

MCHA: Accountability=Catalyst Hebrews 4:11-16 FBC Canton Sunday am August 3, 2025

Introduction: **We are attempting to MCHA. We have discussed 7 core habits that will leverage change in your Faithwalk. Romans 1:16-17**

Do not negotiate with yourself. Do the hard things first.

1. *Time in the Word*; He is ahead of you every day. Hearers and doers of the Word!
2. *Time in prayer*, hearing His voice in solitude.
3. *Time in worship*, private awe will lead to public awe.
4. Service. When your Christianity is dull and lifeless pour service into it, and watch it flourish.
5. *Enduring hope* is the strongest evidence of healthy Christianity.
6. *Knowing your purpose* for existence will prolong your days and fulfill your deepest longings.
7. *Reproduce Disciples* who are engaged in these core habits will reproduce others who are doing the same...disciples who are healthy grow.

Last week we looked at how to attain that goal: **Disciple=a learned follower of Jesus.**

1. Immersion in the person of Jesus
2. Engage in the 7 core habits
3. Which leads to core activities...which combined will produce disciples.
4. Trusting that...
 - a. Consistency over time will produce disciples of Jesus.
5. Seeking...Opportunistic pathway, not programming.

The committed look for opportunities, the non-committed look for excuses.

But, last in the series of messages about MCHA is:

The most powerful catalyst of all: Accountability.

Accountability means someone you must answer to for your progress towards discipleship.

You will need to seek someone to hold you accountable to become a disciple of Jesus.

“Let’s define it this way: An accountability relationship is one in which a Christian gives permission to another believer to look into his life for the purpose of questioning, challenging, admonishing, advising, encouraging, and otherwise providing input in a way that will help the individual live

according to biblical principles in a way that honors God. That's almost a Pauline sentence."

This passage is going to tell believers they must give an account to God. V. 13

Hebrews contains 5 warnings to believers reminding us we must give account:

Warning for drifting away

Warning for disobedience.

Warning for stagnation.

Warning for willfully sinning.

Warning for indifference.

Today we are going to look at the 2nd warning...

Disobedience = unbelief flowing from a hardened heart.

The reward for obedience is rest. V. 11

Of salvation by grace not by works.

Of faith-walking towards maturity.

Of kingdom inheritance in the Millennium.

We have to willfully enter that rest area. V. 11

We have to be diligent to pull off the road of disobedience and enter into God's rest for our lives.

Others before us failed, we should learn from their negative example.

I. Reason why we should be held accountable. V. 12-13

a. Word of God is not safe.

i. Pierces.

ii. Discerns.

iii. Sees.

b. We must give account to God; therefore, we intentionally seek accountability with one another.

i. Unintentionally=drifting leads to disobedience leads to stagnation
leads to willfully sin leads to indifference.

c. Intentional accountability=exponential growth.

d. Unintentionality=The slow fade to a loss of rewards. I Corinthians 3:9-15

⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's

building. ¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master

builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

II. We have the greatest help. V. 14-15

a. We have a great High Priest.

- i. Made it from heaven to earth and back.**
- ii. Sympathizes with our weaknesses.**
- iii. Tempted in all ways like we are, but never sinned.**

We never outgrow the need for PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY.

Past successes are no guarantee of FUTURE FAITHFULNESS.

We constantly underestimate the power of our own SINFUL PASSIONS.

We constantly overestimate our ability to handle TEMPTATION.

We naively believe our struggles and temptations are UNIQUE.

III. Therefore, we boldly go to Him. V. 16

a. To the grace of God's throne, not a game.

We are in need, when we are weak He is strong...

- i. Obtain mercy=don't get what we deserve.**
 - 1. Progress, not perfection is the goal.**
- ii. Find grace=unmerited favor.**
 - 1. Extend grace to yourself and others.**

Conclusion: Create accountability:

- 1. Find safe people, not gossips.**
 - a. Safe people are people of the same sex.
- 2. Find a prayer warrior, not a keyboard warrior.**
- 3. Seek God's wisdom, not man's information.**
 - a. Including boundaries.
- 4. Must be close proximity for regularity.**
- 5. Willing to ask hard questions, fighting for honesty.**
- 6. Expects the best of us, even when they see the worst in us.**

The Secret to Spiritual Growth

Author
[Chuck Missler](#)

Over the many decades that I have enjoyed my love affair with the Bible, I have had the marvelous benefit of many great teachers. I've also had the incredible experience of fellowshipping in one of the most famous churches emphasizing expositional teaching from the Word of God. But I would like to let you in on a precious secret.

Unquestionably, the greatest personal spiritual growth I've ever witnessed occurs in the home Bible study.

From those early years on Harbor Island Road in Newport Beach, to those precious times on Mountain Home Road in Silicon Valley, the fellowship of those intimate home groups, where people can interact, ask questions, and hold one another accountable, was the place of growth for all of us—teacher and student.

This was, of course, the way it all started. A group of only a dozen—fishermen and others—along a sea-side in Galilee.

Even later as Paul traveled and planted, it was the intimacy of home fellowships that provided the earliest forums for the Gospel. The declarations in the synagogues and on Mars Hill were but an initiation. Their resulting questions were responded to in small groups in homes and on hillsides.

Groups meeting in houses were the original recipients of the Gospel.¹ Even the famed giving of the Spirit at Pentecost was in a house.² Clearly, the early Christians met in homes. (Check out Acts 2:46; 5:42; 8:3; 9:11; 12:12; 16:40; 18:7; 20:20; 21:8; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; 1 Tim 5:13-14; and Phile 1:2).³

(When you visit the remains of Peter's home in Capernaum, you can trace the gradual additions in its transitions from a modest home to a larger meeting place. There now exists a modern structure suspended over the original ruins so as to not disturb the archaeological site.)

As I travel, both in the United States and especially abroad, I sense that the emergence of home fellowship groups are, again, among the most exciting—and spiritually productive—phenomena on the planet Earth.

Controversial

And these groups take many forms and styles. Some are healthy, intimate fellowships to be encouraged. Some are sponsored and supervised by a local church. (I use the term here in the vernacular sense: actually, the “churches” are meeting in the homes! An elder once reported to his pastor, “They are chewing gum in the sanctuary!” The pastor corrected him, “No, the sanctuaries are chewing gum!”)

In other cases, the gatherings are a response to a lack of teaching, or other opportunities to participate. They can be a symptom of a shortfall in opportunities of various kinds. In many cases they are, tragically, a form of rebellion or rejection of traditional styles of “church.”

Cozy

There are, obviously, many that find the excitement of a “Mega-Church” environment irresistible. The quality of the music and other accoutrements can be very uplifting, and the exposure to a nationally recognized leadership can be truly inspiring.

There are others, however, who find the mere size of such an organization intimidating and seek a more personal opportunity to participate and grow in. Many of the larger organizations also foster and nurture small groups (often called “cells”) during the week to respond to just such needs.

Some pastors tend to discourage the formation of home study groups for a variety of reasons—some valid and some questionable. But like it or not, this is unquestionably the tide of the times. It was the principal phenomenon of the 1st century and it appears to be one in the 21st century as well!

Contrast of Resources

Of course, the early church was constrained geographically by the limitations of foot travel, and also by the lack of printed materials. We generally fail to fully appreciate the role Gutenberg's movable type played in printing technology and its role in relieving the darkness of the medieval period!

The combination of information appliances and the availability of the Internet is also ushering in a comparable revolution in our times. Today I travel with more volumes in my laptop than populate many seminary libraries—and they are in a machine-readable form that I can search in seconds.

(In fact, I carry eight different Bibles, as well as He-brew and Greek concordances, several dictionaries, and commentaries in my phone!)

With the Internet, one can find out practically any-thing about anything, if they know how. The resources now available are truly astonishing, and are improving daily.

One of the many implications of our current environment—in contrast to that of the past—is that technology has favored the decentralization of information and resources, and that has remarkably im-proved the opportunities for “equipping the saints!”

But that still leaves the discoveries, the personal development, and the accountability in face-to-face interactions in small groups, whatever the labels or con-texts.

A Challenge

If you are not presently in a small, weekly Bible study group, I strongly encourage you to find one and give it a try. You may be in for a truly life-changing surprise. There are probably many different styles within your current orbit and one of them is likely to “fit.”

(Some may be geographically within your neighbor-hood. Some may be groups of your professional peers at a greater distance. “Different strokes for different folks.”)

If you can't find one, start one! It's easier—and more rewarding—than you can imagine. And we are here to help you.

One way to begin is to simply pick out a DVD and invite a few friends and neighbors to come over for some refreshments and discussion. Play it and solicit reactions. More often than not, this will initiate a continuing series.

Or pick out a manageable group of studies to explore and discuss together: *Prophecy 101* consists of four one-hour segments that could lend itself to such an initial group.

Many are using our *Learn the Bible in 24 Hours* for a more ambitious series of gatherings. An hour of presentation can easily be followed by some discussion. Work-books are available, with suggested discussion questions, study questions, and research projects.

Or simply take a book of the Bible and explore it together, a chapter a week, and watch what happens! God always rewards the diligent. Again, presentation materials and comprehensive study workbooks are available—see the special prices available for our *small group packages*.

Pray about it. But pray carefully: it is likely to be more life changing than you can possibly imagine.

Notes:

1. Cf. Matthew 10:14; Luke 10:5, 7; Acts 10:22, 30; 16:15, 32.
2. Acts 2:2.
3. The caution in 2 John 1:10, against hospitality to false teachers, is specific to the addressee of this letter: Mary, the mother of our Lord.

F 5. (Hebrews 4:11) Applying the idea and the invitation to enter God's rest through faith.

Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

- a. **Let us therefore:** This phrase, or this idea, appears repeatedly in the Book of Hebrews. A doctrinal truth is presented — in this case, the truth of a remaining rest available by faith — then the truth is applied.
- b. **Be diligent to enter that rest:** The **rest** is there, but God does not force it upon us. We must **enter that rest**. Clearly, the rest is entered by **faith**; but it takes **diligent** faith. This shows us that faith is not **passive**; it takes **diligence** to trust in, rely on, and cling to Jesus and His work for us.
- c. **Lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience:** If we are not **diligent to enter that rest**, the result can be a disaster. We may **fall according to the same example of disobedience**. We may **fall**, even as the children of Israel did in the wilderness.

6. (Hebrews 4:12-13) Found out by God's Word.

For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must* *give* account.

- a. **For the word of God:** God's Word diagnoses the condition of man with a surgeon's precision. It lays open the heart and accurately discerns spiritual health. In the case of those the writer to the Hebrews first addressed, they were too ready to follow in the failure of the children of Israel and to give up strong, living faith.
- b. **Living and powerful:** When the **word of God** exposes our weakness and unbelief like this, it demonstrates its inherent power, sharpness, and accuracy. It bears constant reminding that as we submit ourselves to the **word of God**, we do it for far, far more than intellectual knowledge or to learn Bible facts. We do it for the **ministry of the Word**, because God **meets us** in His Word and the **Holy Spirit** works powerfully through the **word of God**. This spiritual work of God's Word goes far beyond the basic educational value of learning the Bible.

- i. God's word brings true health, fruitfulness, prosperity and success to what we do. ([Psalm 1:3](#))
- ii. The word of God has healing power and the power to deliver from oppression. ([Psalm 107:20](#), [Matthew 8:8](#), [Matthew 8:16](#))
- iii. God's word cleans us. If we take heed according to God's word, our way will be cleansed. ([Psalm 119:9](#), [John 15:3](#), [Ephesians 5:26](#))
- iv. The word of God, hidden in our hearts, keeps us from sin. ([Psalm 119:11](#))
- v. God's word is a counselor. When we delight in God's word, it becomes a rich source of counsel and guidance for us. ([Psalm 119:24](#))
- vi. God's word is a source of strength. ([Psalm 119:28](#))
- vii. God's word imparts life. It is a continual source of life. ([Psalm 119:93](#), [Matthew 4:4](#))
- viii. God's word is a source of illumination and guidance. When God's word comes in, light comes in. It makes the simple wise and understanding. ([Psalm 119:105](#), [Psalm 119:130](#))
- ix. God's word gives peace to those who love it. They are secure, standing in a safe place. ([Psalm 119:165](#))
- x. When the word of God is heard and understood, it bears fruit. ([Matthew 13:23](#))
- xi. The word of God has inherent power and authority against demonic powers. ([Luke 4:36](#))
- xii. Jesus Himself — His eternal person — is described as the [Word](#). When we are into the word of God, we are into Jesus. ([John 1:1](#))
- xiii. Hearing God's Word is essential to eternal life. One cannot pass from death into life unless they hear the word of God. ([John 5:24](#), [James 1:21](#), [1 Peter 1:23](#))
- xiv. Abiding — living in — God's word is evidence of true discipleship. ([John 8:31](#))
- xv. God's word is the means to sanctification. ([John 17:17](#))
- xvi. The Holy Spirit can work with great power as the word of God is preached. ([Acts 10:44](#))
- xvii. Hearing God's word builds faith. ([Romans 10:17](#))
- xviii. Holding fast to the word of God gives assurance of salvation. ([1 Corinthians 15:2](#))
- xix. The faithful handling of the word of God gives the ministers of the word a clear conscience. They know that they did all they could before God. ([2 Corinthians 4:2](#), [Philippians 2:16](#))
- xx. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit. It is equipment for spiritual battle, especially in the idea of an offensive weapon. ([Ephesians 6:17](#))
- xxi. The word of God comes with the power of the Holy Spirit, with "much assurance." ([1 Thessalonians 1:5](#))
- xxii. The word of God works effectively in those who believe. ([1 Thessalonians 2:13](#))
- xxiii. The word of God sanctifies the very food we eat! ([1 Timothy 4:5](#))

xxiv. The word of God is not dead; it is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword. The word of God can probe us like a surgeon's expert scalpel, cutting away what needs to be cut and keeping what needs to be kept. ([Hebrews 4:12](#))

xxv. The word of God is the Christian's source of spiritual growth. ([1 Peter 2:2](#), [1 Corinthians 2:1-5](#))

c. **Is living and powerful**: Understanding this spiritual nature of the Bible, the writer to the Hebrews could confidently write this. The Bible isn't a collection of merely old stories and myths. It has [inherent](#) life and power. The preacher doesn't make the Bible come alive. The Bible [is](#) alive, and gives life to the preacher and anyone else who will receives it with faith.

