headed down the Proverbs 7 road must be rooted in a genuine love for them and for their good. We must desire to love them well for the long haul, not merely desire to see them change their behavior in the short term. To do otherwise is merely legalism.

Biblical accountability is rooted in deep humility. Biblical accountability says, "I am unable to do this on my own. I need God's help through you." Simply put, we must be willing to ask others to speak into our lives, and to receive their words graciously, understanding that God often works in our lives through the words and actions of others.

The Apostle Paul sets the standard for human relationships in the Church in Ephesians 4:15 when he says that we should be “speaking the truth in love” with one another. The truth—given to us by God in his Word—and the love, as we incarnate (live out) Christ in one another’s lives.

The converse of this is true, as well—that we must be willing to *receive the truth in love from one another*, in humility and grace. Why? Paul also tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:20 that “we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” God often speaks to his people *through* his people, as we humbly reflect the truth and love that he has graciously given us.

Biblical accountability has an agenda for heart change and behavioral change. Accountability must always have a focus toward change of not only behavior, but of the attitudes that underlie it. As we said before, focusing solely on behavioral change doesn’t help—what it actually succeeds in doing is making us better sinners! We become self-righteous, and wind up sinning in other ways to get what we want.

The biblical standard set before all people is repentance. Paul says that God “commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30) and that this repentance is “that [we] might no longer live for [our]selves, but for him who for [our] sake died and was raised” (2 Corinthians 5:15). In other words, repentance means a change of direction²—a radical reorientation of our lives, from living to satisfy the desires of self, to living to honor God.

The individual who wishes to engage in true biblical accountability must be willing to live differently in all aspects of life. He/she must be willing to allow the Spirit of God to do his full work in their heart. After all, God doesn’t want us to walk away from just one particular pattern of sin—he wants us to be men and women who are increasingly in love with him and obedient to him.

This bears repeating—please don’t fall into the trap of believing that biblical accountability focuses merely on behavior. The behavioral standards given in the Ephesians passages above are meant to guide us to act like Jesus, to build one another up in love as members of the Body of Christ. But they are also meant to *engage* and *destroy idols* in our hearts that control our behavior.

What idols do we typically react to when we avoid true accountability? They probably fall into broad categories of safety, comfort, and control. We generally hide our sin and avoid true, intimate relationship with others in order to keep a safe distance from one another, to keep from feeling the pain (and shame) of exposure and confession. We hide in order to secretly nurture our sin, in order to engage in it again—for a sense of comfort—when we feel anxious. We don’t want to submit to any authority—to God, His law, even to the accountability of others—because we want to be in control of our own lives.

But biblical accountability is meant to directly confront those idols. They must be destroyed if the pattern of sin is to end. Both the “proactive” and “honesty” aspects of biblical accountability are direct challenges to these idols. With the help of one or more others in the Body of Christ, the individual will be able to see them and, in faith, break them down as they realize that the love of God is better by far.

² Ferguson, Sinclair. *The Christian Life*. Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981. Page 73

Biblical accountability must be proactive in preventing sin. If God's intent for his people that we would walk in repentance, with an ever-increasing devotion to God and commitment to obedience, then it follows that we would want to turn away from our sin.

Yet we need help in doing this, because sin is deceptive in nature and has a way of clouding our self-perception and judgment. So within the context of a biblical accountability relationship, enough information must be exchanged so that the others in that relationship can see when the individual is blindly heading down the path toward sin (as in Proverbs 7), and then confront him/her with that reality.

So here's how it would work. Within an biblical accountability relationship, the individual should share enough about his/her *historic patterns of sin* so that the accountability partner(s) would know how he/she is *likely* to sin, based on past experience. What has seemingly worked for them in the past might be an option for them in the future.

But—here's the proactive aspect—the individual should also share what's going on in his/her *current life and experience* so the partner(s) will be able to surmise if the individual is in danger of sinning now, or in the near future.

