



AUTHENTIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Introduction

Living our lives with the Spirit of truth (John 16:13) also means we must be honest and open about where we are, especially with those we live in close community with. I'm not saying we have to tell the whole world our deepest, darkest secret. However, it is important to bring our sins and faults into the light through authentic accountability and partnerships within the discipleship process so we can grow, learn, and mature spiritually (Isaiah 29:13, Ephesians 5:13; 1 Corinthians 4:4-5, James 5:16). This is a process that will not only keep us humble, but will also help us to overcome our sins together in community.

Why Do We Need Accountability?

Let's read Ephesians 5:8-16:

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper,
rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”

When you think of things that are shameful, when or where are they usually done? For the sake of argument, if you thought about a drug deal. I think most of us would probably be thinking at night, in an alley, where no one can see you. In the NIV Cultural Bible, the authors note, “Initiations into Greek mystery cults, some of which had acquired immoral reputations in Rome, were normally at night. Travelers who stayed at inns often had prostitutes available especially at night.” To put it bluntly, there are few things that happen in the dark, in secret, that are holy or godly.

The authors of the Bible call on God's people to be obedient and holy because our God is holy (1 Peter 1:13-16; Leviticus 11:44). The truth of the matter is that we can't do it by ourselves. We can't live obedient, holy lives on our own. By ourselves, we naturally fall into our predisposed sinful ways. And when we don't have the right people in our lives, it can have the same effect. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:33, “Bad company corrupts good character.” We must be incredibly careful about who we allow into our inner circle. And when we allow people with poor character to guide and speak into our lives, we allow our souls to be guided by foolishness rather than by wisdom.

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.” Proverbs 27:6



AUTHENTIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Why Do We Need Accountability?

Let's read James 5:13-16:

“Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore 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.”



Who are some of the people in your life that you've chosen to keep you accountable? What does your relationship look like?

What Do You Mean “Authentic” Accountability?

I chose the words authentic accountability because it's not just enough to have accountability as a Christian. I consider “authentic accountability” to be the inner circle. The people you trust the most in your life. While regular accountability is important, it's equally important to have someone in your life whom you love and respect, someone who knows your heart and can tell you when you need to repent or make life adjustments. The principal aspect of authentic accountability is willfully submitting yourself to that exhortation. If we enter into an accountability relationship with someone but we never listen to their correction, the accountability is worth nothing.

Jesus chose twelve people that he would do life with. He was devoted to teaching them, investing in them, and holding them accountable. They ate together, they taught together, they learned together. They knew one another's heart, soul, and mind. Those men chose to be held accountable and because they entered into that relationship with Jesus, almost all of them changed this world. You can still feel and see their impact today, 2,000 years later, all because they agreed to be taught and corrected.



Who are some people that you would consider your inner circle? Have you been intentional on choosing those people?



AUTHENTIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Let's read Matthew 18:15-17:

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

There are many people in the church who think they are above correction or think that they are right on every topic. And some of them use this philosophy to justify their sins. When we walk through the Matthew 18 scripture, what we see is Jesus essentially saying, “If you will not listen to correction, you're not a follower of mine.” The church was established by Jesus to make disciples and to teach those disciples to obey Jesus' commandments. In other words, the church was established for the very purpose of accountability. And while we must always listen to the Holy Spirit above any person on earth, we must also trust in the confirmation of what God is speaking to the people we've chosen to be accountable to.



When was a time that someone corrected you in love? Did you respond willing to change or were you defensive?



Watch Henri Nouwen's sermon “Beloved” 17:30-20:50

Authentic Accountability As Pruning

I love the imagery of John 15 where Jesus is talking about pruning the branches. Jesus says, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.” In theology, we use the term “sanctification” here. Sanctification is the process of being made holy, or as we've been saying, more like Christ. When we submit ourselves to authentic accountability, we allow first and foremost the Holy Spirit to convict us when we sin. Secondly, we allow people who know us to correct us not because they think we're terrible people, but because they genuinely love us and want to see us be more like Jesus.

In Matthew 16 we see Jesus praising Peter for calling Him the Messiah. Then, just a few verses later Jesus rebukes Peter saying, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.” Authentic Accountability allows for these tough rebukes in order that we may continually be pruned to live for God rather than the world.



AUTHENTIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Practical Steps For Authentic Accountability

Before anything else, when you enter into authentic accountability, you need to brace yourself to feel the pain of knowing you've done something wrong and you need to correct it. Each week, Lauren and I ask each other how we can love one another better the upcoming week. It's a time of complete honesty and a time where there is no getting defensive or offended. To be frank, we just take it. We allow that correction to motivate us to be better spouses. The same should be done with our relationship with Jesus and with our inner circle.

Whether it's once a month or whatever timetable you choose, I would find two to three people you are close with, who know you well, and ask them, "How can I love Jesus better? What are some things in my life that you've seen that I might need to adjust?" It's most likely going to hurt. It's most likely going to be painful. Consequently, there will be times when you get great advice and other times where it may not be where God wants you to focus. Take the time to seek the Holy Spirit afterwards and ask if these are truly things God wants you to work on. And then set up practical and "S.M.A.R.T. goals" to help you move forward.

Step-By-Step Instructions

- 1. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit who should be in your inner circle.**
- 2. Be intentional. Make it known to them that you want them to be in your inner circle. Tell them that this relationship is meant to help you grow spiritually and you want genuine and honest feedback so that you can grow effectively.**
- 3. Make sure that there is an open line of communication and that you are meeting frequently. Depending on the person this may be a few times a year or once a month. Whatever works best for you as long as there is open communication.**
- 4. Come up with a few things you know you need to work on and share them with your inner circle. Work together with them to come up with S.M.A.R.T. goals so that you'll have a timetable for growing effectively. However, a quick disclaimer here, some areas of growth will take longer than others. Some you'll have to work through the rest of your life. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't be intentional on making those daily adjustments.**
- 5. Each time you receive feedback from your inner circle, pray about each thing. Let the feedback, whether painful or not, motivate you to grow. Seek the Lord on how to handle that feedback and how you can love the Lord better moving forward.**