i. **Powerful** (translated [active](#) in the KJV) reminds us that something may be [alive](#), yet [dormant](#). But God's word is both [living](#) and [powerful](#), in the sense of being [active](#).

d. **Sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow**: God's word reaches us with surprising precision, and the Holy Spirit empowers the ministry of the word to work deeply in our hearts.

i. Often people wonder how a preacher's message can be [so relevant](#) to their life. They sometimes honestly wonder if the preacher has secret information about their life. But it isn't necessarily the preacher at all. It is the sharpness of the Word of God, delivering the message in just the right place.

ii. "A sword with two edges has no blunt side: it cuts both this way and that. The revelation of God given us in Holy Scripture is edge all over. It is alive in every part, and in every part keen to cut the conscience, and wound the heart. Depend upon it, there is not a superfluous verse in the Bible, nor a chapter which is useless." (Spurgeon)

iii. "While it has an edge like a sword, it has also a point like a rapier, 'Piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit.' The difficulty with some men's hearts is to get at them. In fact, there is no spiritually penetrating the heart of any natural man except by this piercing instrument, the Word of God. But the rapier of revelation will go through anything." (Spurgeon)

e. **Even to the division of soul and spirit**: The writer to the Hebrews makes a distinction between [soul](#) and [spirit](#), indicating that a [division](#) can be made between them.

i. Certainly, there is [some](#) distinction between [soul](#) and [spirit](#). "The New Testament use of [pneuma](#) for the human spirit focuses on the spiritual aspect of man, [i.e.](#) his life in relation to God, whereas [psyche](#) refers to man's life irrespective of his spiritual experience, [i.e.](#) his life in relation to himself, his emotions and thought. There is a strong antithesis between the two in the theology of Paul." (Guthrie)

ii. But the stress of this passage isn't to spell out a theology of the difference between **soul** and **spirit**. "Attempts to explain [these terms] on any psychological basis are futile. The form of expression is poetical, and signifies that the word penetrates to the inmost recesses of our spiritual being as a sword cuts through the joints and marrow of the body." (Vincent)

iii. However, it is important to understand what the Bible means with the terms **soul and spirit**. The Bible tells us that people have an "inner" and an "outer" nature ([Genesis 2:7](#), [2 Corinthians 4:16](#)). The inner man is described by both the terms **spirit** ([Acts 7:59](#), [Matthew 26:41](#), [John 4:23-24](#)) and **soul** ([1 Peter 2:11](#), [Hebrews 6:19](#), [Hebrews 10:39](#)). These two terms are often used the same way, as a general reference to the inner man. But this is not always the case. Sometimes a distinction is made between **soul and spirit**. We can say that **soul** seems to focus more on *individuality* regarding the inner life (often defined as *the mind, the will, and the emotions*). The **spirit** seems to focus more on supernatural contact and power in the inner life.

iv. That there is *some* distinction between **soul and spirit** is obvious in passages like this ([Hebrews 4:12](#)) and [1 Thessalonians 5:23](#). Passages like [Job 7:11](#) and [Isaiah 26:9](#) show that the terms are *sometimes* both used to generally refer to the inner man.

v. Because the soul and spirit both have reference to the "inner man," they are easily confused. Often an experience intended to build up the **spirit** only "blesses" the **soul**. There is nothing wrong with "soulish" excitement and blessing, but there is nothing in it that builds us up spiritually. This is why many Christians go from one exciting experience to another but never really grow **spirit**ually — the ministry they receive is "**soul**ish." This is why the Word of God is so powerful and precise; it can pierce **even to the division of soul and spirit**, which isn't easy to do.

vi. "When the **soul** is thus distinguished from the **spirit**, by the former is meant that *inferior faculty* by which we *think of* and *desire* what concerns our *present being* and *welfare*.

By **spirit** is meant a *superior power* by which we *prefer future things* to *present*." (Clarke)

vii. The terms **flesh** ([Colossians 2:5](#), [Matthew 26:41](#), [Galatians 5:16-17](#)) and **body** ([Romans 6:6](#), [Romans 8:13](#), [1 Corinthians 6:13](#) and [6:19-20](#)) describe the **outer** man. The terms **flesh** and **body** also seem to include aspects of our person such as the senses and habits. When we allow our flesh to direct our thoughts and actions, it ends in spiritual ruin. God wants us to be directed by the **spirit**, not by the **flesh**, or even the **soul**.

f. **All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account**: There is no one hidden before God. He sees our heart and knows how to touch it, and we must **give account** for how we respond to His touch.

i. **Naked** reminds us of the way God saw through Adam's feeble hiding. God sees through our hiding the same way.

- ii. **Open** translates the ancient Greek word *trachelizo*, used only here in the New Testament. It was used of wrestlers who had a hold that involved gripping the neck and was so powerful that it brought victory. So the word can mean “to prostrate” or “to overthrow,” but many scholars do adopt the simply meaning of “open” — in the sense of laying an opponent open and overcome.
- iii. Remember the context. The writer to the Hebrews trusts that he has pierced the hearts of his audience, who thought about “giving up” on Jesus. In this passage, he makes it clear that they can’t give up on Jesus and keep it “hidden” from God. The word of God discovers and exposes their condition.

B. Jesus our High Priest.

1. (Hebrews 4:14) Seeing Jesus, our great High Priest.

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession.

- a. **Seeing then that we have a great High Priest:** The idea that Jesus is our **High Priest** was mentioned before (Hebrews 2:17 and Hebrews 3:1). But now the idea will be developed more extensively.
- b. **Seeing then:** The writer to the Hebrews calls attention to the specific, unique character of Jesus as our **High Priest**.

- No other High Priest was called **great**.
- No other **High Priest... passed through the heavens**.
- No other **High Priest** is the **Son of God**.

- c. **Let us hold fast our confession:** It is wonderful to know we have a **High Priest**, and how unique and glorious He is. It is even greater to know He **passed through the heavens**, that He ascended into heaven, and now ministers there for our sake. Both these truths should encourage us to **hold fast our confession**.

2. (Hebrews 4:15) Our High Priest can sympathize with us.

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin.

- a. **We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize:** Thus far the writer to the Hebrews was careful to document both the deity of Jesus (Hebrews 1:4-14), while careful to also remember His compassionate humanity (Hebrews 2:5-18). It means that Jesus, God the Son, enthroned in heaven, our **High Priest**, can **sympathize with our weaknesses**.

- i. To the ancient Greeks, the primary attribute of God was *apatheia*, the essential *inability* to feel anything at all. Jesus isn’t like that. He knows and He feels what we go through. The ancient Greek word translated **sympathize** literally means “to suffer along with.”

ii. What makes the difference is that Jesus added humanity to His deity, and lived among us. When you have been there, it makes all the difference. We might hear of some tragedy at a high school, and feel a measure of sorrow. But it is nothing like the pain we would feel if it were the high school we attended.

b. **But was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin**: Jesus knows what it is like to be **tempted** and to battle against sin, though He was never stained by sin. “His sinlessness was, at least in part, an earned sinlessness as he gained victory after victory in the constant battle with temptation that life in this world entails.” (Morris)

i. Sometimes we think that because Jesus is God, He could never know temptation the way we do. In part, this is true: Jesus faced temptation much more severely than we ever have or ever will. The Sinless One knows temptation in ways we don't, because only the one who never gives into temptation knows the full strength of temptation. It is true that Jesus never faced temptation in an **inner** sense the way we do, because there was never a sinful nature pulling Him to sin from the **inside**. But He knew the strength and fury of **external** temptation in a way and to a degree that we can never know. He knows what we go through and He has faced worse.

ii. “Yet He endured triumphantly every form of testing that man could endure, without any weakening of His faith in God or any relaxation of His obedience to Him. Such endurance involves more, not less, than ordinary human suffering.” (Bruce)

c. **Sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted**: Jesus can sympathize with our **weakness** and our **temptation**, but He cannot sympathize with our **sin**. We should not think that this makes Jesus less sympathetic to us, and that He could understand us better if He had sinned Himself.

i. “But listen to me; do not imagine that if the Lord Jesus had sinned he would have been any more tender toward you; for **sin is always of a hardening nature**. If the Christ of God could have sinned, he would have lost the perfection of his sympathetic nature.” (Spurgeon)

3. **(Hebrews 4:16) An invitation: come to the throne of grace.**

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

a. **Let us therefore come boldly**: Because we have a High Priest who is both omnipotent and compassionate, we can **come boldly** to His throne. Discouraging us from this access is a central strategy of Satan. The devil sometimes wants us to consider Jesus as unapproachable — perhaps encouraging us to come by Mary or by the saints instead of Jesus. Sometimes the

devil wants us to think of Jesus as being powerless to help, not as one who sits on a throne in heaven.

i. Boldly does not mean proudly, arrogantly, or with presumption.

- Boldly means we may come *constantly*.
- Boldly means we may come *without reservation*.
- Boldly means we can come freely, *without fancy words*.
- Boldly means we can come with *confidence*.
- Boldly means we should come with *persistence*.

b. **The throne of grace**: The throne of God is a **throne of grace**. When we come, we may **obtain mercy** (this is *not getting* what we deserve) **and find grace** (this is *getting* what we don't deserve) in our **time of need**.

i. Ancient Jewish Rabbis taught that God had two thrones, one of mercy and one of judgment. They said this because they knew that God was both merciful and just, but they could not reconcile these two attributes of God. They thought that perhaps God had two thrones to display the two aspects of His character. On one throne He showed judgment and on the other throne mercy. But here, in light of the finished work of Jesus, we see mercy and judgment reconciled into one **throne of grace**.

ii. Remember that grace does not *ignore* God's justice; it operates in *fulfillment* of God's justice, in light of the cross.

c. **Find grace to help in time of need**: Thankfully, God provides **help** in our time of need. No request is too small, because He wants us to *be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer... let your requests be made known to God*. ([Philippians 4:6](#))

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Updated: August 2022

Chapter 4: Chuck Smith

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it ([Hbr 4:1](#)).

As you look at your own heart tonight, is it at rest? Have you entered into the rest of God? Do you have that deep peace of Christ tonight filling your mind, your heart, and your life? Or is there anxiety, strife, turmoil, unrest? What is the condition of your heart tonight? Let us beware, let us be careful. God has given us the promise of rest. Let's take heed that we enter into that rest, for it is very possible that even though God has a rest and is desiring you to come into that rest, it is possible that you don't know or experience that rest that God would have you to know and experience in Christ. Jesus said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." ([Matthew 11:28-30](#)). Have you found that rest for your soul? Are you resting in Jesus tonight? That's the issue, for there are many who are not. There are many Christians who do not know that rest in Christ, but are still laboring under a works ethic in order to be pleasing unto God. Or just who through unbelief have not made that total commitment of their life and the affairs of their life unto Him, knowing that He is faithful and will keep that which I've committed, but they haven't made that commitment. And thus, they do not know the rest

For unto us was the good news preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, because it wasn't mixed with faith in them that heard it ([Hbr 4:2](#)).

God has promised a rest. I've got to believe that. I enter into it by faith. If I don't by faith enter into it then I will remain in my mental turmoil and strife. Do you believe that God wants you to experience His rest? Do you believe that God is in control of your life? Do you believe that God loves you? If you believe these things then you have entered into that rest, because after all, why should I worry, God is in control. God will take care of it. The way we sometimes act, you would think that God has abdicated the throne, that He wasn't in control any more. But God is in control if you have surrendered and submitted your life to Him. You have to just believe Him and trust Him knowing that He is able to take care of you.

For we which have believed do enter into the rest ([Hbr 4:3](#)),

And that is the key to entering into the rest. It is the rest that can only come through faith.

Now, a lot of people say, "But it's so hard to rest in faith. It would be a lot easier to rest if God would just show me what He is doing. If God would just explain to me why He has allowed this to happen to me and what He is going to work out of it, the good that is going to come from it. If I could just see that, then I could probably rest more easily. It's hard to rest in faith." You may find it hard to rest in faith, but the only place you'll ever rest is in faith. You cannot rest in your works, in your skills, in your efforts. Never will you find rest until you come to that rest of faith. "Lord, I've committed it completely unto You. I can't do anything about it, Lord. I have no control over these circumstances, Lord. I turn it over to You and I place it in Your hands, God, and I'm just going to trust You and I'm going to watch and see what You do, knowing that You've promised that You will work. I'm just going to believe You, Lord, to just work out a perfect plan in my life and in the circumstances by which I am surrounded." And so, I rest. And in complete commitment is complete rest, that total commitment and abandonment to God is the place of perfect peace. And God will keep you in perfect peace if your mind is stayed on Him.