For an example, let's go back to the accountability relationship between Jeff and Mark, which we visited earlier. Mark, the accountability partner, might say something like this, "Okay, Jeff. You've told me that in the past you've looked at pornography when you've felt lonely. Just now, you've said that your wife will be out of town this weekend. Is it at all possible that you might be susceptible to looking at pornography this weekend, while she's away?"

Through pursuing the individual in conversation, the accountability partner should explore with him/her how he/she is feeling, what he/she may have actually planned to do, and what he/she may be vulnerable to doing. Then, the partner and the individual should agree to an agenda for intercepting the temptation and preventing the sin.

Such an agenda would necessarily be *practical* and *attainable* (for instance, in Jeff's case above, something like giving the computer to a neighbor for the weekend, or installing a reporting program on the computer, or staying with a friend for the weekend).

The agenda for change, then, would also become something for which the individual would be accountable. His/her accountability partner would check in with him/her during and after the event, providing encouragement, helping diagnose and troubleshoot weak points, and processing the individual's success in following the agenda for change.

Where do we get the strength to do this?

Lest we think we can do any of this in our own strength, we can't. We can only pursue one another in genuine honesty and love as we cling to the Source of Truth and Love, Jesus Christ. Only as we believe His promises by faith, and begin to rest in His gracious love can we ever begin to remove the masks of half-truths and deception that we've used to keep ourselves and our secrets safe.

What will you do to encourage an atmosphere of real, proactive accountability in your relationships? Perhaps it begins with confession of your own sin—beginning to live transparently. Perhaps it means lovingly and humbly pursuing someone else whom you love and care about—a church member, a family member, a friend. Perhaps it means

praying for the grace to *really* love someone in your life, so much that you would want to confront them.

Perhaps it means asking someone to hold you accountable for your desires, thoughts and actions.

Proactive accountability begins and continues with faith in Jesus Christ. We can only engage in it as we hope in something better than what we can accomplish for ourselves, in our hiding and attempts to control our life. We can only offer our heart to another as we trust that Christ will speak His love to us through them. We can only confess our sin if we believe that we already have received forgiveness in Christ alone. We can only pursue the other in love if we believe that His Spirit is at work within them to conform them to His own image.

Proactive accountability is not easy. But it is good. It's what we were created for. Pray for grace, love and strength to engage in it, and, you will participate with the Lord in building up His Body in love.

Common-Sense Strategies to Foster Proactive Accountability

Don't try to go it alone. Four main reasons for this.

1. *Scripture tells us we need it.* We're commanded to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another, in order to be healed (James 5:16). We're told to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2) and to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21). Relationships with others in the Body are the normal means by which God sanctifies us and helps us to walk in repentance.
2. *We need others to help us understand our own hearts and motives.* Our hearts are wickedly deceptive (Jeremiah 17:9). We can't control them. We can't fully understand them. Left to ourselves and without God's restraining grace, we would openly rebel against God all the time (Genesis 6:5).
3. *We need others to point us to Jesus.* Because our hearts are naturally rebellious, self-serving and don't want to believe the truth, we need one another in the Body of Christ. The only way we will be able to walk in repentance is to submit to others speaking the truth in love to us (Ephesians 4:15). If we don't, the natural outcome is that we'll develop "evil, unbelieving hearts leading [us] to fall away from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12-13).
4. *On your own, you will justify your actions and deeds.* Without others looking objectively at us and our circumstances, we tend to subjectify everything we think and do. It becomes deceptively simple to justify being alone for long periods of time, or spending unnecessary time on line. Without someone else calling us back to the truth, we will inevitably walk down the street where the prostitute lives because we like play with fire.

Find at least one regular discipleship-accountability partner. A regular discipleship-accountability partner would meet the following criteria:

1. He or she is the same gender as you
2. He or she knows you well or wants to get to know you well
3. He or she is relatively mature in the Lord
4. He or she is reasonably available to talk with you regularly (once every one to two weeks)
5. He or she is reasonably available to talk when a severe bout of temptation hits

Don't know anyone who meets that criteria? Pray. Pray that God would open your eyes to find such a person and would prepare both that person and you for such a relationship. Since God tells us in the Bible that "one-anothering" through the Church is the usual way He matures us in Christ and helps us to walk in repentance, we can usually expect that He will raise up at least one person to help. But it may not be whom you expect!

