

Do You Have an Accountability Partner? – Dan Hitz

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You've probably heard the term "**accountability partner**" for years. You might have wondered if you should get an accountability partner. You might have even asked yourself, "How on earth could I ever humiliate myself by telling all my shameful secrets to someone who might Tweet them the moment he gets home?" The question really becomes, "**What is having an accountability partner all about?**" Another good question is, "Do you actually use your accountability partner in an honest, transparent dialogue of how you're truly doing?" In this month's article, we'll take a look at what an accountability partner really is, and explore some ways in which all of us could benefit from having one.

Everyone should have an accountability partner, not just those who are in some type of 12-step recovery program. Two Scriptures come to mind. James 5:16 tells us to confess our sins to each other

and pray for each other so that we may be healed. Proverbs 27:17 tells us that iron sharpens iron just like our friends should sharpen, or refine, us. This gives us Scriptural direction to find those in the Body of Christ that we truly trust, friends that can hold a confidence, and confess our sins to him/her so that we can be healed emotionally. It also shows us how we are to submit one to another (Ephesians 5:21) and encourage one another (Hebrews 3:13) to live a holy, godly life in Christ Jesus. This means that there are times when the Lord calls us to humble ourselves and confess those things that cause us much shame so that we can be spiritually set free from condemnation. Accountability helps us avoid sin. Confession emotionally releases us from the shame that causes us to shrink back, or pushes us to repeat our habitual sin looking for false relief. Accountability brings true relief. The reminder that we are to sharpen one another is a reminder that we are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and call out our friends when they are engaging in sin. This is the role of an accountability partner, a true godly friend who will walk with us towards Jesus and encourage us to live as He has called us to live.

Simply put, an accountability partner is someone at the same life stage as you, and who will equally participate in accountability with you. You both give each other permission to ask the difficult questions like, "Have you looked at anything inappropriate on the internet since we last talked?" or, "Have you engaged in insert your habitual sin here since we last talked. If we casually gloss over something that we've asked him/her to hold us accountable about, he/she has our permission to "sharpen" us by challenging us about our actions – or perceptions – and encourage us to be honest about our struggle, and/or rethink our perceptions. True accountability partners don't act like drill sergeants, they act as godly brothers or sisters in Christ who recognize their own vulnerability to sin and graciously call us back to our Scriptural foundations. And, yes, sometimes they may have to be a little blunt.

So how do we find an accountability partner? This is the million dollar question, and perhaps the most frightening part of the process. We should prayerfully consider who among our acquaintances is at the same spiritual stage as us. That means they have a similar level of maturity as us, and a similar spiritual vision as us. It helps if they are in the same life stage as us in terms of age or starting a family, but that isn't entirely essential. It also isn't important that they share the same struggle as us, as long as they are willing to learn about our specific journey. They should also be the same gender as us to avoid having an inappropriate emotional bond. This is especially important if we are dealing with sexual

issues. Very often, the accountability partner won't be our best friend. Sometimes they let us get away with too much because we're very familiar with them. The most important thing is that he or she is someone who has a heart that is trustworthy and faithful to Jesus.



The next step in accountability is coming up with a list of questions specific to your struggles and the things that make you vulnerable to the specific sin you are trying to overcome. Of course, you'll have questions like, "Have you been faithful to spend time with the Lord each day?" General questions are important, but it is critical that you get directly to the point. If the struggle is with alcohol, you ask if he/she has consumed alcohol. If the struggle is with lying, porn, or gambling, you specifically ask if he/she has engaged in lying, porn, or gambling. It is a good idea to prayerfully discern the things in your life that push you towards your struggle. Do you drink when you get frustrated at work? Do you look at porn when you get lonely? The things that push you to your sin are called *triggers*. Once you discern your triggers, then you can create specific questions for each trigger. "Did you feel especially lonely since the last time we met? If so, what healthy steps did you take to overcome your loneliness and avoid viewing pornography?"

Identifying your triggers also helps you to engage with your accountability partner proactively. If you know that being lonely is one of your triggers, and you know that your spouse is going out of town for a week, you can inform your accountability partner that you have an unavoidable vulnerable time coming up that week. That way he/she knows to specifically ask you how you did accountability wise while your spouse was gone. It would also be good to schedule an extra call during the time that you are alone just to reach out for help.

If you are in the beginning of a period of intense recovery, it is recommended that you make a short call to your accountability partner at least once each day for 40 days to get yourself into the habit of reaching out for help. These calls should be kept short, and to the point. A few minutes is good so that neither partner gets overwhelmed. If a crisis arises, then a longer meeting can be scheduled. After the initial 40 day period, it is a good idea to meet with your accountability partner once each week if possible. This can be done over the phone, or ideally in person. If weekly meetings aren't possible due to busy schedules, then meet at least once every two weeks. These don't have to be long meetings. Twenty minutes to a half hour is a good goal to start out with. Be sure to get down to business right away so small talk – or avoidance – doesn't rob your time.

Of course, the success of your accountability partnership depends on both partners honestly embracing the process. They share each other's victories, and support each other in their failures. Both must be completely honest about how they are doing. It is heartbreaking to hear that someone in the body of Christ has fallen. He/she may have even had an accountability partner, but at some point chose to avoid full disclosure and pretend that he/she was doing better than he/she was. Accountability must be fully embraced and practiced to be effective; and when accountability is embraced and practiced, both parties are empowered to continue their recovery journey successfully.

A healthy relationship with an accountability partner, and a life lived connected to Jesus, can help you overcome habitual sin, stay away from daily temptations, and accomplish all that the Lord has for you.