For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world ([Heb 4:3](#)).

Now, as far as the works are concerned, they have been wrought by God. All I am to do is to believe the work of God. "What must we do," they said to Jesus, "to do the work of God?" And Jesus said, "This is the work of God: believe on Him who He has sent." ([John 6:28-29](#)). It is a finished work that Christ has accomplished for us. You cannot add one thing to your salvation. You cannot add one thing to your acceptance by God. He has accepted you in and through the finished work of Jesus Christ. You cannot add to your righteousness. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, "Oh, foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, that you should so soon turn from the truth? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now going to be made perfect in the flesh?" ([Galatians 3:1-3](#))

As the children of Israel began a spiritual relationship with God, being brought out of Egypt by the power of God, now they thought that by their own efforts they were going to have to go in and take the land. And thinking that by their own works they had to take the land, they looked at the giants and they looked at the problems and they said, "We can't do it." Thus, they failed to enter into the rest.

There are so many Christians delivered miraculously by the power of God's Spirit from the life of sin. And now God holds before them this full rich life in the Spirit, walking in the Spirit, walking after the Spirit, walking in a life of complete obedience unto God, and they say, "Oh, I could never do that. That's beyond my capacity. I can't be that good." Having begun in the Spirit, somehow they think that God has said, "All right, you see what you can do from here on." They even quote you that verse of scripture, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" ([Philippians 2:12](#)). And oh how that scripture used to shake me up. I had that preached to me so long. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," but they never completed the scripture, "for it is God which works in you both to

will and to do of His good pleasure." Don't quote a half a verse. You don't have the whole truth in half a verse. When you finish the verse, it makes all the difference in the world. It takes it off me and puts it on Him. It takes it off of my strength and puts it on His, my abilities and it puts it on His. It is God who is working in me, both to will and to do. I don't have it. I can't do it. But God is able to do for me what I can't do for myself.

So, I am believing and trusting God to do it. I am resting in God, and as I rest in God, I have that glorious peace within. Hey! I'm not perfect, not by a long shot, but I'm on the way. God is working. He is able to do what I can't do for myself. Having begun in the Spirit, I must remain in the Spirit. Walking after the Spirit, yielding to the Spirit that God might work. But in the meantime, I am resting. So I fail, so I rest. God is able to make me to stand. He is able to keep me from falling. I am believing Him and trusting Him. Resting in Him and in His finished work.

For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all of his works. And in this place again, if they shall enter into my rest ([Hbr 4:4-5](#)).

Now, God rested on the seventh day from all of His works, that is, His creative works, because the creation was finished. Once the creation was finished there was no longer the necessity for creative works, so God rested from His creative works on the seventh day. Now, God established, then, the Sabbath Day. He said, "Six days shalt thou labor and do thy work, and the seventh day is the day of rest" ([Exodus 23:12](#)), because the Lord rested on the Sabbath day.

Now this Sabbath day rest that was established in the law by Moses was a type of the rest that the believer is to experience in Jesus Christ. The problem is they made a work out of the Sabbath day rest, and you ought to see how they work at it today. It's a real task to keep that Sabbath day rest. And it really takes working at it. They've made all kinds of rules and regulations concerning the Sabbath day rest. "Thou shalt not bear any burden on the Sabbath day." What constitutes bearing a burden? Well, false teeth are something that you carry, so you can't wear your false teeth on the Sabbath day. I suppose false eyelashes would fall into the same category, but the rabbis really didn't have to deal with them. You're not to use money on the Sabbath day to buy or sell, but a nice little convenience--you can use a credit card. You're not paying for it today. There is some kind of mental imbalance with credit cards where you think you are not paying. It sure is a lot easier to shove the card across the counter than it is the bucks, isn't it? Somehow you got the feeling that you're not paying for it. It's just a card.

But that Sabbath day was only a shadow of the rest that the people of God should experience in Jesus Christ. The substance is of Christ. "Therefore let no man judge you in respect to new moon, Sabbath days and so forth, which all were a shadow of things to come, but the substance is Jesus" ([Colossians 2:16-17](#)).

There are those today who would judge us because of the Sabbath day. There are those that would even introduce the Sabbath day worship to the church, and introduce the laws of the worship on the

Sabbath day to the church. But if you are going to seek to be justified by the law, you better also realize the curse that is involved with it, because it says, "Cursed is every man who continues not in the whole law to do all of the things that are written therein" ([Galatians 3:10](#)).

Now one of the things on the Sabbath that you could not do was kindle a fire. The minute you turned the ignition switch on in your car you are kindling a fire. That little spark that ignites the fuel in the cylinder, you're kindling a fire. You can't turn on a light switch. It's kindling a fire within the bulb.

Seeing therefore it remains that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached did not enter in because of unbelief: again, he limited a certain day, saying to David, Today ([Hbr 4:6-7](#)),

Notice through the text there has been today, today, today, today, today, some five times or so. The emphasis is upon today. So he limited it to a certain day. Through David in [Psalm 95](#), he said, "Today." And this was a long time after their failure in the wilderness. They had still not entered into the rest. God was still speaking of the day that they could, long after their failures.

after so long a time; it says, Today if you will hear his voice, don't harden your hearts ([Hbr 4:7](#)).

So David was pleading with the people of his day. Today, hear God's voice. Don't harden your hearts. Don't follow the example of those in the wilderness.

For if Jesus ([Hbr 4:8](#))

Now this is Joshua. It is the Greek translation of Joshua and it is a reference to Joshua who took over after Moses' death. Again, one of their great leaders.

If [Joshua] had given them rest, then would he not have afterward have spoken of another day [in which they could enter into that rest] ([Hbr 4:8](#)).

Joshua, who brought them into the land, did not bring them into the rest. And that is an interesting thing. There are even those that have come into the Land of Promise who still haven't entered into the rest, the rest that God wants you to experience as His child. The rest in the completed finished work of Jesus Christ for our righteous standing before God. "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name." I am resting in Him. He has done the work of salvation for me. He paid the price for my sins. He is the one who has made me righteous by my faith and trust in Him. It is a completed, finished work. There is nothing that I can add to it to compliment it. It is once and for all accomplished for me by Him.

Now, I have to by faith believe that, and enter into the rest. If I don't believe it, I can go on in my efforts, in my struggles, in my strivings, in my endeavors, and in all of these works that I seek to do in my fervid desire and activity to try to be better or to improve my relationship with God by my efforts. Or I can just simply believe that Jesus did it all and enter into the rest of faith.

"For if Joshua had given them rest then he wouldn't have spoken of another day."

There remains therefore a rest to the people of God ([Hbr 4:9](#)).

There is a place of rest for God's people.

For he that is entered into his rest, he also has ceased from his own works, as God did from his ([Hbr 4:10](#)).

Once the work was finished, God ceased. He rested the seventh day. Once the work of redemption was finished by Jesus Christ, God rested as far as man's redemption is concerned. Jesus said, "I came to do the will of Father, and to finish His work," ([John 4:34](#)) the work of redemption for man. And on the cross, it was finished. He cried, "It is finished." Man's redemption is complete. Now, if we have entered into His rest and we have ceased from our own works, even as God did from His, there is nothing that God will do now to save you more than what He has already done in providing the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. And now it is up to you to believe and to accept that which God has provided, the perfect and complete work of salvation and acceptance before God, and our endeavor and labor to be accepted by God. We are accepted in Christ. As Paul said, one of the blessings is we are accepted in the beloved.

Let us labor therefore ([Hbr 4:11](#))

And it sounds like a contradiction in terms.

Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest ([Hbr 4:11](#)),

Hey, there is a rest. Let us labor to enter into it. Let's work at it entering into it, because Satan is going to challenge you at every step. "You can't do it. You can't live that kind of a life. You can't live a life of purity and righteousness and holiness." That's His work in me as I believe and trust in Him. He is able to do for me what I can't do for myself. I must believe and trust in Him to do it. No, I can't myself, but through Him I can. I can be all that God would have me to be through the work of Jesus Christ within my heart and life. "Therefore let us labor." I have to really work at it because Satan is constantly challenging my position of faith and trust in Jesus. Satan would come along and bring turmoil again into my heart. He would keep me in a state of restlessness, as he would encourage me in my endeavors and works, because he knows that I will fail. Anything I try in my flesh is going to fail. I think that Satan is behind the incentives for every fleshly endeavor, because he knows that all you can do in your flesh is fail, and then you get discouraged and upset and you lose your rest and peace in Christ. Oh, how important that we labor to enter into that rest.

lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief ([Hbr 4:11](#)).

As they did in the Old Testament. Because they were trusting in themselves, in their power to whip the giants, and they knew they couldn't. And so through unbelief they fell.

For the word of God is alive, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart ([Hbr 4:12](#)).

God's Word. Again, there is a scripture that people so often misquote, and that is the scripture, "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life" ([II Corinthians 3:6](#)). And people in misquoting that use that to refer to just the scripture, the teaching of the scriptures. They say, "Oh, but the letter killeth." Not so. He was talking in context of the letter of the law trying to be righteous by your works that will kill you. If you try to live under the law, that will kill you. It will condemn you to death every time. The letter kills. The letter of the law will wipe you out every time. But the Spirit gives life. But here it declares that the Word of God is alive. It is powerful. It's sharper than a two-edged sword, and as such, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit.

There is a lot of worship that is purely psychic and touches our emotions and is soulish, but not necessarily spiritual. It doesn't really touch our spirit. The liturgy, the incense, the candles, the robes, the chants, quite an experience. As you sit there, you are entranced by the beauty of the liturgy, and you go away with the sense of having worshipped God. But if the Word of God was not really taught, all you experienced was a soulish experience. It didn't really feed your spirit. It's only the Word of God that is able to feed the spirit of man. You don't grow spiritually in psychic or emotional experiences. You grow spiritually through the Word of God. In the same token in the Pentecostal services, with the highly emotionally-charged meetings, where when as the people leave they declare the blessedness of the service, "The preacher didn't even get a chance to preach. The Spirit came down and we were all so blessed tonight." It seems that the pinnacle of the spiritual experience to them is when the preacher doesn't get a chance to preach. "God intervened tonight." They've had a very powerful, emotional experience, but not necessarily a spiritual experience.

For it is the Word of God that is able to divide between the soul and the spirit. That's something that is hard for us to divide. Man's soul and spirit are so intertwined, there is such a crossover network between the two, that it's really hard for us to discern when it has really touched me spiritually or just touched me in a psychic way, in an emotional way. In fact, the division is so fine that it is only the Word of God that can make that distinction between that which is soulish and that which is spiritual.

Then, "it is a discerner of the thoughts and the intents of the heart." I'm going to trust in the finished work of Jesus, or I'm going to trust in my own works and my own efforts to finish this work of redemption in me, and perfection. If I'm trusting in my own works, I can't rest, because I'm not certain of my own works, of what motive they really are. Some things that we do, that apparently on the outward side have a very marvelous appearance. It looks so good. If our hearts were honestly examined, the reason why I did those things was in order that I might look good, and so I made sure that everybody was watching when I did it. I started whistling "Jesus Loves Me" real loud so that everybody would turn, and then I did my little thing and they said, "Oh my, isn't that marvelous." So

the motivation behind it is often wrong. The motivation behind my works is so often wrong. "Take heed," Jesus said, "that you do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of men" ([Matthew 6:1](#)). God help us, that so often is so. Behind my righteous acts is that desire to be seen of men that I might be known by men as a righteous person. Now be careful of that, Jesus said, take heed that this doesn't happen to you. For we are told that one day we are all going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the things that we have done while in our bodies, whether they be good or evil. And that our works are going to be judged of what manner or sort they are.

Now the judgment of our works when we stand before the Lord and our works are brought before Him, those works are going to be judged, but they're going to be judged not as to what I did or didn't do, but what motivated me to do it. And because that is the judgment, the motivation that prompted the work, a lot of those good things that we have done are going to be tossed out. My works will be judged by fire. If any of them remain, I will be rewarded for them.

As a child of God, I do work. So many times people take these things of the New Testament as Peter said, the writings of Paul, and they wrest them to their own destruction. As Paul points out that by works of righteousness shall no man be justified in the sight of God. And points out the necessity of resting in the finished work of Jesus. People say, "Well, then there is no sense in doing anything because, after all, it doesn't count anyhow or it doesn't matter." Not so.

I do many works, but the motive behind them is my love for Jesus Christ. I do not look to my works to make me righteous. I do not look to my works to make me accepted. I do not look to my works and point to my works when I come before God and say, "Lord, I've done this and that and the other." My works are just the response of my own heart for all that God has done for me. I don't look for any credit for the work that I have done. It's just the natural response of my heart in understanding all that God has done for me. I want to do something for God. I long to do something for God.

As David said in [Psalm 116](#), "What shall I render unto the Lord for all of His benefits unto me?" When I think of all of these things that God has done for me, my spirit cries out, what can I give to God? Look how much God has given to me. Look how much God has done for me. What can I give to God to show my appreciation, my thankfulness for all of these benefits and blessings that God has bestowed upon my life. And just to show my appreciation and love, I get out and do what I can just to show God I love Him and I appreciate all that He has done.