Avoid troublesome technology. Is your laptop a source of temptation for you? If it is, only use it in a public place—like the library or cafeteria. How do you know if it's a source of temptation? Ask yourself this question: "When I think about using my laptop, do I often think about looking at porn or chatting inappropriately?" Or,

to put it another way, “Is going online one of the ways I walk down the street where the prostitute lives?” Don’t get rid of the laptop—it’s not the problem. It’s only the means of sin. But do use it wisely, wisely understanding your limits. Apply the same logic to cell phones, ipods, and any other device that you have used or could use as a means to sin. For some, even avoiding the department store ads in the Sunday paper is necessary. *And, if devices are a stumbling block for you, in no uncertain terms tell that to your accountability partner!*

Be ruthless in cutting off the means to sin. Specifically when talking about sexual sin, Jesus tells us to be ruthless in stopping our progression toward sin. In Matthew 5:27-30, he tells us to go so far as to “tear out” an eye that is fixated on something sinful or to “cut off” a hand that causes us to sin. This implies that cutting off the means to sin is often painful and involves personal suffering.

Are you willing to pray for God to supply you the grace to be that ruthless? Are you willing to ask him for the grace to turn away from technology, media, places, people and situations that have led you down the path to sin in the past? When the temptation to fantasize comes, are you willing to fight in prayer instead of giving in—even for a moment? Are you willing to humble yourself in front of someone else to tell them what’s going on and to ask for help? Are you willing to admit you’re out of control?

Being ruthless also means, in a very practical sense, making big changes to the normal way you live your life in order to break the cycle of sin. This usually involves knowing what your common “triggers” to sin are—and then having a system in place to either avoid them altogether, or at least to successfully react to them when they come up. Here are some examples:

- If you are often tempted at a certain time of the day, night or week (i.e. Friday nights, first thing in the morning when you wake up, etc.), recognize that trend and change your regular activities to make it difficult or impossible to fall
- If you’re tempted when you’re alone, then make plans to be in a public place (common area at school, the mall, the library, church activities, hanging out with friends, etc.)
- If being alone in general is a problem for you, look at changing your living situation. If you live by yourself, look at getting a roommate. If you’re married, eliminate “private” places in your home by inviting your spouse into them. If you have too much alone time at work, change your environment or work practices as much as you can so that you’re more transparent to others.
- If you are tempted by walking or driving past certain places that have been problematic for you (massage parlors, adult book stores, movie theaters, parks, etc.), go out of your way to change your route
- If you go to a church that doesn’t preach the Gospel and isn’t helping you grow in Christ and walk in repentance, prayerfully consider finding another church
- If your friends tempt you to sexual sin by the way they talk or their activities, limit or cut off your contact with them. If they usually engage in gateway activities (specific behaviors which lead you into sin), like partying

too heavily, using drugs or alcohol, or watching provocative movies, limit your exposure to your friends by not engaging in those particular activities. Remember your limits.

- As mentioned earlier, if any of your devices cause you to stumble, get rid of them or use them only in an environment where others are around. Believe it or not, you can survive without a cell phone or an ipod!
- Try to change your class or work schedule if extremely long days leave you feeling exhausted and looking for a little relief. By the same token, if your schedule leaves big gaps between activities when you might fall into temptation, try to change your schedule so you don't have so much unstructured time.
- Make an accountability contract with your discipleship-accountability partner which outlines specifically, step-by-step, what you can do when tempted to flee from temptation and sin. Make a copy of that contract on a card or piece of paper and carry it with you. When you are aware you're being tempted, look at the steps you've outlined and do them.
- If you're aware you're being tempted, begin calling the people on your Panic Button list. If you reach someone's voice mail, leave a very specific message: *"This is Roger. It's 6:30, I'm at work and I'm being tempted pretty strongly right now. Pray for me and call me back to ask me how I'm doing."* Keep calling down the list, leaving voice mails, until you're able to reach someone to talk with.
- If you're being tempted strongly, no one is around and you can't reach anyone, make a decision to get out of the environment you're in. Something as simple as going for a long walk, or getting to a public place, or going to a movie, or going to work out can be a diversion and break the cycle of desperation.
- Pray daily that God would open your eyes to see the temptation before you. Pray that when you are tempted, He would make very clear to you the "way of escape" He promises (1 Corinthians 10:13). Pray that He would give you the grace to take that way of escape.

