



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

PARTNERS IN PURSUIT OF INTEGRITY • Chris Adsit

An accountability relationship can help us live a life that pleases God and satisfies our soul.

Del Hessel was the new track coach at Colorado State University. I was a sophomore hurdler—and not a very good one. During our first one-to-one meeting he asked what my athletic goals were.

I'd never thought about it before. My concept of college track was (1) show up for practice, (2) run some races, (3) if nobody's faster than you, you win! But I knew Coach Hessel wanted to hear more than that. So before I realized what I was saying, I told him, "I want to compete in the Olympics in the 400-meter hurdles."

From the moment I uttered those words, my relationship with Del Hessel went downhill. The theme of our association became: Kill Adsit. He began staying up late at night devising cruel ways to torture me.

He forced me to run in the mountains, lift heavy weights, sprint stadium stairs and do repeat quarter-miles. He made me go to sleep early and eat bad-tasting food. He demanded I jump thousands of hurdles. Through all this, he remained deaf to my pleas for mercy.

What prompted this onslaught? I'd simply shared a pleasant idea about the Olympics, and rather than applauding and saying nice things like, "Good luck, Chris—I'll pray for you!," he undertook a diabolical scheme of pain and torment.

Which was exactly what I needed and wanted. Del Hessel knew something about human nature: We all tend to search out the path of least resistance. On my own, I never would have worked hard enough to become a great athlete—or even an average one. But through his coaching, I became an All-American by my senior year. Not quite an Olympian, but close. And I hold Del Hessel in high esteem, because he was one of the few men in my life willing to take the initiative with me, hold me accountable, and push me toward my goals.

Irresponsibility and sloth run rampant throughout humanity. That's why we hire coaches, teachers, foremen, editors, cops, drill sergeants, and IRS agents. When we truly want to achieve a goal—be it athletic, academic, financial, dietary, whatever—we always put ourselves in an accountability structure of some sort. We know we won't make it otherwise.

As Christians, our ultimate objective is to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. Part of this transformation is God's responsibility, but part is ours. Doesn't it make sense that, as we pursue this highest of all goals in life, we would seek accountability?

What Do You Want?

On the grandest scale, most of us desire to lead lives of integrity, longing to bear eternal fruit and hear the Righteous Judge one day say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." What will produce a life of integrity? Nothing less



than the power of the Holy Spirit within us. How do I access this Holy Spirit power? Many things are involved, but here are three biggies:

(1) maintain a moment-by-moment state of being filled (controlled and empowered) by the Holy Spirit; (2) find nourishment daily in the Word of God; and (3) avoid sin.

But there's one overwhelming theological problem with this recipe, and I'll quote my two-year-old niece, who is an expert on the subject: "I don't want to!"

Why should I? I mean, integrity seems like a good idea on the whole, but a part of me still loves sin, hates discipline, and would prefer that God go away and let me run things. My new, Christ like nature hates this. So my old nature is forced to devise various mechanisms that will conceal my sin and rationalize my behavior—to others and to myself.

But when a person takes on an accountability relationship, it's like bringing in a heavenly demolition crew that pulls down those defense mechanisms, leaving the "old man" exposed with nowhere to hide. This greatly reduces his control.

What Is It?

People have profound misconceptions regarding biblical accountability. Some conjure up visions of a steel chair, a single bulb dangling from the ceiling, and the Christian Gestapo poking dental instruments at them sneering, "You looked at her twice, didn't you?!" Others imagine a weekly grilling involving long lists and check-boxes.

Professor Mark Dorn of Colorado Christian University gives a good, short definition: "Accountability is answerability." That's it—accountability provides a forum in which people must answer for their actions. When people feel sin is inconsequential, their standards drop.

But it's more than just answerability. According to Dallas Theological Seminary President, Charles Swindoll, "Accountability includes opening one's life to a few carefully selected . . . confidants who speak the truth—who have the right to examine, to question, to appraise, and to give counsel."

Accountability partners love each other—so much so that they're willing to jeopardize their relationship by asking hard questions, listening, and then speaking the truth. They're out for each other's good, and they both know it. More than anything, accountability is simply the deep, honest friendship that we all long for.

Why Do It?

An accountability relationship provides an environment conducive to my wanting to pursue holiness. Some days I want to be holy. Some days I don't—usually because pursuing holiness is harder. If nobody around me is being holy, and no one cares if I'm holy, why should I bother? But if I'm in a relationship with someone who does care, and if I value that person's opinion, affirmation, and friendship, it creates the environment I need.

The objective of my relationship with Coach Hessel was not to gain his approval, but the approval of the race judges who would say, "You won. Here's your trophy." Just so, the goal of an accountability relationship is not to please other people, but God, and to become more like Christ.

But Who's the Holy Spirit Here?

It's the Holy Spirit's job to convict of sin (John 16:8), but how does He do it? To be sure, He's got direct access to each of us, and this is His usual mechanism. But when we don't like what He's saying, we have the option of reaching for the volume knob, and often we turn it down. So frequently He'll speak to us through another brother or sister—whose volume knobs are less accessible.

Thea, a food-industry consultant, was meeting with a single woman. "Jan" confessed to Thea that she was having romantic liaisons with a non-Christian co-worker during lunchtime, and could not back off on her own strength. Jan agreed—grudgingly at first—to Thea calling her up at work during the day.

Continued on page 3



Sometimes they'd talk for only a few seconds, sometimes for quite a while. "But the point was," Thea says, "I was checking up on her and she knew it, and it made her feel the pang of guilt that she had lost long ago." Jan eventually dropped the guy, and the relationship between Thea and Jan became deeper than ever.

Hell's Tragedy

Satan's primary tactics are to isolate and blind. God's nature is to unify and reveal truth. When a person is unaccountable, whose strategy is he lining up with? About two months before the senior pastor of a 7,000-member church was exposed in an affair, he remarked forcefully in a staff meeting, "I am accountable only to God!"

Lord Acton's famous observation applies: "Power tends to corrupt." When people become leaders, they often inherit an exalted sense of their own judgment, as well as the idea that privacy and secrecy are entitlements. Satan rubs his hands in glee over this. "Those not accountable underestimate the enemy and his deadliness," notes Karen Bergquist, Navigators staff member in Seattle. "They forget that his full-time occupation is to deceive, accuse and devour us." As the apostle Paul put it, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). All of us—especially those of us in leadership positions—need the fresh perspective and corrective feedback of a trusted friend.

Heavenly Support

Are you impressed by the giant redwoods, standing so majestic, tall and strong? Have you ever seen one standing alone, all by itself? Probably not, because redwoods only grow in "stands." Each redwood has an embarrassing secret: a very shallow root system. So God ordained that they clump together, interlacing their roots, to hold each other up when the storms howl.

Which is just what Coach Hessel did for me. And it's just what accountability partners do for us—they hold us up and help give us strength to live a life that pleases God and satisfies our souls.

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