But I don't turn then and say, "Well, God, look. You ought to love me, because look what I have done for You. God, You ought to bless me, because look what I have done for You." No. What I have done I have done because God has blessed me. He has blessed me so much I want to respond to Him. Be careful that you don't try to put God in the respondent position. "Let us all praise the Lord tonight, because the Lord inhabits the praises of His people and we want to be blessed of God tonight. So let's all just lift up our hands and praise the Lord, so that God will bless us." You see, you initiate and

let God respond. God will surely respond if you initiate. Not so. What kind of a real praise is that if I'm only praising with a selfish motive of getting blessed? Is that true praise unto God, or is that just something selfish? I want a blessing so I'm going to praise Him. No.

The true praise is that which rises spontaneously from my heart unto God when I realize how good He has been to me and His blessings upon me. "Oh God, You are so good. I love you, Lord. I know I don't deserve anything. Well, I know that I do deserve something, but not these blessings. I deserve a swift kick. And yet, look what God has done for me. Oh God, You're so good. I love you, Lord!" And just that which rises from my heart in spontaneous response to God. God is the initiator. God so loved that He gave, and now I respond to that gift. God has blessed me. I respond to those blessings.

There is no work that I can offer to God that will cause God to respond to me. God is the initiator always. I am the responder. And yet, for so many years I fasted in order that God might work in my life. You know, I want God to respond to me. And so my fasting was works. I haven't fasted for a long time. There may be a day I'll go back to it again, but when I do, it will be on an entirely different basis than what it was in my early years, for my motives were wrong. I read all of these books about fasting and how you can get God to really work. "All you have to do is fast." And they even had the thing all worked out in five days this will happen, in ten days this will happen, in fifteen days... man, the whole thing was mapped out, and so you know, "How much do you want? This is how long it takes." God is the initiator. Let's respond to His love.

My works are to be judged and the Word of God is the discernor of the thoughts and the intents of the heart. What chance do I have when my judgment will be the motivation behind the work, not the work itself? As they said to Jesus in that day, "Lord, Lord, open unto us. Have we not prophesied in thy name and cast out devils and done many mighty works?" And Jesus said, "I never knew you; depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity" ([Matthew 7:22-23](#)). Oh yes, they did all of these things, but they did them in such a way that they brought glory and fame unto themselves. They merchandised the things of God. They enriched their own pockets. Yet, they come to God in that day and tried to say, "Lord, we healed the sick and we cast out devils and we did all of these marvelous things." Yes, you did them for your own glory. You did them in such a way as you brought glory and wealth and all to yourself.

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do ([Hbr 4:13](#)).

You're not going to hide anything from God. Your life is an open book to Him. There is not one single thought that you have ever thought that He doesn't know. You can't hide from God. David said to God, "You know my thoughts before I think them." Everything is open. Everything is naked before Him. God knows everything I do and He knows why I do it. That's why I don't want to depend upon

my works. I want to depend upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. I'm glad that I can have my standing in His finished work, not my efforts or my works.

When I was a little kid, the little neighbor boy and I were out in our clubhouse. We were putting flashlight batteries under our T-shirts pretending we were girls. I was about four years old, I think. My mother came out and caught me. I said, "How did you know that I was doing that?" She said, "I was ironing and the Lord told me." Man, all through my life I had that. I had a mother who was a godly woman who the Lord talked to her about me. He squealed on me all the way. I didn't get by with anything. And believe me, I came to the realization as I was growing up, I was afraid to do anything because I knew the Lord would tell my Mom and I would be in trouble. You don't hide anything from God. I came to that consciousness very early in life. You don't hide anything from God. How foolish to even try.

"Let us consider the Apostle and the High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus" ([Hebrews 3:1](#)).
Verse 14:

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession ([Hbr 4:14](#)).

Seeing that we have this great high priest, not entered into the Holy of Holies, which was only a model of heaven, but has entered into heaven itself for us. This great high priest, let us hold fast to this new confession in Christ, that confession of Christ.

For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our weaknesses; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin ([Hbr 4:15](#)).

We have in Christ a glorious high priest. He has passed into heaven for me to make intercession for me. But He is a sympathetic high priest because He understands my weakness, because He became a man and experienced the temptations that man experiences. He knows my problems. He knows my weaknesses, and thus, He can empathize with me. Oh, what a glorious high priest that we have.

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace ([Hbr 4:16](#)),

How can I ever come boldly to the throne of grace except through Jesus Christ? Dare you come boldly to the throne of grace asking God to accept your works or to reward you for what you have done? "Lord, look what I've done for You this week. Now I'd like to receive my rewards today." No, I'll tell you, I can only come to God through Jesus Christ. I don't dare come to God on my own. But through Him I come boldly, because my great High Priest understands my weaknesses. He was tempted just like I am. That's why He is able to help me in my time of temptation.

So, I come boldly to the throne of grace, not to the justice bar of God to receive the works' rewards. I don't come to the paymaster to get my pay for the work I've done, but I come to the throne of grace

that I might obtain mercy and find grace to help me in my time of need ([Hbr 4:16](#)).

And so I approach God on the basis of His grace and mercy towards me, not on the basis of my works and my deserving. And because I approach God on the basis of His goodness and His grace towards me, I can come boldly, and I can always receive the help that I need. I can find grace to help me in the time of my need, because I'm coming on the basis of God's invitation to me as His child.

Now, in our minds, because we hold in our minds this concept of rewards for goodness and for good works that we carry from childhood. If you are good today you can have ice cream for dessert tonight. So instilled in me from a child is this reward for goodness, and punishment for badness. No ice cream for you tonight; you've been bad today. Even Santa Claus makes out the list and checks it twice, and you're going to get a bundle of sticks because you've been naughty.

It's hard for us to think in the terms of grace. But it's important that we come to God by virtue of His grace and not by virtue of our merit, our goodness, or our works. Because if I come by virtue of my goodness, then most of the time I can't come. If I come by the virtue of God's grace, I can come any time. If I come on the virtue of my deserving, then I'll get very little because I don't deserve very much. But if I come on the basis of His grace, it's wide open. Everything, anything I might need it's there, richly, freely bestowed upon me because God loves me. He is a merciful, gracious, loving, compassionate God who knows my needs and my weaknesses and sympathizes and empathizes with me and for me.

So, how are you going to approach God? On the basis of your goodness, your efforts, your work, or on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ?

So here I am resting tonight, because I'm not resting in myself, in my righteousness, but I'm resting in His finished work for me. "Here I come tonight, God, not on the basis of I've had a good week and everything has been flowing well, but I'm coming on the basis that You love me, and You've invited me to come to receive of Your grace through Jesus. I just believe You, Lord, to help me, though I don't deserve it, to bless me, though I'm really not worthy of it. But just because You are a God of love and a God who is so gracious and merciful. Lord, bless me now."

And I believe and trust God to bless me so He does, because the blessings are always predicated upon the faith and believing Him to do so. The lack of blessing does not come from the lack of your devotions, but your lack of faith. That's hard for us to grasp, isn't it? "Oh, I haven't been faithful in my devotions this week, I really shouldn't ask God to help me. I really failed Him again. There is no use asking Him, because I know He won't help me, because I just did such a miserable thing this week. I just know that I dare not ask Him for anything. I know He won't do it. I just know." And you know what? He won't if you have that attitude, if you don't believe Him to. See, the lack of blessing isn't the lack of devotion, it's the lack of faith, believing God to do it.

Many times my failures get in the way of my faith, because I am looking to my works rather than to His finished work. If God can help us to grasp this concept, then your life is going to rest and God is going to bless you. And as a result of the blessings of God, you're going to be responding to God in continual praise and thanksgiving and awe and wonder at all God has done for you. He is so great and so merciful and so marvelous that you're just going to be constantly rejoicing and praising Him. "Oh God, You're so good! I love you. You are so marvelous to me." And God will continue to bless and bless and bless and bring you into that rest that He has for His people.

God, help us tonight, we pray, to believe Your Word and to trust in Your Word and to believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ our great High Priest, who has made the way for us to come boldly to the throne of grace to receive the mercy and grace in our times of need. Oh Lord, how thankful we are for Your grace towards us and Your goodness and Your mercy that endures forever. How thankful we are for Jesus Christ our Lord, our Savior, our great High Priest who has finished the work of our redemption so that we rest in His finished work. Lord, I'm saved because I believe in Jesus as my Savior. And because I am saved, I surrender my life to You as my Lord, that I might obey Thee and do whatever You want me to do. That I might be a servant that is pleasing in the eyes of his Master, because I love You, Lord, because You first loved me. Amen.

Now may the Lord be with you to bless you this week, to pour out upon your life the riches of His love and His grace and His mercy towards you through Christ Jesus our Lord. And may you abound and be rich in all things in Christ.

February 28, 2013

Why Accountability Matters



Article by
Trillia Newbell
Guest Contributor

We call it accountability. Beginning in 2001 I had the privilege each and every Friday afternoon to meet with two women for mutual encouragement and prayer. We did this for several years and remain accountable to each other to this day. The reasons we started meeting were simple: we were young Christians wanting encouragement in our walk with God. We wanted to build a deeper, more meaningful friendship with a few women. And we were girls and loved any excuse to hang out and eat together.

It was a real friendship. The purpose of our meeting was simple but the benefits were endless and life-changing.

For Our Protection

We know that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. When I first became a Christian, I freely confessed my sin because I was acutely aware of God's grace and forgiveness. I knew the depths of my heart and what it meant to be forgiven much. But then came knowledge, which coupled with strides in godliness, can lead to pride ([1 Corinthians 8:1](#)). As I grew I began to subtly believe I should "know better" than to sin — as if the temptation to anger or envy were beyond me. Accountability was a good reminder that it was okay to be needy for God's grace. It reminded me that I am a sinner and that, because of Jesus, God is faithful to forgive ([1 John 1:8-10](#)).

Consistent accountability has been a means of God's protection in my life. To this day, though I'm further along in my walk than I was a decade ago, I do not believe I'm incapable of grievous sin ([1 Corinthians 10:12](#)). I am a new creation, and I have the Spirit's power, but it's no longer a surprise that when I want to do good, evil is close at hand ([Romans 7:21](#)). Understanding that we are all batting on the same team (all have sinned) means we can freely share with these close, trusted friends. Accountability allows us to confess patterns of temptation and in so doing we are restrained from actual transgression.

Five Characteristics of Life-Giving Accountability

The point behind accountability isn't just to share about sin and hear the hard words of rebuke. Though the wounds of a friend are a sign of their faithfulness, accountability should also be a time to build each other up and encourage each other toward God's goodness and grace found in the cross of Christ. My friends and I reminded each other who we were in Christ: accepted completely, daughters of the Most High, and forgiven. We reminded each other that we knew Jesus, he was ours and we were his, and we could draw near to him and his throne of grace. In my experience, there were five characteristics that make accountability particularly life-giving:

1. We expressed a genuine love for one another because God had transformed our friendship into sisterhood. We were devoted to one another ([John 15:17](#); [Romans 12:10](#)).
2. Each week we had a choice to extend grace or judgment. We could display the love and grace that God had already extended through the judgment of Jesus on the cross ([Romans 14:13](#)).
3. Each of us had an opportunity to be honest, which we may not have accomplished had we not established the habit ([Ephesians 4:25](#)).
4. There were times we would need to extend forgiveness. Honest friendship sometimes leads to hurting one another. Also as one person might go through a season of struggling with the same temptation we'd learn to bear with our friend ([Romans 12:16](#); [Colossians 3:13](#)).
5. We bore each other's burdens in prayer ([Galatians 6:2](#)).

More of Jesus

Ultimately accountability can be a means in which God draws us, through the friendship and fellowship of others, to himself. Self-sufficiency says we don't need anyone, but humility shouts for help from those God has placed in our lives. This habit of sharing and praying with others will inevitably teach us how to cast our cares on the only One who can fully bear their weight and who loves us with an unfailing love ([1 Peter 5:7](#)).

God graciously reminds us that apart from him we can do nothing. And one great means of that reminder are the brothers and sisters he puts in our lives.

Trillia Newbell (@trillianewbell) is the author of numerous books, including a six-week Bible study on Romans 8, *If God Is for Us: The Everlasting Truth of Our Great Salvation*. You can find her at trillianewbell.com.

What does the Bible say on the importance of accountability?

There is much temptation already in the world today, and Satan is always striving to create even more. In the face of such temptation, many Christians seek out an “accountability partner” to pray with and help share the burdens that come with doing spiritual warfare. It is good to have a brother or sister we can count on when we are facing temptations. King David was alone the evening that Satan tempted him into adultery with Bathsheba ([2 Samuel 11](#)). The Bible tells us we fight a war not of flesh but of the spirit, against powers and spiritual forces who threaten us ([Ephesians 6:12](#)).

Knowing we are in a battle against the forces of darkness, we should want as much help as we can gather around us, and this may include making ourselves accountable to another believer who can encourage us in the fight. Paul tells us that we must be equipped with all the power that God supplies to fight this battle: “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” ([Ephesians 6:13](#)). We know without a doubt that temptation will come. We should be prepared.

Satan knows our weaknesses, and he knows when we are vulnerable. He knows when a married couple is fighting and perhaps feeling that someone else might better understand and sympathize. He knows when a child has been punished by his parents and might be feeling spiteful. He knows when things are not going well at work and just where the bar is on the way home. Where do we find help? We want to do what is right in the sight of God, yet we are weak. What do we do?