Resources for Accountability and Discipleship

Accountability Contract

An accountability contract is a written and signed agreement between an individual and their accountability partner(s) that provides structure to their accountability relationship. This is helpful for establishing boundaries and specific accountability both a new relationship and in an accountability relationship that has grown from an existing friendship. *The terms of the Accountability Contract are mutually decided by the individual and their accountability partner(s).*

Elements of an accountability contract:

- Number of contacts to be made per week
- Timeframe for the contract
- If telephone contact is part of the contract, who is responsible for initiating those contacts—and when they will be made (day of the week and time)
- Specific questions to be asked related to specific behaviors. For example:
 - o What did you do last Friday night?
 - o Have you looked at any pornography over the last week?
 - o Are you telling me the complete truth?
- A list of resources for the individual to use in times of temptation
 - o At least five friends to call for support / encouragement
 - o Specific steps to take to escape from the temptation or the trigger
 - o Specific steps to take if the individual feels they are falling into sin. For example:
 - Giving their car keys to a neighbor if they feel compelled to drive to a bar on a Saturday night
 - If Internet porn is a problem, giving their computer to a friend to hold for them
 - If buying/renting DVDs or magazines, or going to a bar or club is a problem, giving a friend their credit & debit cards and cash to hold
 - If loneliness is a trigger, make arrangements to stay at a friend's house on certain nights or invite a friend to stay over at their house
- Other means to be used to track accountability (web reporting, copies of phone bills, etc.)
- Consequences if sin is disclosed
- Other people who need to be a part of the disclosure process (i.e.: spouse, pastor)

Figure 1. *A Sample Accountability Contract*

Accountability Contract between John Smith and Mark Jones

Contacts

John will speak with Mark twice per week, beginning June 4, 2007 through December 31, 2007. Mark will call John on his cell phone at work each Monday and Thursday morning at 9:00 am.

Questions

John is to ask Mark the following questions during each conversation:

1. Have you looked at any pornography since we spoke last?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how big of a struggle has your thought life been since we spoke last?
3. Are you telling me the complete truth?

Resource List

Friends to call: *(When Mark feels the need for support/encouragement, he will call these friends. If there is no answer, he'll leave a message and then keep calling the names on the list until he reaches a live person to speak with.)*

Josh North (412-987-6543)
Ken South (412-876-5432)
Mike East (412-765-4321)
Tom West (412-654-3210)
Sam South (412-543-2109)

Specific steps to avoid my triggers:

1. Since passing by adult bookstores is a trigger, Mark will change my route to drive to/from work to avoid the adult bookstore on Route 19.
2. Since feeling overwhelmed at work is a trigger, Mark will make time to take a 15-minute walk each afternoon at work to clear his head.
3. Since Mark fighting with his mother is a trigger, Mark will ask 2 friends to pray before every conversation he has with his mother.

Specific steps to avoid falling into sin:

1. Mark will give his car keys and wallet to his next door neighbor, Alex, by 5:00 pm Saturday and retrieve them from him at 9:00 am Sunday.
2. Mark will leave my laptop at the office each Friday instead of bringing it home.

Other Means to Track Accountability

Mark will install on his laptop and will not disable web reporting software that will email a weekly report of his web activity to John. He will also inform his IT office at work that he will install this same software on his work computer, and John will also receive that report. Mark will also attend a biblical support group on a weekly basis and will make himself accountable to the men and leaders of that group.