[Proverbs 27:17](#) says, “Iron sharpens iron; so a man sharpens his friend’s countenance.” A friend’s countenance is a look or expression of encouragement or moral support. When is the last time you had a friend call you just to ask how you were doing? When is the last time you called a friend and asked her if she needed to talk? Encouragement and moral support from a friend are sometimes the missing ingredients in fighting the battle against Satan. Being accountable to one another can provide those missing ingredients.

The writer of Hebrews summed it up when he said, “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 10:24–25](#)). The [Body of Christ](#) is interconnected, and we have a duty to each other to build each other up. Also, James implies accountability when he says, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective”

([James 5:16](#)).

Accountability can be helpful in the battle to overcome sin. An accountability partner can be there to encourage you, rebuke you, teach you, rejoice with you, and weep with you. Every Christian should consider having an accountability partner with whom he or she can pray, talk, confide, and confess.

Why Is Accountability So Important for Christians?

[Heather Adams](#)

Contributing Writer

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“So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God” ([Romans 14:12](#)).

Accountability is a subject that’s talked about a lot in the business world. Leaders are especially encouraged to hold themselves to certain standards for the good of their team and their company.

As followers of Christ, we are each called to be a kind of leader for those around us. We are to set an example of not just good behavior, but Godly behavior. And a willingness to be personally accountable will help us, our families, our churches, and the community at large to be healthier and more effective.

What Does It Mean to Be Accountable?

One of the definitions of “accountable” is “answerable.” In other words, it means a person is held responsible to others, either for certain results or in a more general way. Done well, accountability leads someone to be more reliable and consistent in how they live and show themselves to others.

True accountability starts with accepting that we are all imperfect. It demands that we be honest enough with ourselves to receive correction, or to speak the truth in love to others when it’s needed. Approached that way, while it might sting in the moment, accountability will bring us more joy and deeper faith.

Why Accountability Is Part of God’s Plan

One of our Father’s highest purposes is for us to look more and more like His Son. Part of that is clearing away faulty beliefs or thoughts, and then replacing them with His truth. It’s a process - one that requires us to invite Him into our hearts and respond to His correction, and to allow others to speak into our lives as well.

It may not sound like fun at first, but our Lord is always a gentle teacher. And as we submit, we'll start to find that accountability actually brings us benefits. Pursuing this holy habit helps:

To keep us aligned with God's plan

"[Trust in the Lord with all your heart](#) and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" ([Proverbs 3:5-6](#)).

To keep us on track to maturity

"The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand" ([Psalm 37:23-24](#)).

To keep us connected with others

"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ" ([Ephesians 4:15](#)).

To keep us able to represent God well

"For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man" ([2 Corinthians 8:21](#)).

Who Are We Meant to Be Accountable To?

We are to seek accountability from two places:

1. From God (through His Word and His Holy Spirit)

"I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve" ([Jeremiah 17:10](#)).

"But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" ([Matthew 12:36-37](#)).

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" ([Hebrews 4:13](#)).

2. From Fellow Believers (through Fellowship)

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" ([Proverbs 27:7](#)).

"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" ([Galatians 6:1-2](#)).

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” ([James 5:16](#)).

“If your brother or sister sins against you, [rebuke](#) them; and if they repent, forgive them” ([Luke 17:3](#)).

People in Scripture Who Sought Accountability

King David

He declared that God honors those who seek accountability.

“Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way” ([Psalm 25:8-9](#)).

He shared the need to be accountable for his imperfections.

“But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults” ([Psalm 19:12](#)).

He told how blessings came from being accountable to God.

“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin” ([Psalm 32:5](#)).

The Apostle Paul

He experienced being held accountable by Jesus.

“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do’” ([Acts 9:3-6](#)).

He desired to hold himself accountable.

“So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” ([Romans 7:21-25](#)).

Two Cautions When Giving or Receiving Accountability

1. God isn’t looking for perfection, so neither should we. We must not be too hard on ourselves or others.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” ([Romans 3:23](#)).

2. God isn't calling us to make judgements. We must not be self-condemning or harsh on ourselves or others about needing to grow.

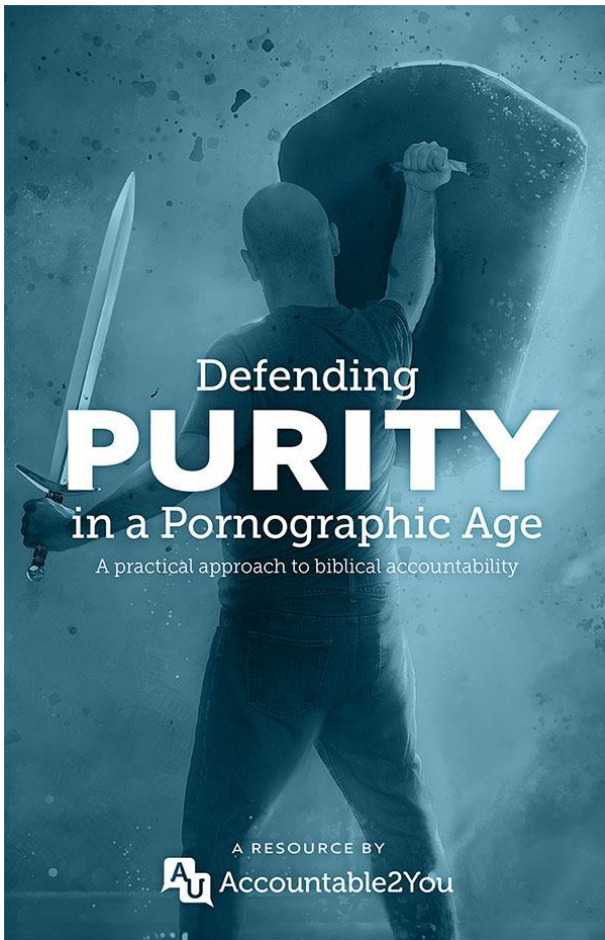
“You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat” ([Romans 14:10](#)).

Making ourselves accountable is actually a wonderful way to worship God. It shows that we value knowing and obeying Him. If we're wise, we'll seek the help of the Lord and our trusted brothers and sisters. And then, as we support each other and celebrate the process, God gets the glory.

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through [psalms](#), hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts” ([Colossians 3:16](#)).

Photo credit: ©Getty Images/izkes

Heather Adams is an author, speaker, and singer living in Connecticut. Heather's passion is to equip and encourage believers to seek more of God's truth and to experience more of His joy each day. Her book, [Bow Down: The Heart of a True Worshipper](#) is a practical, 30-day devotional about worship based on the writings of King David. Heather's blog, [Worship Walk Ministries](#), offers weekly [Scripture](#) passages and insights to ponder. A native New Englander, Heather is settling into her home in the South, trying out local foods and watching for the alligators that live nearby!



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Two Types of Accountability

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*So then each one of us will give
an account of himself to God.*

[Romans 14:12](#)

Every Christian is accountable to God and should be accountable to other believers.



Before exploring the three vital defenses, we first need to understand [accountability](#).

Accountability is both an attitude and a practice. It means taking responsibility for your actions and willingly communicating with others about your choices, so you can show your integrity and grow in maturity.

This book is based on the biblical framework of two types of accountability within the local church:

1. Accountability to God
2. Accountability to One Another

Both types of accountability are important to preserving sexual purity.

Accountability to God

The Bible teaches that everyone is accountable to God. We have all sinned and fallen short of the perfect standard He requires of us ([Romans 3:23](#)). One day, everyone will stand before the Judge of all the earth, and “each one of us will give an account of himself to God” ([Romans 14:12](#)).

Accountability to God is inescapable. You may be able to deceive other people, but before God, “all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” ([Hebrews 4:13 ESV](#)).

Our sin, exposed before a holy God, is bad news because “the wages of sin is death” ([Romans 6:23](#)). But that same verse continues with the good news that “the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross to bear the judgment of God against sin. Then, ^[1]He rose to life again, defeating sin and death, so that anyone who believes in Him can receive forgiveness of sin and walk in newness of life! This is the gospel—good news for all who trust in Christ for salvation from their sins.

Having been forgiven and rescued from sin, Christians live to please the Lord Jesus. All believers in Christ are accountable to Him:

Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. ([2 Corinthians 5:9–10](#))

Knowing we must answer to God should compel us daily to turn away from sin and pursue purity. And when we stand before Him at last, we want to hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” ([Matthew 25:21, ESV](#)).

Sexual purity is truly possible for Christians who have been forgiven and are accountable to God.

Accountability to One Another

Christianity is not a “me and God” religion. If you are joined to Christ by faith, the Bible teaches you are part of His body, the church, and “individually members one of another” ([Romans 12:5](#)). Being accountable to one another is part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Biblical accountability requires committing to a particular group of fellow believers. Membership in a local church is the context for fulfilling the many “one another” commands in Scripture (for example, see [Romans 12:10](#), [2 Corinthians 13:11](#), [Galatians 6:2](#), [Colossians 3:13](#), and [1 Thessalonians 5:11](#)).

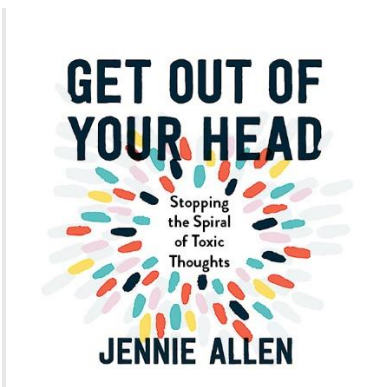
Accountability in the church is not meant to be a one-way street. All believers are individually accountable before God and should also hold each other accountable, helping to bear burdens ([Galatians 6:1–2](#)) and grow in holiness ([Hebrews 10:24](#)). Mutual accountability is a key function of a healthy local church.

Christians are accountable to God and to one another. With this framework in place, we can start exploring the three vital defenses to walk in purity.

5 Bible Verses To Inspire and Direct Biblical Accountability Relationships

By Chip Ingram

Developing a biblical accountability relationship with a trusted advisor is a powerful tool *in every believer’s spiritual walk.*



CURRENT SERIES

Stop the Spiral of Toxic Thinking

Guard your mind against toxic thoughts that threaten to destroy you.

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It's one thing to make a commitment and to really mean it. It's quite another thing to keep it sustained over a significant period of time.

But as you build on your commitments and they begin to shape your life, you're building your life's legacy.

Open the Scriptures and you'll see many people who started strong but didn't finish well. Specifically, look at the myriad of Kings of Israel — only a few ended well. Likewise, look around and you'll find examples of efforts that began strong but failed:

- Churches
- Companies
- Marriages
- Families

The solution is biblical accountability.

This kind of intentional relationship includes enlisting the support of those who love you, with the sole purpose of helping you keep your commitments to a [sovereign God](#).

Unlike “accountability partners” of years past, which were very impactful for many but difficult for others, this is not a relationship based on harassment and strong-arming. It's a partnership built on an agreement to be *honest about what's below the surface*.

This kind of relationship invites someone into your life to help you keep YOUR commitment to God. No outside person or source is mandating specific behaviors; you're working towards a legacy of strong faith, and your biblical accountability relationship will be a powerful partner.

To quickly navigate to the 5 verses, use the links below.

1. [We never outgrow the need for PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY.](#)
2. [Past successes are no guarantee of FUTURE FAITHFULNESS.](#)
3. [We constantly underestimate the power of our own SINFUL PASSIONS.](#)
4. [We constantly overestimate our ability to handle TEMPTATION.](#)
5. [We naively believe our struggles and temptations are UNIQUE.](#)

WHAT IS A BIBLICAL ACCOUNTABILITY RELATIONSHIP?

While most of us intellectually generally agree on the concept of being one another's keeper, we have varied in our approach to living that out.

Historically, accountability has taken on different forms. Small groups often encourage some kind of accountability as part of the discipleship process, and some groups have even gathered for corporate confession.

This is not a new concept.

The world is very aware of the power of accountability. Recovery groups and self-help groups all include an accountability component where they share temptations with the intention to motivate lasting change. It works!

And yet, the majority of Christians do not have or have not experienced a biblical accountability relationship.

If we agree that it works, why aren't we engaging? We care about discipleship, and we know that becoming a [Romans 12 Christian](#) who is growing consistently takes intention and effort, and yet so many of us have overlooked this key instruction.

I believe we've forgotten the power of biblical accountability relationships and the impact they can have on our spiritual walk and lifelong legacy. That's why we're exploring verses that teach us how to form these kinds of partnerships and teach us why they're pivotal in our lives.

5 Bible Verses to Inspire and Direct Biblical Accountability Relationships

1. We never outgrow the need for PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY.

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in

such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be *disqualified*.” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

The Apostle Paul’s greatest desire was to be used greatly for Christ. On the flip side, his greatest fear was getting disqualified from the “race.” Even he was concerned that he’d subtly stray from following Jesus. If Paul was concerned, how much more concerned should we be?

And leaders, you’re the most susceptible. Whether you lead teams or you lead toddlers, you are not above questions that will be presented in a biblical accountability relationship. Those inquiries dig below the surface and reveal who you really are — for the purpose of confession, growth, and discipleship.

If the Apostle Paul was concerned with getting disqualified from the “race” of faith, how much more should we be concerned? Our training should include a trusted biblical accountability relationship. [SHARE ON X](#)

2. Past successes are no guarantee of FUTURE FAITHFULNESS.

“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.” (1 Corinthians 10:1-5 1)

In other words, don’t rest on your laurels.

After Paul just admitted he was concerned about his faith, he pointed back to the Israelites. His ancestors were examples of faithful people who’d had powerful experiences following God, and yet — when disappointment struck — doubted.

We’re no different than the Israelites! We could create a long list of things God has done on our behalf and the grace He’s bestowed upon us. Yet when a crisis appears, we also lose faith. It’s no different than the Red Sea and the manna and the serpents and all the other stories.

Actually, it's His ways that sustain you. That's why Moses wasn't saying, "God, give me one more great experience." Rather, he said, "Lord, I want to see Your glory. I want to know You. I want to know what You're like. I want to know Your heart."

There is no such thing as spiritual autopilot. The truth is: walking with God in the past is *no guarantee that you'll walk with Him in the future*. A biblical accountability relationship will help you to know His heart.

Get equipped: [12 Powerful Scriptures For Spiritual Warfare Resistance](#)

3. We constantly underestimate the power of our own SINFUL PASSIONS.

"Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people sat to eat and drink and stood to play.' Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." (1 Corinthians 10:6-11)

How in the world can some of the most committed, gifted people in the entire church, both in Bible times and now, get off track? And if Paul thinks he has the potential to stray, don't think you're exempt from the same fate.

Do you underestimate the power of your own sinful passions?

You are human and so am I! I don't care how long you've been a Christian, how dedicated you are to your quiet time, you are always in a [battle](#).

Whether it's a time of difficulty, loneliness, travel, pain, sickness, or unresolved anger and injustice, be aware of your humanity and need for the Light. That's the beauty of a biblical accountability relationship — you know your behavior's going to be brought to light, which helps you to avoid the darkness.

Resist warfare when you memorize God's Word: [Invisible War Scripture Cards](#)

[Why do we underestimate the power of our sinful](#)

[passions? We have to acknowledge that we're always](#)

[in a battle and that we're sometimes tempted \(which](#)

isn't a sin). Then we need to admit our humanity and our need for accountability. [SHARE ON X](#)

4. We constantly overestimate our ability to handle TEMPTATION.

“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Corinthians 10:12)

I’ve been there, too. In your subconscious, you’re thinking that you would never do that. You might be saying, “I would never do that. I mean, I’m past that. Those things don’t affect me.”

Many times, accountability focuses on avoiding sin. In this [Got Questions](#) article on the importance of accountability, the author reminds us of the dark forces behind our temptations and the importance of [resistance](#).

In this verse from Hebrews, the author provides an anecdote to the very real possibility that sin hardens hearts that were once soft and inviting to God’s ways:

“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (Hebrews 3:13)

When we’re ENCOURAGING one another by coming alongside one another, our hearts can stay soft and alert. Sometimes a biblical accountability relationship looks like having very serious, hard conversations. Other times, it’s coming alongside someone and LISTENING in support.

5. We naively believe our struggles and temptations are UNIQUE.

“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Because we naively believe our struggles and temptations are unique, we start to hide the ones that we think are too bad or ones for which we’re too mature.

This is exactly what the Enemy wants you to believe. Secrecy will be used to bombard you with doubts and struggles and condemnation. But you can take that way of escape and avoid being overtaken.

Your biblical accountability partner will help to point out the ways of escape and also remind you that your temptations are not unique.

Forgiveness awaits: [4 Events That Explain God’s Grace For Prodigal Sons](#)

PURSUE ACCOUNTABILITY

There you have it. Five reasons to pursue a biblical accountability relationship with a trusted advisor in your life.

Although few take this step in their walk with Christ, Scripture is clear about the importance. The Apostle Paul needed it, and 1 Corinthians 10 outlines that clearly, we all need it.

Leave a [legacy of faith](#) and let no temptation seize you. God provides a way of escape in His design of confessing our sins to one another and bringing truth into the light.

Get specific instructions on how to develop a biblical accountability relationship, how to establish priorities in your life, and harnessing discipline when you listen to my sermon series on YouTube entitled [Balancing Life's Demands](#).

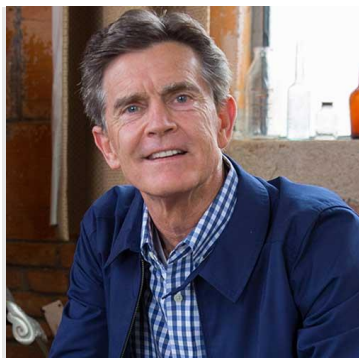
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WRITTEN BY

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MORE ARTICLES BY CHIP

Conference Messages

Biblical Friendship and Authentic Accountability

Speaking the truth in love, we grow up into Christ, all of us together.



Kevin Carson

•Sep 28, 2022

We're talking about friendship and authentic accountability. I trust that it will serve you well as you think both in terms of friendships in the church as well as how those friendships transition into meaningful accountability.

I want to start us off just thinking through a few things before we jump in. When we think about biblical counseling, often we think about conversations that have a purpose. It's a conversational ministry. Often, the goal of the intentional discipleship that we talk about is for people—whether they're in the nursery working together, or they're standing out in the parking lot of a church, or they run into each other at Walmart, or wherever that particular place is—to have a conversation in the process of engaging with one another that leads them down the road toward Christ-likeness. It's this mutual walk. It's companionship. The goal is that people would grow together in Christ. We know in Ephesians 4 that the way that they grow in Christ is through speaking the truth in love with each other. Friendship provides that foundation from which you can have those types of conversations. As people talk, our goal is not just to speak the truth, but to help each other both at the level of encouragement as well as to support each other in the midst of life's deepest struggles.

One other note is something that has been on my mind a lot. Probably every person reading this knows of a pastor or two, possibly even a biblical counselor, that somewhere along the journey has lost his or her ministry. As we listen and consider what happened and when and where it happened, I've often asked the questions: Who was the friend who should have been helping? Who is the person who needed to speak up? Who is the

person whose silenced voice kept the pastor or counselor from getting the help that he or she needed?

I think one of the most sobering portions of 2 Samuel 11-12—and there are many—is in 2 Samuel 11. I'll just read three verses. In verses 1-3 it says: "It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, 'Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?'"

From verse 3 all the way to the end of chapter 11, as we follow the narrative of this very sad story, we never see whoever it was that asked that question actually go to David. We never see that question come up again in conversation. As you read the story, more and more people get involved in this circumstance, but no one is David's friend to the extent that he or she says to David, "David, what are you doing? Why are you sending for someone else's wife?"

We recognize that friendships are essential. God has given us people in life to be a voice for truth, to speak the truth in love, and to help us stay on the right path. We need those people and we need those voices. With all of that said, let me jump into this sense of accountability. Here are two questions to start out.

1. What kinds of accountability typically exist in a person's life?

The reason I ask this question is because sometimes when we mention accountability—especially to a counselee, but it could be to a pastor or someone else in the church—often that word "accountability" prompts all kinds of reactions. They think, "Oh, accountability. You're one of those people. What are you thinking or what kind of accountability are you talking about?" So they start asking questions. But when you look at life, there are all kinds of accountability. The fact that we're suggesting in Christ and in the church that there ought to be some kind of relationship that provides this sense of accountability really isn't different than any other aspect of living. We have professional accountability, legal accountability, personal accountability, vocational accountability, familial accountability (could be parental or spousal), governmental accountability, and of course, we have spiritual accountability. We could keep rattling off all the places in life where we are held accountable. Sometimes we don't even know the people that are holding us accountable.

The other night real late, I was driving by a semi just a couple blocks from here. The light turned yellow, and I was just far enough away that I thought "I'm going to stop," but the semi was going fast enough, he didn't stop. As he went through the intersection, lights flashed all around the intersection. I hadn't been paying attention, but it was an intersection with cameras. Therefore, that driver is going to get a reminder that when the light turns yellow and then red, you have to stop. It's accountability. We can't escape it. But somehow in life there are times, at least as Christians, when someone mentions

accountability and we get the sense of, “I’m not sure about that. I’m not sure I need it.” I’ve heard men say that or say, “Oh, that’s good for somebody else.”

- **What is our typical response when we think about accountability?**

Again, there are a variety of responses. In Psalm 139, David wasn’t that hip on accountability when he says: “Where can I flee from your presence? If I go as far north as I can go, I can’t flee from you. If I go south as far as I can go, if I go east, if I go west, no matter where I go. It can be in the middle of the night, and it’s just like the middle of the day to you. I can’t go anywhere.” If you understand the kind of psalm this is, at that particular portion he’s not saying, “Oh praise God, you’re everywhere. I love Your omnipresence.” No, he’s saying, “Where in the world can I hide from you?” He wasn’t that much into accountability.

Sometimes we’re not much into accountability as well, there are two questions for us to at least consider when we think of accountability:

1. Are you doing these things—when you think about accountability—in order to be God-pleasing or God-glorifying or God-honoring (whichever of the terms you appreciate)?
2. What motivates your accountability?

At the end of the day, this is what we know:

- We can know about accountability.
- We can teach people to think about it.
- We can encourage them to make it a part of their typical daily living.

But unless someone chooses to take it seriously and chooses to actually engage, what will happen is that you can have all kinds of accountability structures and still people choose to sin and to hide. They choose not to be apparent and open with people whom they talk with. I think one of the things that help us get past that potential poor reaction to accountability is just the necessity of understanding friendships.

Key Characteristics and Benefits of Friendships

There are some key characteristics that relate to friendships. I think these benefits of friendships are helpful to all of us. Let’s first define the terms.

Friendship would be companionships or friends walking down the road of life with you. They’re important for each one of us. We need those kinds of people that as we live, they live with us; as we go, they go with us; as we strive, they strive with us. Sometimes it’s in text messaging, sometimes it’s in conversation, sometimes it’s actually physically and they go somewhere, but the reality is we go and we go together. Again, some of the most important benefits of my life and some of the most important contributions made by people in my life were made by friends who were with me who were companions in life.

1. **Companions help live life with joy and endurance. ([Ecclesiastes 3:22-4:12](#))**

We see this concept in [Ecclesiastes 3:22-4:12](#). When you're looking at that particular portion, you understand that he says, "You know, two are better than one." He gives some very specific examples. If you fall, it's kind of nice to have somebody else pick you up. That's kind of hard to do if you're by yourself.

I was out this weekend in the Ozark Mountains. We were out at this particular place that was a forest when we finally got to the sign that said, "You are entering the wilderness." That was a little bit disconcerting. What did that mean compared to where we had been? I had this little guy with me named Jojo, and we continued our journey on this seven-mile trail. He's not little anymore, but he was about 12 years old at the time. Back when he was two, ten years prior, he had brain surgery to remove a tumor. They didn't know if he'd ever walk again.

On this particular day it was my joy to hang out with him, and we were going on this seven-mile trail together. He has a hard time with balance and all of those things. For the majority of the trail, he did just fine. But as we got to this one portion consisting of an old riverbed where there were little rocks, big chunk rocks, and various elevations, I noticed that he was really struggling and that it was hard for him to get through some of those particular spots. I grabbed him and I said, "Hey, you know, Pastor Kevin is getting old, why don't you help me get through all these rocks?" He did. He held onto me. I said, "You're strong. I need a strong guy with me." He said, "I'm not really strong, but I'm tough." I said, "Perfect. I need a tough guy with me too. Strong or tough, I'll take it."

We started going through these rocks. It would take time for him to evaluate it and judge it. I said, "Okay, let's jump together." At this one spot, we went from a high range to a low range, and then there was another big chunk of rock with gaps a couple of feet wide. I said, "Okay, Jojo, we've got to jump. You have got to help me get to the first rock, but we have to land it because we have to get to the second rock and we don't want to fall." Sure enough, we jumped and hit the first one. He didn't have any brakes or something and he kept moving with his weight, so we went jumping for the second one. I landed, but he didn't land and started going down. I grabbed him, pulled everything inside of me I think, and as I held him and pulled him back up he said, "Oh, that was close." I was thinking, "Yes, it was close. Your dad doesn't know how dangerous this is."

Here's the point: two are better than one. I walked in a different direction on a different path a little bit later in the day with somebody else. At the end, that person said, "You know, this journey has been better because you slowed down to walk with me." Ecclesiastes makes it clear that in life, there's more joy and more benefit when we walk with someone.

2. **Companions help us get wiser or destroy us. ([Proverbs 13:20](#) & [1 Corinthians 15:33](#))**

Listen to [Proverbs 13:20](#): "He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed." It sounds like Paul when he says in [1 Corinthians 15:33](#), "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'" Companions are either going to help raise you up and give you wisdom, or they're going to help you live more like a fool.

3. Companions love us and are with us through life. ([Proverbs 17:17](#))

[Proverbs 17:17](#) says: “A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.”

Early this morning, I received a call from a long-time close friend of mine from a family associated with the church because his father-in-law had died. As this man was walking through the death of his father-in-law, his own dad had died just a little bit ago. He was on the phone and he said, “You know, I know you’re busy. I know you’re at a conference. I just need to talk to somebody.” All he really needed was just somebody to say, “Hey, I love you. We’re with you. I’m not there in presence but I’m praying for you.” He got his wife on the phone. I had the privilege to talk to her. Within just a few moments we were both crying and I started laughing. I said, “You didn’t know you were going to get to talk to a pastor,” and all of us just cried together.

Walking down the road of life with people is just part of loving them. We do that because we understand that it is one of the roles of companions. It’s a benefit.