Consequences If Mark Falls Into Sin

If Mark falls into sin, he will confess it to John immediately, and to his pastor within three days. Mark will submit himself to any disciplinary action his church elects to pursue. If Mark looks at Internet porn again, he will surrender his laptop to John for one month for the first fall, two months for the second fall, and three months for the third. If Mark visits the adult bookstore again, he must make a donation in the amount of his purchase there to a charity of John's choosing.

Life Arena Exercise for Understanding Idols and Devising Accountability Strategies

How has Jesus made a difference for me in the ways I experience life on a daily basis? This is the question that a Life Arena Worksheet is meant to answer. Quite simply, this worksheet provides a mechanism for an individual to consider who they are in Christ and what that means for them in their daily decision-making. **A Life Arena Worksheet is completed by the individual with the help of their discipleship partner.**

The formula is simple. List 5-10 arenas of life—different aspects of life and experience where doubt, negative feelings and temptation often enter in. For each arena, list 1-3 particular ways in which the individual struggles—first by stating how they feel and then what they do in response to that feeling. Then, the individual and discipleship partner look at Scripture together and find what God says about the key elements of that struggle. Finally, the individual and discipleship partner devise different responses to those same struggles—different decisions made in faith that the individual can turn to in times of temptation. The individual should keep copies of the completed Life Arena Worksheet in various locations where they might be throughout the day (next to their bed, in the kitchen, in the car, in the office) as a ready resource for when doubt or temptation strikes.

Figure 2. *A Sample Life Arena Worksheet*

Arena of Life	What I feel	What I do	What Scripture Says	Different Ways I Can Respond

Figure 3. *A Sample Completed Life Arena Worksheet*

Arena of Life	What I feel	What I do	What Scripture Says	Different Ways I Can Respond
Self-image	I feel unattractive	I look at porn and masturbate to feel better	Zephaniah 3:17 - The Lord chooses to love me and delight over me	When I feel unattractive, I can choose to find acceptance from God rather than from fantasy
Friendships	I feel like no one understands me	I hang out at gay bars to feel connected	Hebrews 4:14-15 - Jesus understands me	When I feel alone and misunderstood, I can call out to Jesus and talk with His people in the church
Finances	I never have enough	I spend a lot on porn and sex	Psalms 104 - God is a generous and loving Provider	When I feel unprovided for, I can believe the promises of God with a grateful heart

Some Technology Resources to Help with Internet Pornography Use

Web filters (*most of these products are fee-based*)

Bsafe Online: www.bsafehome.com/harvestusa/

Family Safe Media: www.familysafemedia.com/software

Internet Use Reporting Software (*some of these products may be free*)

Bsafe Online: www.bsafehome.com/harvestusa/

XXXChurch's X3 Watch monitoring software—available in free and paid versions:

www.xxxchurch.com

Covenant Eyes: www.covenanteyes.com

Web-Based Resources to Help with Discipleship

Online daily discipleship program designed for men struggling with sexual sin (*Free*)

Setting Captives Free, Men of Honor Series: www.settingcaptivesfree.com

Suggested Reading for a More In-Depth Understanding of Accountability, Discipleship and Transparency

How People Change by Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp, Chapter 5: "Change Is a Community Project" pp. 73-90

Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands by Paul Tripp, Chapter 14: "Instilling Identity with Christ and Providing Accountability" pp. 259-276

Seeing With New Eyes by David Powlison, Chapter 3: "Godly Roles and Relationships" pp. 59-74

"Legends of the Fall: When Christians Struggle with Sexual Sin" by Barney Swihart, HARVEST News, Fall 1995

"Living in the Light: A Redemptive Response to Sexual Sin in Your Church" by David White, HARVEST News, Spring 2006

Crossroads: Choosing the Road to Sexual Purity (Workbook and Facilitator's Guide) by David Longacre, available through Turning Point Publishers (www.LivingFree.org)

Love Walked Among Us by Paul Miller, published by Navpress. Use with a study guide developed by Tim Geiger of HARVEST USA (available on request)

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