4. Companions help mold us. ([Proverbs 27:17](#))

[Proverbs 27:17](#) says: “As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”

We need that person who can walk beside us. We need the person who can ask us the right question. We need the person who can help give a word that is needed.

One of the joys over the last 15 years or so of my life is that this particular lady only has to say, “Pastor Kevin,” and that’s when iron begins to sharpen iron. I can be talking with a bunch of people and when she says, “Oh, Pastor Kevin,” I hear the tone and I know her love. The moment that I hear her say that I realize I am on shaky ground somehow. Somewhere, somehow I have gotten too close, and either I’m being ungodly (I hope not but she may think so), and the reality is that I’ve walked into something unwise. I’m so grateful for that. I’ve talked about that all over the country. I’ve said that there are some voices in my life that in just saying my name, I know that I need help, that I need to pay attention, or that it is a warning.

This morning, I went out for coffee with some people and we were talking through some of Chris’ teaching. Then Chris and I were in a room together and I said, “Oh Chris, I’m glad I saw you. I just had a conversation about everything you taught.” We really needed to switch places I think, but the reality is, it’s iron sharpening iron, and I very much appreciate the fact that somebody loves us enough to speak and to be clear and to try to help us and push us.

5. Companions provide us comfort and they edify us. ([1 Thessalonians 5:11](#))

[First Thessalonians 5:11](#) says: “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”

It’s the words. It’s the help.

6. Companions help us identify sin and protect us. ([Hebrews 3:12-13](#))

This is such an important concept in Hebrews 3. It says, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief....exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today’...”

It’s that daily companionship. It’s the voice we need. It’s that extra set of eyes. It’s the fact that someone needs to be speaking and in the process of speaking, I can check my own heart carefully. I’ve sat with friends who are close to sin or have entered into sin, and I’ve been the one with that word of advice. Then they’ve said, “Thank you, I needed that.”

I’ve also been the one at times where someone has come and said, “Hey, have you considered this?” I’ve needed that help to identify sin. There really is a joy in protection. I have a family. I have church. I have people that I love all around me. The reality is that I need that protection because I don’t want to do something that would distract from the name and reputation of Christ and would somehow hurt one of those people.

7. Companions help us do good deeds and/or do better. ([Hebrews 10:24](#))

[Hebrews 10:24](#) says: “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works...”

We need someone in our life who is actually agitating us and pushing us forward, who is asking hard questions, and who we know is going to push us to places where we may be uncomfortable. It’s such a joy to be with those people, and not because we want to be uncomfortable. If you’re like me, I don’t like being uncomfortable. But I know that this person loves me enough to not let me sit still, to engage me, to ask if I’m being creative, and to ask what I’m doing specifically and intentionally to move forward in this particular area or to do something that’s going to honor God. These people help us do good deeds and certainly help us to do better.

8. Companions help us spiritually. ([James 5:16-20](#))

In James 5, it says that when we serve our brother or sister, it benefits that person and it benefits us as well. It says in verse 19: “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way, will save a soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” In verses 16-18, it’s talking about this prayer ministry that we have to each other and with each other and the opportunity to say a word and to benefit. Companions along the way help us spiritually.

9. The many one-another commands help us understand our responsibility to each other.

As we try to participate in those almost 50 one-another commands that we find in the New Testament, it is through those commands that we are being pushed, helped, loved, and served.

Friends, I've really just cherry-picked some general ideas here. But I hope that when someone comes to you and says "You know, I'm not sure that I want to do this accountability thing. I'm not sure that I want to take that step. I'm not sure that this will benefit me," that you would say, "Yes, not only do you need friendships, but that kind of friendship will benefit you in a way that you won't be benefited by anything else." As Christians, we were never meant to live on an island. We were never meant to live alone. It's not a one-person sport. In Christ, we are responsible for our position and for our behaviors, but God has given us a multitude of people that should come around us and be with us and walk that journey with us. Again, when we think about companionships, we think about friends who are walking down the road of life and that walk provides many benefits.

Standards for Friendship

I think standards of friendship are important as well. Again, if you go to the concordance to look for standards for friendships, you don't find that specifically. But I think there are a couple of key passages that help us. I've just cherry-picked a few. You can pick your own and add to this list.

1. Someone who fears God/respects God and obeys God. ([Psalm 119:63](#))

There are multiple potential authors of Psalm 119—I think seven if my memory serves me correct. One of those potential authors is Daniel. If it's Daniel, it's especially fascinating because we can consider the narrative about Daniel and think about his particular friends from that narrative. Regardless of who the author is, listen to what [Psalm 119:63](#) says: "I am a companion of all who fear You, And of those who keep Your precepts."

I've taught this verse to my children, and I teach it whenever I go and speak to youth groups. This is one of the places I like to land because I want them to understand that those are two key components of godly friendships. When you say, "Who do I want to be my friend?" my mind immediately goes to one who fears God or respects God and one who obeys God. You think about [Ecclesiastes 12:13](#) when he says, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments..." It's very similar.

I grew up in a country church where we used to sing a hymn called "Trust and Obey" that says "For there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey." Friends, when you trust God, you are respecting His character and you understand who He is. I would suggest to you that the key standard of friendship is to find a friend who fears God above every other thing in life (therefore has respect for God) *and* who strives to obey God.

Again, let's think about Daniel. When Daniel was taken out of Jerusalem, he was put in Babylon and was educated in the Chaldean language by the Babylonians. During that time, he had these various opportunities that are described in the narrative. The first, of course, is with his diet and only Daniel and his three friends (Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah) were willing to say, "We're going to choose God and choose obedience, not fear the king."

Then as the story goes on, you know about the three Hebrew children, and they were the ones who said, “We’re not going to bow down.” The king replied: “But you don’t understand. We’re going to play the music again. You’re going to hear it. Everybody’s going to bow down. That’s your opportunity. Somehow you misunderstood the directions the first time we went through this, so get ready.” Then they reply, “Oh king, you don’t need to play the music. Don’t be confused. We will not bow down.” What is that? That’s someone who fears God and keeps His commandments.

When they said to Daniel, “Hey, you can’t pray. You’ve got to pray to the king. You can’t pray to your own God.” What does Daniel do? He says, “No, I’m going to continue praying to my God.” He continues praying, so much so that he gets thrown into a lion’s den, and that’s someone who fears God and obeys God. Friends, when you think about friendship, and as you teach and counsel, I would suggest to you that in my mind this is one of those anchor verses. He chooses companions who fear God and obey God.

- **Someone who stays away from the wicked/sinners/scorners. ([Psalm 1:1](#))**

I like Psalm 1 because it describes a person who stays away from the wicked, sinners, and scorners and who, instead of choosing the world’s system, meditates on God’s word. Remember it says, “Oh the happiness of the person who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law does he meditate day and night.”

When we look at our friends horizontally, at some level we have to say, “Well, what is their relationship vertically?” It calls for discernment, not criticism nor critique. We have to live out and teach our counselees and our young people to apply this sense of discernment to say, “How is this person in relationship to the world as it pertains to their relationship to God?” The best, wisest friends are not ones who are drawn away by the world’s system, its values, or its activities. They are people who are consecrated to God. According to [Psalm 1:1](#), that’s the person who will be happy or blessed.

- **Someone who honors God in life lived. ([Psalm 15:1-5](#))**

You may ask why Psalm 15 is an example of a standard of friendship. Psalm 15 is unique because God basically says, “Hey, who can hang out on my hill?” if you’ll allow me to translate it just a bit differently. It says: “LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?” As I’m reading this text, I’m thinking, “Wait a minute. It seems like if I’m supposed to be Christ-like and these are the kind of folks that God doesn’t mind hanging out with, maybe this would be a good list for me to consider.” As I think about friendship, verses 2 through 5 give this whole list of behaviors and attitudes of people who honor God simply in the way they do life. Those verses describe such a person like this:

“He who walks uprightly,
And works righteousness,
And speaks the truth in his heart;
He who does not backbite with his tongue,
Nor does evil to his neighbor,

Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;
In whose eyes a vile person is despised,
But he honors those who fear the LORD;
He who swears to his own hurt and does not change;
He who does not put out his money at usury,
Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.
He who does these things shall never be moved.”

Those are the kind of people that will always be welcome in God’s presence: people who are engaged in living life for His glory. Maybe that would be a good standard.

- **Someone who is a wise person. ([James 3:13-18](#))**

In the middle of the book of James, right in the center, he says, “Hey, who is the wise person who is skilled in living? Who is that person?” He answers, “Well, let that person show [his wisdom] in the humility or the meekness of his lifestyle.” Then the next set of verses starts working through wisdom from below (which really isn’t wisdom at all) and wisdom from above (God’s kind of person). In verses 17 and 18 he describes the wise person where he says: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

Essentially in this text, we learn that when we consider what and who a wise person is, that particular individual is motivated by purity and essentially lives out Philippians 2 in life with others. This person is concerned about the people around them and has the kind of life that produces the fruit of righteousness and peace.

- **Someone who serves well and has a heart of service. ([1 Peter 4:7-11](#))**

When you ask, “Who is a good biblical friend?” or “Who is someone that I should consider as a friend?” I would suggest that it’s someone who has a heart for serving God and others. It’s the first and second greatest commandments lived out. It’s understanding and being motivated by the love that Christ has for us ([2 Corinthians 5:14-15](#)) and letting that move us to serve others. I think the particular paragraph in [1 Peter 4:7-11](#) is excellent.

Verse 7: “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.”

These people are engaged at the level of praying for other people.

Verse 8: “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins.”

These people are creatively loving the people around them.

Verse 9: “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.”

These people are living saying, “I’m going to take the resources I have and invest those and share them with other people and I’m not going to be grumpy about it.”

Verses 10-11: “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the

Here he’s saying that you are a steward of God’s grace and as you receive that grace, make sure

manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies..."

that both what you say and what you do honor God. The rest of that verse highlights that all of this is by Jesus Christ for God's glory.

I would suggest to you that when you put these five things together, you get a small picture of the person who is walking with Christ and who is living the kind of life that would make you say: "That's the person I want to be my friend. That's the person who will be benefited both by me and that will benefit me as I seek to live for Jesus Christ." Again, I would suggest those five standards. You could say, "Oh man, you missed the most important verse in the Bible." Okay, maybe I did, but those are at least five that I try to live by. The first one is the one that I speak about the most as I work with people.

Observations

1. You need friends.

The potential benefits to you are incredible and God never intended for you to live without them. God did not intend for you to live in a way that did not have the voices of people who love Him and who love you and who have your interest at heart. Some of you are pastors and missionaries and full-time workers in the church, and at least in my own training I have heard at times people say: "Oh, you have to be careful with how many friends you have. You have to be careful. Pastors really can't have close friends." I would suggest to you that this mentality is not biblical, although it comes from a practical sense of the fact that you can't show favoritism. You need friends. If you're a counselor, you need someone who can speak into your life. You need someone who will love you enough and who will look you in the eye and say, "What about this?"

We have multiple levels of those friends. There's a bunch of them that I could mention, but let me just mention Amy Baker. If you know Amy, she's just the sweetest person ever. Amy and I actually had a conversation months and months and months and months ago, and something about that conversation bugged her. She was interested and prayed about it for months. She and I see each other a couple of times a year. The very next time she saw me—which was the last time we saw each other and was in a setting where there were people everywhere—she said, "Oh, Kevin, I'm glad you're here. Come over here. I need to talk to you." We got over on the side and she said, "You mentioned this in our last conversation. I want to know what you've done about it, how you are doing now, and what you are going to do about it because it has been on my heart that long."

Friends, that is invaluable that a friend would love me enough to say, "This is something you said, just a side statement, but I want to make sure that you're right with God and you're right with everybody else." That's biblical counseling. But it's more than biblical counseling, it's biblical friendship.

We need each other. We need the extra pair of eyes. We need someone to watch our backs. We need someone to help us say:

- "You know, I hear what you're saying."

- “I see what you’re doing.”
- “Have you considered this?”

We need that extra question. I need the encouragement. Recently somebody asked me, “So, are you like a ‘words-of-affirmation’ guy?” I said, “Every person I know is a ‘words-of-affirmation’ person.” Do I love encouragement? Absolutely. It would make my brain hurt to think someone doesn’t want to be encouraged. The issue isn’t whether we enjoy it. The issue is whether we have people in our life that are actually walking in Christ that provide it. I know I’ve mentioned Amy, but there are so many people that I love dearly and with whom I appreciate lengthy friendships.

We need benefits of the community, and the local church is the absolute place where those things take place. Now, we enjoy it because we have a family. Last night when I was talking with Heath, I asked him, “What are you thinking? You’re transitioning. You’re leaving as executive director. You’re going to have one job. That would be crazy to think about one job.” I also mentioned something about our family as biblical counselors. As we were talking about that he said, “Kevin, this is the thing I rejoice in as I leave and that is this: when I leave, I don’t leave this family, I’m just leaving a job.”

We have something sweet. It is a joy to spend time together annually, to talk on the phone, send emails, read each other’s blogs, to do those things where we can engage with each other. But it’s not just enough to have a biblical counselor friend. We must have those same people in our churches who are speaking into our lives with words that are true, right, and helpful.

- **You need to be a friend.**

You don’t just need friends, you need to be that person.

There are other people in and around your life who need you.

Just as a word fitly spoken has been God’s grace to you, you need to be God’s words to other people. Like 1 Peter 4 said, “Speak as the oracles of God.” Use your voice to build into people and to serve those people.

Do not minimize your potential role in the lives of others.

Sometimes, people say, “Well, you know, I don’t really have much to say,” or “It’s not that important for me to go hang out,” or “We don’t really need to go to coffee; I’m kind of busy and it’s kind of hard to schedule all of this stuff.” Friends, people need your voice. Don’t minimize that. It doesn’t make you have a sense that you’re better than you are for me to say to you that they need to hear your voice. It’s not prideful to think people need to hear your voice. No, the Bible says that people need your voice. Speaking the truth in love, we grow up into Christ, all of us together.

Consider who may need a word of encouragement, then give it.

I can consider a lot of people. In the middle of the night, I’m thinking, “Oh man, I needed to talk to that person. I’ll try to do that.” Then, if I don’t write it down, it’s not going to happen. Therefore, I have actually to write it down and then the next morning, I put it in my calendar. Then later in the day, I get a reminder that says, “Okay, don’t forget to send

something kind to this person” or whatever the word is. Then I send that out. I love most of my friends enough not to do it in the middle of the night. Some of them whose phones I know will be off, I’d go ahead and send it in the middle of the night.

Consider how God could use you in community.

- **How should you respond now?**

Don’t delay in considering your own heart.

If there’s parts of what we’re talking about that potentially you haven’t engaged well, then I would encourage you not to delay. You want to be involved. You want to take the next step.

Question your qualifications for being a friend, then pursue change for God’s glory.

Look at those standards of friendship. You might say, “Well, really you’re talking to me and this is for my counselees.” That’s cool. Then go talk to your counselees about it, but in the process consider your own heart. Potentially you need to be challenged to ask yourself, “Am I the kind of friend that God wants me to be to the people that are around me? Where am I a bit self-serving? Am I a bit self-centered? Do I allow my schedule to dictate my friendships more than allow God’s Word and a concern for others?” These are questions that we need to ask. We need to ask if there is something in our lives that we need to repent of.

Walk with Christ who is our best friend and the best friend.

Implications

You might be saying, “Okay, Kevin, I’m with you. At this point, I think it’s important to see that it could be helpful, so what am I going to do about it?” Let me give you just a handful of practical implications.

1. **Be the kind of person that you would desire as a friend.**

When you talk to counselees, this is a good first step. I had this one case where a girl came to me for counseling and she said, “Well, no one will be my friend.” I said, “Well, you know, I’ve thought about this a little bit. Let’s talk about what are good qualifications for friends.” Then we went through those qualifications and I said to her, “Okay, this is what we’re going to do this week. I want you to be that kind of person. I want you to not think about the people who aren’t serving you the way you want to be served, but instead, let’s flip the script and I want you to think about the question, ‘Am I being the kind of person who *walks in wisdom, who walks in the Spirit, who worships Christ*, who has a sense of the presence of Christ? Am I that person? Because someone else is going to need that from me.’” We start there.

- **Cultivate these kinds of friendships in daily living.**

Don't keep records of how people respond to you.

Again, let's go back to that illustration I was just giving you. This particular person said, "You know what, I made cookies for that family; they didn't send me a thank you note; they didn't send me cookies back. I invited that person to our house; they've never returned; they've not invited me to their house."

I said to her, "Well, there's your problem. For one, you've got a wrong motivation. For two, why are you keeping record? You don't have any idea what's going on in that person's home. You don't know why they haven't done all those things to you. For heaven's sake, for the glory of Jesus Christ, why are you keeping track of that so that you can sit in my office and go through a whole catalog of every lady in our church and tell me whether they've sent you a thank you card or not." There's something wrong here. We can't live that way.

Serve often and creatively.

We need to serve so often and serve so creatively that we lose track of all those receipts. My secretary hates me—I say this kindly—because I'm horrible with receipts. She will say to me, "You were on a week-long trip, where are your receipts?" I'll respond, "Well, you know, I do remember I bought coffee. You'll see it on the credit card, I'm sure." Where are the receipts? Who knows. That's because I buy so many things when I'm out that there's no way to track that stuff.

This is the bottom line: we ought to be serving people so often and so creatively that there's no way we can track it. That ought to just be part of everyday living.

Check your motivation for why you are seeking friendships.

Are you doing this for Christ or are you doing it for yourself? Are you doing this for Christ or because you just want to have a bunch of friends? What is the reason? What's motivating you?

Be others-centered as a daily lifestyle.

When you wake up, you get engaged and you start seeking to serve.

- **Be intentional to seek accountability.**

If you say, "I'm just going to trust that we'll talk about it sometime" "when we can" or "when we get together" (whatever that looks like), you'll never talk about it. *Instead, you're going to have to follow up with each other often and potentially you have to be the instigator.* Now, I do have a busy schedule. I have a couple of jobs. I have a busy family. We have four children ranging from 7 to 17. They are active in everything. It keeps us active. As a result, sometimes what I have to say to people is, "I want *you* to call me back because I don't want to miss what you have to offer. I want *you* to text me and if I don't respond immediately, then text me again. Don't think, 'Oh man. He just isn't going to return my texts.' No, just send a second one. You're not going to frustrate me. I'm inviting

you to do that.” Why? Because I know sometimes I need to be an instigator in their life, but I certainly want them doing the same thing for me. Take your time and gauge it.

What Does Accountability Look Like in the Church?

I’m just going to give you three quick answers to this particular question.

1. Emphasize the one-another ministry in your church.

If you’re here and you say, “Well, I’m part of a church and a part of a church team. We want to do this in our life groups (or whatever area of the church).” I would suggest that has to be done church-wide and it begins with the one-anothers. It’s important for those in our church to understand—like Ephesians 4 says—that if I’m not speaking the truth, then the church isn’t going to grow into Christ-like God intends. In verse 16 of Ephesians 4, it says every part, every ligament, and every person is needed in order to speak the kind of truth that’s going to benefit the body.

Galatians 6 is one of my favorite passages in the Bible and I would go back to Jay Adams when he taught it. That particular passage says that, as brothers and sisters in Christ who are walking in the Spirit, our responsibility is to restore each other, to bring each other back to a place of usefulness, and to carry each other’s burdens that are more than what each person can carry on their own, while in the process carrying our own backpack and helping other people learn to carry their backpack. Your church needs to be passionate about Galatians 6 ministry. That will build and fuel this sense of more and more friendships as well as accountability.

In [1 Thessalonians 5:14](#), it says to warn the unruly, to comfort the feeble-minded, and to help the weak. But the reality is, if you go back to verse 12, it says that the pastors are demonstrating that kind of lifestyle and as they do, the people appreciate the pastors’ work, love them in the midst of their work, and are accountable to them. Then, the people go out and do the same thing. In some churches, the issue isn’t why the people aren’t doing it, but the issue starts in verse 12 with why the pastors aren’t doing it. We can’t be so engaged with the business that we forget the people.

- **Move your model of care down to life groups and the small group level.**

Make it part of your leadership training. Make this one of the specific intentional goals of your life groups or your small groups. Understand that counseling and discipleship are co-equals and ought to be happening in that level of ministry.

- **Use advocates where you can.**

There are a number of ways to use advocates. An advocate is essentially someone who comes alongside the person receiving care and helps provide a relational, 360° assessment to the person in the process of doing life. In our book, *Biblical Counseling and the Church*, Garrett Higbee has two chapters that would be very helpful that can help you think through advocates as it relates to accountability and as it relates to this kind of friendship.

Details

Just a couple of details as we wrap up.

1. What is an accountability relationship?

Let's define it this way: An accountability relationship is one in which a Christian gives permission to another believer to look into his life for the purpose of questioning, challenging, admonishing, advising, encouraging, and otherwise providing input in a way that will help the individual live according to biblical principles in a way that honors God. That's almost a Pauline sentence.

Basically, it's someone you invite into your life and you live life together. You say, "let's have intentional conversations."

• What is the best structure?

The best, ideal structure is face-to-face, regularly scheduled times when you can get together. Usually, it's best with two people, though you can invite more than two people. Some people have groups that are accountable. Sometimes it's a meeting of a group of people who get together once or twice a month and then follow each other on GroupMe-type apps so that they're constantly with each other and trying to think through those things. But the best structure is face-to-face meetings as often as possible.

• How should I select an accountability partner?

Someone of the same sex

Let me just mention this at the top: it should be someone of the same sex. I am a proponent that, yes, a husband and wife are there for each other and they're there to walk through life together as one covenant relationship and one flesh of people. But when it comes to the specific sin level, I encourage a husband to have men and a wife to have ladies that can help engage them at the heart level. There are some things that a man is going to have a hard time understanding with his wife and some things that a wife is going to have a hard time understanding with her husband, and it's best to have people and voices in life that can dig into those situations.

Sometimes a wife may be intimidated to ask. Sometimes she may not know to ask. Sometimes she may say, "Well, my husband is so godly and wise, he would never do that" when another man would say, "Hey, I just caught you do that with your eyes and I'm interested in other places in your life where you may be doing that." A man can ask a question to a man that a wife is going to have a hard time asking. A wife can talk to another lady and have a much better conversation. Therefore, I would suggest somebody of the same sex.

Someone other than your spouse

Someone with whom you can have two-way accountability

Someone who will benefit you in wisdom (seek this as much as possible)

Someone you respect and like and who is a brother or sister in Christ

What are some ground rules?

Let me just suggest a couple.

- *Agree on the parts of your life for which you'll be accountable.*

You don't have to be accountable to everybody about everything. I have people in life that specifically speak to certain areas. I have one man that came to me and said, "You know, I'm really struggling in my business with integrity. Would you help me through that?" I said, "You know what, as a pastor, as a biblical counselor, I have to be very careful with my integrity too. Let's be accountability partners together for integrity." That's a narrow accountability. It's one primary issue that bleeds into other things, but that's something we agreed on. It is something that I think that we've helped each other with.

- *The objective is to humble yourself and to be honest about an area of life usually accompanied by deceit and to give the accountability partner an accurate understanding of your struggles.*

I mentioned this already, but accountability will only work as you are engaged in the process and willing to engage in the process. Just because you have an accountability partner isn't going to keep anybody from sin. It's not going to keep anybody encouraged. It's not going to necessarily do anything that's helpful biblically. You have to have people who are going to be honest, are full of integrity, and are willing to have that real conversation.

- Agree to pray together.

Pray often together. You can pray at the beginning of your time of accountability, at the end, or in the middle as you talk about certain circumstances.

- Both parties must agree to love each other and Christ enough to not participate in gossip.

This avoids what a lot of times people say, "Oh man, think of all the gossip." You have to protect someone else's story as much as you would desire your story to be protected. You've got to be committed to the truth and committed to integrity so that you don't share what you hear except for those certain instances where it must be shared.

- Agree to ask each other direct questions.

Here is a sampling of some questions that you could ask:

- What was your attitude this week about becoming more like Christ? How did your behavior display that attitude in your daily walk? (This is an inner man-outer man question.)
- Have you consistently and specifically confessed and sought forgiveness from those applicable? If not, what's your plan for doing so? (This question is asked for insight and then it develops a plan so that you can come back to it.)
- What are the areas of growth (i.e., opportunities, pressured situations, temptations) in your life right now, and what are the most pronounced patterns of sin at present? What are you going to do to help you respond more godly?
- Where do you need help or advice to respond godly? (That's a wisdom issue.)
- Have you recognized an opportunity this week to share Christ? How did you act upon that? What's your plan moving forward?

- Have you creatively loved and served others this week? What creative things have you done, have you seen done by someone else, or has someone else done for you?

That's just a series of questions that are just a sample. There are hundreds of questions. Right now though, in my accountability, we have three simple questions. One question relates to God; one question relates to others; and one question relates to self-counsel. It doesn't have to be overly complicated. For a long time we used the question, "Are you honest?" just as one more reminder.

Lastly, there's a diagram from the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, way back from '99. Inside the big circle would be everybody who is saved. When we think about those people who should be our friends, it comes out of that group. The very middle, of course, is yourself. The diagram suggests that there are these four primary relationships that you have. The first one would be a discipler who is building into your life, someone who speaks to you and from whom you're learning so that you're growing as a Christian. Then what you learn, you are giving to somebody else (a disciple), somebody who's walking with you and that you're choosing to build into. Then, for accountability, it would be these two peers (in this illustration there is one on the left and one on the right). Notice around the edge of those four categories is a dotted line. That's because there are going to be people moving in and out of your life in the regular pattern of the ebb and flow of life who all belong to the group of all disciples of Christ. I thought that would be helpful for you to think in your mind, "Who am I learning from? Who am I imparting life to (who am I helping)? As I walk, who am I walking with in terms of accountability?"

Back to our original question: Are there people that we know who, along the pathway of life, have somehow done something that's wrecked life or ministry and who are not serving Christ? Who should have been talking to them?

2 Samuel 11: "And someone said, 'Isn't that Uriah's wife?'" Then we have scores of people who become part of the plot and yet not one more person says, "David, what are you doing? You are wrong." We have to get to chapter 12 where Nathan has to creatively come to David a year later. Friends, people knew that story. Nathan wasn't the only person who knew that story. People all over the palace knew that story. But it took a year before someone else was willing to come and say, "What are you doing about it?"

We can't be sloppy when it comes to friendship and accountability. We need to understand what a biblical friend is and then invite others to participate in our lives and do the same in their lives. Then help your counselees do the same. In the process, we are going to help them be counseled.

TOPICS: **Discipleship**



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